

TheLASTword



Time for Independents to Become Truly Sustainable Operators

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At Give Something Back, a commitment to sustainability has long been part of our culture. Here's how we approach it:

First we define it. At Give Something Back we believe that sustainability is not an attribute of any one product we sell or a single characteristic of our company but rather a system condition. For Give Something Back to be sustainable we must be positively contributing members of a larger community, called an ecosystem. As such, we choose to restore and protect our ecosystem and the people who inhabit it to ensure the health and vitality of our future generations.

And we get real about the impacts of our industry. The office products industry benefits from cheap labor and products from developing countries. The unfortunate reality is that there are hidden costs buried beneath those discounts. Environmental and social costs are making their way into the consumer spotlight. It is our responsibility to push our industry to move beyond "business as usual" and towards collaboration and innovation. This means designing products that are better on the environment, proactively engaging with our overseas suppliers and rewarding those who protect human rights and the environment.

We set goals and get creative about achieving them. Our dealership used 77,000 cardboard boxes last year. We need those boxes to protect products but do we need to use a new box every time? To reduce the number of boxes we were using (and the environmental costs associated with manufacturing them), we initiated a program that allows customers to return boxes with the driver to be used again. Customers have more room in their supply closet for more products, and our otherwise empty trucks are full on the way back to the warehouse.

We educate our employees who educate our customers. It is our responsibility to provide customers with the tools and information they need to make a qualified decision about any given product. To do that, we are

working to provide more visibility into the product's entire life-cycle; from design to obsolescence. We encourage our employees and customers to ask questions like these when choosing a product:

What are the ingredients?

Who manufactured it and where?

How far did the product travel to get to the end user?

Can it be reused?

Can it be deconstructed, reused or recycled?

We also push our wholesalers and manufacturers to provide us with the appropriate environmental data to ensure the credibility of "green" products.

There are several reasons why other dealers should join us and commit to more environmentally-responsible policies and procedures.

It makes business cents. Greening our own business has saved us money. The energy costs alone, through retrofits and rebates, have easily justified our choice to be a sustainable operator. Our message to you: Do these retrofits now, because soon they will be mandated and there will be no carrot given out for the followers, only the early adopters.

Customers will notice. They will notice if you take action and if you don't. Especially in the economy we all face today, customers will begin to expect more from you. They will look for services that save them money, help their businesses succeed, and make it easy for them to do something good at the same time.

You have children. It can be difficult in a society that sees mainly short-term to look further into the future. We challenge you to try. We believe the science of climate change and water shortages, and we understand that these problems are overdue for action. That means that our children will inherit them. What will your business's legacy be?