

Serious About

SUSTAINABILITY

By Barbara Wichmann

The 2016 Business-Essential Sustainability Trends.

With 2016 just around the corner, it's the perfect time to take a look at the most important trends in sustainability coming our way.

Supply Chain Focus

As we all know, for our sustainability initiatives to succeed, they need to be embedded within every aspect of our business, not treated as a separate task. In the last issue, I wrote about the key role the supply chain plays in achieving sustainability targets, and in 2016 the focus on the supply chain is set to intensify. According to an excellent report from the **Ethical Corporation** (www.ethicalcorp.com) on the findings of some global research they carried out, collaboration will be key, with the greatest number of respondents agreeing that "industry collaboration is the single most exciting opportunity" in the coming years. For small and mid-size businesses, I herald this as great news. Collaboration is part of our DNA, and is demonstrated week in-week out by our participation in communities such as the **Women's Business Enterprise National Council** (WBENC) and *MBE* magazine have created. From a communications point of view, the takeaway is to ensure that openness and spirit of collaboration is woven throughout the way that we market ourselves so no opportunities are lost.

Transparency

Effective collaboration calls for a significant amount of transparency with suppliers and there will continue to be growing demand from shareholders, board members, and even industry peers. Measuring and reporting on sustainability goals will increasingly become the norm, as a report (available here: <http://bit.ly/110Kawp>) from the **Global Reporting Initiative** notes that "Today, the world's largest companies in all sectors and regions disclose their sustainability performance and impacts to some degree." Societal and consumer expectations will also play a part in the demand for increased transparency, emboldened this digital era with the immediacy of Twitter and other social media which requires authenticity from companies of any size.

Long Term Endorsement from Leadership

A commitment to sustainability is now a strategic prerequisite. Thankfully, business leaders are increasingly recognizing

this. According to research from the **United Nation's** Global Compact division (available here: <http://bit.ly/17ZXu54>) 93 percent of CEOs questioned considered sustainability important to the future of their business, 80 percent saw it as a means of gaining competitive advantage, and 78 percent saw it as an opportunity for growth and innovation. All of which is great news! I think it's fair to say the sustainability movement will reach its tipping point once the economic connection has been made undeniably clear. For example, referring back to the findings of the Ethical Corporation's study, 20 percent of respondents in North America said that "eliminating dependency on unsustainable raw materials" was their biggest supply chain issue. Whatever industry you are in, it doesn't make sense to operate with a short-term focus. Sustainability is about the long game, and that needs to be a message that starts from the top.

Local Focus/Global Reach

Technology has made it possible to achieve global reach, no matter the size of your business or the depth of your resources. But it presents a significant challenge in terms of achieving relevance and authenticity in local markets while staying true to the company brand. To paraphrase a well-known saying, sustainability begins at home, and taking the steps to make your company more sustainable (through choosing environmentally friendly suppliers, eliminating non-essential printing, securing ISO certification, or whatever your route may be) can help you globally and locally: sustainability is becoming a universal language, providing access to a growing number of networks across the globe, and allowing your voice to be heard.

This year, my company celebrates its 20th year in business, and I put our longevity down in no small part to having put a commitment to sustainability at the heart of what we do right



from the start. So, in the aforementioned spirit of collaboration, if you'd like to learn more about the very real benefits of sustainability to your business, please get in touch! ♦

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