

Business priority drives the green agenda

Most business owners and managers would agree the need to minimise environmental impact from business operations is 'the right thing to do' and may lead to intangible benefits such as greater brand value and employee engagement.

But according to Tony Innes, principal of the Sustainable Directions consultancy, day-to-day financial pressures and need to maintain market often push 'green agenda' down the list of strategic priorities.

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SME organisations are being asked for evidence of environmental strategy when tendering for supply contracts. Larger companies, with Environmental Management Systems in place, are reviewing supply chains and strongly encouraging goods and services suppliers to follow suit.

Many banks, legal firms and large manufacturers have a sustainability clause in their supply agreements. State and Federal government tender documents require potential suppliers or contractors to have in place - or at least in process - a basic environmental strategy.

Secondly, embracing a green agenda can save operating cost. This was discovered as an unexpected benefit by early adopters of sustainability in their quest to reduce their carbon

footprint.

A classic example is global manufacturing company DuPont which introduced an Environmental Management System in the 1990s. The 'green' process saved DuPont about \$3b in global operating costs.

"What started as an effort to address our carbon footprint has turned out to be financially a very good thing," said Chief Sustainability Officer, Linda Fisher.

Sustainability reviews of business operations now generate cost savings as a primary aim, with lessened carbon footprint flowing from the process. Management tools such as Six Sigma and Lean are being recast as strategies to reduce waste and save money.

The API Insurance Services office in Victoria Square, Adelaide recently reviewed paper-intensive procedures and managed to reduce storage requirements by about 50%.

"We were delighted with the results of our review as we not only reduced our storage costs, we also reduced our impact on the environment. It has encouraged us to look for reductions in other areas," says MD, Rob Skipper.

The third factor driving the 'green agenda' for business owners is the increase in the number of environmentally conscious consumers. Formerly a small, passionate band of 'greenies', nowadays a growing sector of the general public considers environmental impacts when taking major purchasing decisions. This trend has been ignited by the increased exposure of the environment on the political front and also the introduction of successful green products such as the Toyota Prius into mainstream markets.

Waste handling leader SA can use less
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"The longer-term model could well (exploit) the gradual drying out of residual waste due to the removal of organics. This smaller stream of garbage can become a fuel of the future reducing natural gas use as has been already done between ResourceCo and Adelaide Brighton Cement."

It's not obvious, but business opportunities in liquid waste handling are extensive.

"Liquid wastes are so much the same as solid wastes it's not funny. Source separation, innovative uses, particularly Adelaide plains agriculture, and saving a resource by turning a waste into a commodity to be managed as efficiently as possible represents the key to the future," Geoff says.

"Like auditing solid waste fractions within a manufacturing environment, liquids are very similar except that the inflow is most often very easily discovered (the water meter).

"Measurement of use and outflow is relatively easy except that we are most often not used to doing this or ignore it as a low value commodity.

"That value is rapidly increasing and we all need to audit or review how we manage liquids in our processes and as a waste outflow."

SA has a few significant drivers pushing us to create new products from the waste stream.

"The levy on landfills drives the cost of disposal of waste streams to levels that allow investment in systems and innovations to encourage separation and use of the wasted commodities," Geoff says.

"On the other hand, the Environment Protection (Waste to Resources) Policy will provide a stronger legislative enforcement of avoidance of putting wasted commodities in landfills.

Geoff has worked more than 23 years in this field, as Operations Manager of a multinational and CEO of a large city waste authority before founding consultancy, One World, which provides Audit services, Strategy Development and Financial Modelling to Governments and Business in Australia and overseas.

One World is involved in making and developing new products including the innovative use of Bio-Plastics in commercial and industrial applications. The company provides strategic and operational advice to Governments and private enterprise relating to waste collection and processing.

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