

# Serious About

By Barbara Wichmann

# SUSTAINABILITY

Small & Diverse Businesses Can Be Sustainable Too.

When new buildings rise up with the latest state-of-the-art technology and practices in sustainability, it's easy to get excited about the future while forgetting about the potential for the present. Just because a company works from an established building, it is not exempt from demonstrating a comprehensive commitment to sustainability.

As the CEO of a global agency with headquarters in San Francisco, I was especially interested in our city's new move toward green buildings, which requires new structures 10 stories and under to install solar panels on the roofs. This is the first mandate of its kind in the United States, echoing France's plan for plant or solar panel-covered rooftops from earlier this year. These new models are exciting evidence of continued shifts towards sustainability, but opportunities for green buildings are far from limited to new structures.

Buildings consume 40 percent of the nation's total U.S. energy consumption, according to the **U.S. Energy Information Administration**. And while it may take some renovation and investment in new systems and work improving the current ones, any business, large or small, can begin to take steps toward reducing that usage, even without building a new structure. In fact, a study by the **Preservation Green Lab of the National Trust for Historic Preservation** shows that building reuse is overall *more environmentally friendly* than new construction, as working with existing structures is inherently more sustainable, "recycling" the structure rather than starting over from scratch.

For small businesses that aren't ready to make huge commitments, just yet, the **U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)** has a guide to energy efficiency to start with. The SBA points out that "adding sustainability and green marketing to your business strategy can enhance your brand image and secure your market share among the growing number of environmentally concerned consumers." Many local programs also work with businesses of all sizes, supporting them through a customized

certification process, often with the business setting the pace according to what works best for them. It really is a process that requires no special skills or experience in architecture or construction, but an opportunity for all of us to contribute to improving our global impact. All you need is for someone within your organization to be the primary contact for your business' green building project, and let the experts work with you.

Once your business is ready to become more sustainable, there are several ways to start:

**Energy Audit.** The first step towards sustainability is to assess the efficiency of current systems to determine if they are operating at optimum levels. An energy audit will measure the performance of the building's water, air, and electric systems, checking for leaks or pressure inconsistencies, fixing stuck dampers or disabled sensors, and looking for faulty wiring. A careful assessment will determine air tightness around the building envelope for leaky windows, gaps around vents and pipe penetrations, and moisture intrusion. Systems may still need to be upgraded later on, but addressing problems with the building envelope first will ensure new systems won't lose efficiency after installation.

**Upgrading Your Building.** Whole Building Design Guide, a program of the **National Institute of Building Science**, has created a comprehensive set of Guiding Principles to refer to when moving existing buildings toward sustainability. Rather than take each issue piece by piece, businesses should employ an integrated assessment, operation, and management approach to solve for multiple issues as completely as possible. This broad design approach can solve issues with sustainability and working environment simultaneously. For instance, decreasing moisture penetration and reducing mold can improve occupant health and productivity, all while eliminating water waste.

When the Empire State Building underwent a major retrofit, it became a model for promoting sustainability at a high level. The project proved that even an historic

building could be retrofitted to greatly reduce energy use and carbon emissions without compromising its status. By integrating sustainability initiatives with already planned renovation, this upgrade reduced the skyscraper's energy consumption by 38 percent, saving \$4.4 million per year.

**Considering Certification.** Officially certifying your business with a green certification offers your clients proof that you are invested in sustainability at every level, and provides a way to measure it for your organization as well.

Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (**BREEAM**) is the world's longest established method of assessing, rating, and certifying the sustainability of buildings. BREEAM USA now offers a certification process to all existing commercial buildings to assess the environmental performance, operations, and client activities of a building.

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (**LEED**) is a nationally accepted third-party certification program, highly regarded for its design, operation, and construction of high performance green buildings.

Many local certification programs offer support to businesses looking to become more sustainable, walking them through the process step-by-step.

• **Institute for Green Business Certification**—<http://www.gbcertified.com/>

• **California Green Business Program**—<http://greenbusinessca.org/>

• **Montgomery County Green Business Certification Program, Maryland**—<http://www.mcgreenbiz.org/>  
Illinois Green Business Association—<http://www.illinoisgba.org/>

• **Austin Green Business Leaders**—<http://www.austintexas.gov/department/austin-green-business-leaders>

• **Manhattan Chamber of Commerce**—[http://www.manhattancc.org/Committee\\_Guide/Green.aspx](http://www.manhattancc.org/Committee_Guide/Green.aspx)

There is huge potential for any business to reduce the environmental impact of its buildings around the country, in every industry and of every size. Start as small



as you need and continue to progress toward a wholly sustainable future. Join ARTÉMIA Communications and thousands of other green businesses around the globe in our continued quest for sustainability. ♦

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