

5 EASY PIECES

Making Your Sustainability Strategy Profitable



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More than ever, owners and managers want to correlate their green building investments to profitability as they seek new ways to reduce consumption. Sustainable commercial properties are often associated with higher quality spaces and lower operating expenses, and this is often linked to an ability to attract tenants and command a premium, or above-market rental.

Research has shown that going green can actually increase asset value, improve marketability, mitigate risks and provide substantial cost savings. Businesses can realize economies of scale and most cost-efficiently bundle improvement projects.

Sustainability is also closely linked to enhancing productivity and occupant well-being by eliminating waste,

their core business values, compliance toward green actions is replaced with willing compliance.

So how to get started? The good news is that isn't as hard to do as you might think. Here are five ideas that can be implemented quickly and easily:

1 Think Small to Yield Big Dividends

A common misconception about going green holds that upgrades involve tremendous capital expenditures with a relatively long payback period. Actually, plenty of green initiatives' payback periods are three years or less. Large capital expenditures such as cooling equipment aren't always necessary; simple approaches, such as building commissioning, which in-

volves tuning the mechanical systems to operate in sync, might do the job. Other relatively small yet productive changes include obtaining high-efficiency lamps with reduced mercury content. The EPA's Energy Star Portfolio Manager is a good starting point. It is an online interactive energy management tool that allows you to track and assess energy and water consumption across individual buildings or your entire portfolio of buildings in a secure online environment. Whether you own, manage, or hold properties for investment, Portfolio Manager can help you set investment priorities, identify under-performing buildings, verify efficiency improvements, and receive EPA recognition for superior energy performance.

2 Get Organized

Beginning with an organized plan allows for the prioritization of initiatives and helps keep budget constraints from hindering the project. The first step in identifying the best investment strategy for sustainability is an objective evaluation of an organization's current options, including estimated costs, benefits and current procurement practices. Such an assessment should address key categories consistent with guidelines for LEED®-EB or Green Globes: Energy Efficiency, Materials and Construction, Water Conservation, Indoor Air Quality and Environment, and Site Sustainability. Evaluating purchases in practical areas such as janitorial, office and lighting can prove fruitful when it comes to source, waste and energy reduction. They also align nicely with the LEED®-EB sections and can quickly add up to positive bottom line savings. Online conversion calculators that can provide ROI information about green product alternatives are helpful in this process. Evaluating MRO expenses is always part of the bud-



conserving natural resources and improving the environmental quality of our buildings.

As more companies begin to realize the business value of incorporating earth-friendliness into

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getting process, and making it central to a sustainability strategy earns additional points with tenants and stakeholders looking to increase asset value and reduce operating expenses.

Then, consider introducing competitive bidding for such services as landscaping, pest control and janitorial. Along with ensuring fair market pricing, competitive bidding is a way to structure services that promote healthy and sustainable practices into a contract's scope-of-work. Property owners can request reductions of caustic cleaning materials, integration of pest management with reduced chemicals, and landscaping with lower erosion or reduced water. These enhancements can deliver immediate results to the bottom line, not to mention positive environmental and social benefits.

3 Invest Well

With so many competing factors and a softening commercial real estate market, many companies have to determine how to effectively evaluate their options and focus their green dollars where they will

have the most impact. There is an abundance of low-cost, no-cost opportunities available to help fund retrofit projects. For example, energy efficiency incentives and lighting rebates are available through federal and state agencies, utilities, and local organizations. A lighting or plumbing retrofit program tied to a rebate could cost virtually nothing while saving thousands of dollars in annual utility costs.

4 Trust Others

And think about incorporating building commissioning as part of your overall strategy. If you're involved with a U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) LEED™ certified building project, you are probably aware that building commissioning is an integral – and required – component of LEED® certification. This is a relatively inexpensive way to evaluate whether mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems meet design expectations. In many cases commissioning offers a chance to discover if operating systems are performing optimally. If they aren't, this investment provides an imme-

di-
ate
pay-
back if
an upgrade is
required.

Your best bet is having an independent third party recommission the asset or conduct an ASHRAE Level II Energy Audit and, from that, set forth a plan to: A) implement no- and low-cost operational adjustments (this typically brings energy savings of anywhere from 7 percent to 28 percent, according to BOMA International.); B) develop an energy-awareness program for building occupants and educate, set goals, and measure the savings (BOMA reports that occupant behavior may result in energy savings of another 3.5 % to 15.2 %); and C) implement capital improvements considering payback, budget, and return constraints.

5 Measure Results for Continued Success

Once you've done your research, developed your plan and are ready to make the investments, make sure to measure the results. Finding infor-

mation and metrics is not easy, but by documenting your progress along the way, you can adjust quickly to changing market conditions. Additionally,

it allows you to promote your program with tangible results to your occupants and owners. A good strategy should allow for easy tracking, modification when necessary, and objective documentation of successes. This critical step will save time and money and ensure that future initiatives remain in your business's pipeline. So while we seek new ways to create shareholder and stakeholder value while decreasing the footprint of our buildings, it is essential that we look at each part as a whole. Set clear objectives that are based on the company's larger commitment, identify environmentally preferable alternatives, evaluate low cost opportunities, measure and adjust as needed. Following these basic fundamentals will most assuredly provide the proper framework, planning, tools, and structure to support action-based approaches towards environmental sustainability. •



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