

Greening Your Business

By Susan Urquhart-Brown

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Since Al Gore's movie, An Inconvenient Truth, there has been a national and international upsurge in concern for global warming and saving our earth. It has filtered down into all types of businesses, large and small, in the form of creating a healthy work environment and being proactively environmentally conscious in communities and the world.

You can find a lot of information on the internet through federal, local and county governments and non profit organizations about how to make your business more "green" or environmentally conscious. In my research, I discovered that the Green Business Program (www.greenbiz.ca.gov) in California has a model program that is being emulated in other parts of the United States. Their requirements for certifying companies as "green" comply with the national standards set by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov).

All types and sizes of businesses qualify to "go green." For example, auto repair shops, printers, hotels, restaurants, landscapers, wineries, janitorial and laundry services, grocery and retail stores, builders, attorneys, architects, engineers, gift services, business consultants, and a variety of office and home-based businesses can apply and can successfully meet the standards.

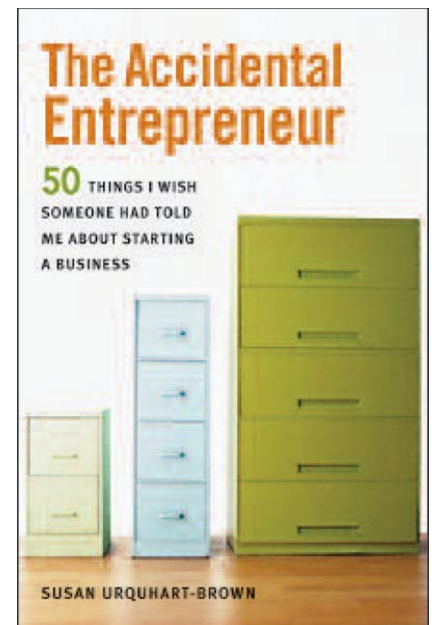
Yet, much like organic farmers, you might choose to have a green business without being officially certified green by your county government. At my local farmers market, many of the stalls have signs that say "organically grown without pesticides." Ask yourself what can you do in your home office or place of business that helps the environment generally and creates a healthy workplace for you and your employees.

Can you?

- * Comply with or exceed all applicable environmental regulations for your business
- * Conserve energy, water, materials and other resources
- * Develop and implement practices that prevent pollution and waste such as recycling, carpooling or bicycling to work

Why get certified as a green business?

It makes good business sense both for the bottom line and the environment. With all the concern about global warming, people everywhere are motivated to do their part in reducing their carbon footprint. Many people become loyal customers of companies who are certified as "green." and this can give



companies a marketing edge. Some other advantages are:

- * Employees appreciate working in a healthy environment
- * Operating efficiently can strengthen the bottom line
- * Green companies can gain recognition as an environmental leader. For example, in California, Acterra: Action for a Sustainable Earth gives annual Business Environmental Awards to companies who demonstrate that they are successful in 3 ways: economically, environmentally and socially by integrating exemplary sustainability practices into their daily business operations.
- * Many customers prefer to shop locally at small businesses to support their local economy and to save on gas and air pollution.

More and more it is true that becoming a green small business is an added marketing advantage!

Real Entrepreneur Going Green:

About two years ago, a mortgage broker in my business networking group announced proudly that she had become certified as a green business. Since I didn't really know what that meant at the time, I asked her to explain it to me. Jenny Shore who runs a small branch office for Alternative Mortgage, an independent mortgage brokerage firm, said that she contacted her local county Green Business program and arranged for her business to be evaluated. Much to her surprise, Jenny discovered that she had already been doing some of the "green" compliance recommendations such as recycling, reducing use of paper and bicycling to work.

In order to become a certified Green Business, there is a specific process required by every local county agency that typically involves inspections by the local electric and gas company and waste management company. Specific recommendations are then made to each business on how to reduce waste and use of paper resources.

One business advantage that Jenny has noticed is that many potential clients call her because of her knowledge of green mortgages and green real estate in general. A green mortgage is essentially a mortgage that rewards the homeowner for reducing waste, reducing energy usage and building with environmentally responsible materials. Even if a client isn't looking for a green mortgage, most clients are pleased that Jenny is a green business and make a point of commenting on it. Jenny says, "I'm proud of my green focus and I'm sure my passion for helping my clients reduce their environmental impact plays a role in the growth of my business."

What are green business practices and how can my business get certified?

For your business, the best way to find out how you can go green in your community and what specific practices you can implement, is to contact your county government and local small business trade associations. In California, you can contact the Green Business Program (www.greenbiz.ca.gov). If there is no program in your community, you can participate in national programs most notably the EPA's Performance Track program. (www.epa.gov/performance-track)

Other Resources for Going Green:

Energy Star, (www.energystar.gov) offers energy management strategies for businesses that help businesses measure current energy performance, set goals, track savings and reward improvement.

CoopAmerica (www.coopamerica.org) is a national non-profit membership organization whose mission is "to harness the power—the strength of consumers, investors, and businesses—to create a socially just and environmentally friendly sustainable society. They produce Green Festivals and many resources for individuals and businesses.