

## White Paper

### **LEED the Way with Sustainability: Go Green without Spending Too Much Green**

By Tina Moore, LEED AP

Green has become the corporate color of choice. More and more companies are realizing that sustainability will help the environment *and* the workplace now that “going green” has become mainstream.

But what about costs? Yes, there is an upfront investment in money and time, but the payoff is clear. Even during this recession, as you focus on the bottom line and try to save wherever possible, you can actually *reduce* operating expenses through green initiatives. In fact, relatively small investments can yield big potential returns. Plus, consider the additional benefits that sustainability can lead to: more effective recruiting, improved worker productivity, lower absenteeism, better employee retention, and enhanced corporate branding.

So, from a business perspective, going green definitely makes sense. Of course, the larger issue is the need to be good corporate citizens and do our part to reduce our carbon footprints and help to save the planet.

But how can companies proceed with their sustainability plans? While 70% of companies now plan to embrace sustainability on some level, others feel daunted by the perceived commitment that is involved. The fact is, however, that you can take big steps or small steps and still make a difference. We explore various options below.

#### **Taking the LEED**

Forward-thinking companies can work toward getting LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environment Design) certification for their offices. LEED certification, developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (<http://www.usgbc.org/>), provides independent, third-party verification that tenant-leased spaces and base building projects meet the highest green building and performance measures.

LEED is a nationally accepted building rating system that is a benchmark for design, construction, and operation of green buildings. Using this system, tenants can earn LEED credits toward one of four levels of certification—certified, silver, gold, and platinum. These levels are based on a point system including the following considerations: Sustainable Sites, Energy & Atmosphere, Water Efficiency, Indoor Environment & Quality, Materials & Resources, and Innovation & Design. Critical components within these criteria include specification of lighting and lighting controls, paint, carpet, existing conditions, and required build-out.

If you determine that LEED certification is a goal, you may want to assemble a team that includes a LEED-accredited project manager. The project manager and commercial real estate service advisor can help you navigate through the certification process and can also help you negotiate lease terms to incorporate additional

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credit-earning strategies—and now that it's a tenant's market, you should have added leverage in such negotiations with landlords. In any event, once you achieve this LEED distinction, your company will be branded as a socially responsible and innovative leader in the marketplace.

## Taking Baby Steps

If LEED certification seems too ambitious, you can still go green through smaller-scale changes in daily office activities. For instance:

- Set objectives to conserve energy, paper, and water. Keep in mind that if you reduce what you use, you can cut your costs (e.g., by consuming less paper, you cut the cost of this line item).
- Recycle paper, glass, and plastic (even if a building-wide recycling program isn't in place).
- Turn off lights and computers when not in use.
- Switch to sustainable products such as green cleaning and maintenance products, carpets, and light bulbs. With sustainable light bulbs, you increase your light bulbs' efficiency and reduce your electricity expense.

These are a few economically feasible and relatively simple green initiatives. For the most part, there are minimal costs associated with these efforts. And an incentive to buying green products is that prices in this area are decreasing. For instance, environmentally friendly carpets are now similarly priced to regular carpets. This is just one example that is shattering the old myth that going green costs too much.

As you become more educated about sustainable alternatives and their costs, you'll be better able to invest in similarly priced green products. The team you would engage for LEED

certification can help you select the best green products.

As you begin to invest—however ambitious your sustainability efforts—you'll begin to save. ***It's reported that you can save 20% – 50% through energy-saving technologies, natural daylight, ventilation, and downsized equipment—and this can translate into thousands of dollars.***

Typically, the more you invest, the more you save. And, while most green improvements have an upfront cost, this will typically pay for itself within three years. Meanwhile, consider the benefits of a more productive workplace, as described earlier.

## Building a Green Planet

While your company is saving money, you're also helping the environment. Most people don't realize the extent to which buildings contribute to environmental issues. According to United States Department of Energy – Energy Information Administration, buildings currently account for roughly:

- 36% of total energy use
- 65% of electricity consumption
- 30% of greenhouse gas emissions
- 30% of raw materials use
- 30% of waste output
- 12% of potable water output

To put this in perspective, the average LEED-certified building uses 32% less electricity and saves 350 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions annually. Just replacing your light bulbs with energy-savers will help decrease your building's contribution to those gaudy figures of 36% of total energy use and 65% of electricity consumption.

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In addition to the environmental and economic benefits of sustainability, consider the social implications of a healthier, happier workforce. How important are these intangibles? Well, if you consider that we spend 90% of our time in buildings, the importance of your comfort level looms rather larger.

### Addressing other Perceived Barriers

To be sure, a sustainability program does require time and upfront spending. And it might be frustrating if fellow employees do not share your enthusiasm. But the fact is that we are all stakeholders in the green movement, and it doesn't pay to pass the buck or be short-sighted.

You don't need to go it alone. You don't need to move into a newly constructed green building. And you don't need to rely on

landlords, though their cooperation is critical in order for the existing building to meet LEED requirements. With the help of a qualified project manager, however, you will be better able to find the right solutions as you plan to upgrade existing space. Advisors can also help you relocate to a newly constructed green building, though additional costs (including impact on the environment) are associated with that.

In the long term, the aim of sustainable design is to reduce the use of non-renewable resources and minimize environmental impact. As an added bonus, it also happens to be good business. So, whether you take small steps toward going green or strive for LEED certification, remember that the payoffs can be significant—and that includes a healthier bottom line.

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