

# Conservation efforts satisfy clients, boost profits



By **RUTH HEIL**  
Business Journal Columnist

Today customers want products and services that improve the quality of their lives without robbing nature of its resources.

Lessen your environmental impact, and your business will become more attractive to these conscientious buyers. Here are 12 things to consider in your business, ones that true nature lovers will sing about:

- **Inherent mind-set or culture.** The sport gear company, Patagonia Inc., lists its "reason for being" — its mission statement — as "Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis."

A company-wide, Earth-first attitude like that will set you apart from imposters who greenwash their image. Your leadership drives the culture that employees work in every day, at every level. If you care about conserving natural resources, make sure they know it.

- **Investment.** An orchard owner who plants no trees will have no fruit to sell. As Henry Ford once said, "Money is like an arm or a leg — use it or lose it." Investment need not be financial or large; often, time or effort is needed. There may be upfront costs involved in green improvements, but they will turn into profit when spent with intention.

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- **Employee buy-in.** Just as every employee needs to understand the point of your environmental initiatives. If not, foster an appreciation. Promote those who work in synergy with your goals.

- **Innovation.** Never would a business advisor warn against innovation, yet when it comes to office management, for instance, so many of us still do things the old-fashioned way.

For example, we've fully integrated

the computer into our tasks, yet the stacks of paper seem to be growing instead of shrinking.

Look at your processes and your product from a different angle. Change your methods to remove the waste or inefficiency.

- **Paper purchase.** In addition to consumption, look at the source of your supply. The American Forest & Paper Association reported a 63 percent recovery rate for consumed paper in 2009. That's waste turned into resource. However, in order to complete the recycling loop, we have to buy paper — and other products — made from that material, which is known as post-consumer waste. In doing so, you send the message that you want the industry to use waste first.

- **Energy production.** Today, we can choose how the power we use is generated. Meanwhile, energy production is the largest environmental issue of our time. Power your business with a renewable energy source that is in line with your environmental mantra.

- **Energy efficiency.** In 2008, the U.S. Department of Energy estimated that commercial and industrial users

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accounted for half of the energy consumed in Pennsylvania.

The other half went to transportation and residential use. Although many people in the transportation sector have been talking about advances in vehicle fuel efficiency, we cannot forget that businesses play a significant role in consumption.

- **Transportation/carpool.** Help your employees use the bus or ride together. Give them the tools to connect with one another and remove any scheduling barriers that prevent them from traveling at the same time.

- **Cleaning products.** A dairyman knows that no chemicals are needed to make the milk taste good. The same goes for green cleaning. Don't use chemicals to clean unless

warranted. Effective alternatives exist; many have been around for centuries.

- **Disposable kitchen products.** Between the cups, utensils, paper towels, and cooking plates, mealtime generates a lot of trash.

For health reasons, reusing disposable plastic is questionable practice, so stock the cafeteria with microwave-safe supplies and an automatic dishwasher.

Post kitchen rules, and let employees know you are watching.

- **Marketing claims.** Eco-minded consumers are smarter today.

They'll detect unethical tactics and will gladly tell their friends. They'll also spread the word about a company they trust.

Make sure your product is as green as you say it is.

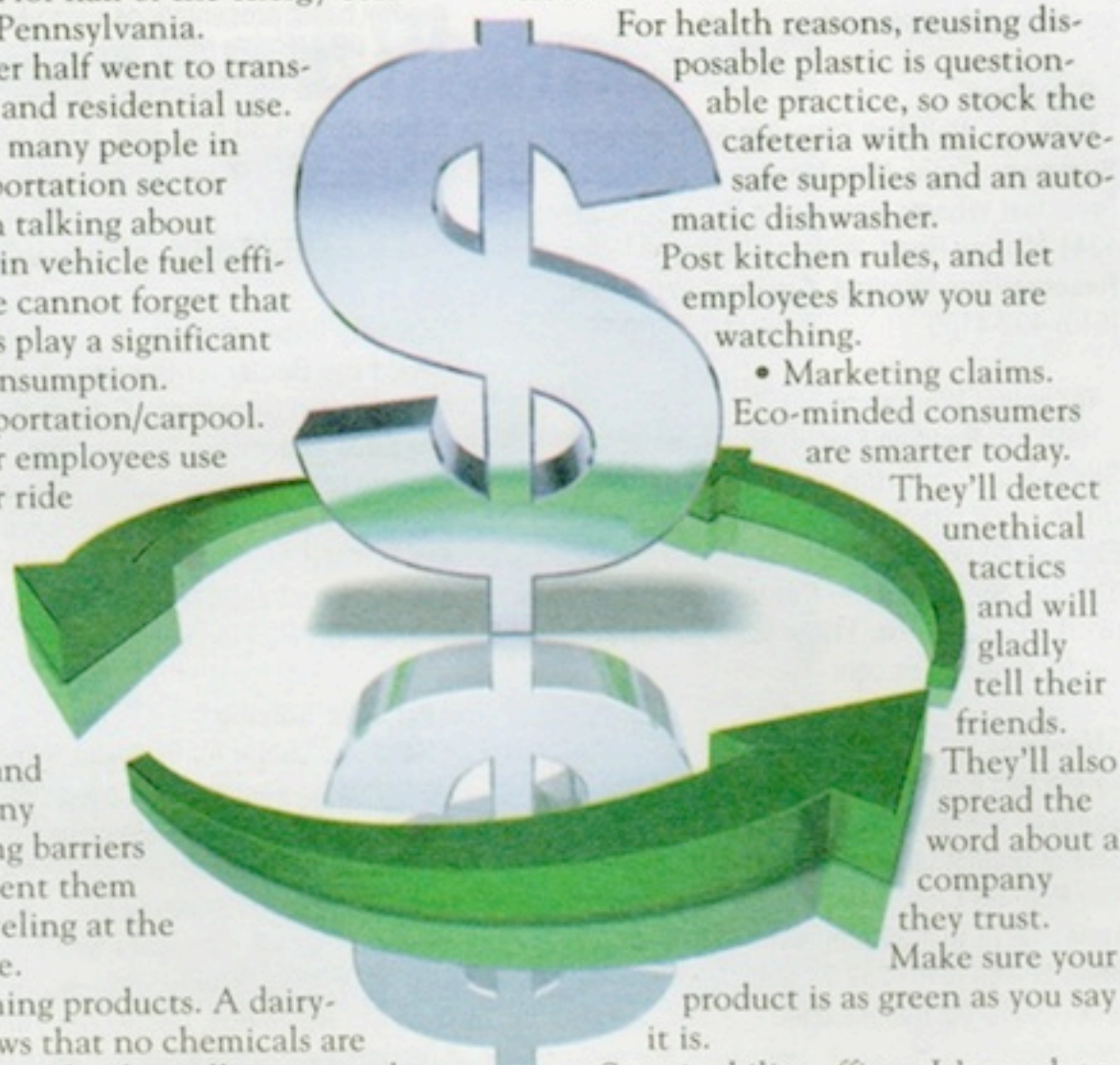
- **Sustainability officer.** It's tough to stay ahead of the rapidly changing green market.

Life-cycle analysis, sustainability certifications, grants and tax incentives are just a few tools and opportunities that require time to manage.

For instance, the Federal Trade Commission is preparing to release new guidelines for green product claims. Appoint a sustainability officer to ensure your claims are true, further your environmental goals and capitalize on the righteous work you've done.

Now more than ever, environmental conservation can yield real dividends: Money saved, happiness increased, quality of life ensured, customers satisfied and guilt removed are just a few.

Ruth Heil is a freelance writer based in Green Lane. She can be reached at [ruth@thewritebeat.com](mailto:ruth@thewritebeat.com)



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business news  
to [epbjnews@epbj.com](mailto:epbjnews@epbj.com)

