Hotel Business Review
Best practices, insights & trends

Green Means Green: A 90 day process to a money generating eco-makeover

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Mr. Jeff Slye

With the ever increasing demand from organizations and travelers to stay in socially responsible hotels, adding environmental responsibility to your hotel's identity can translate directly into new revenues. The Ecological Lifestyles market is now estimated at $81.2 Billion (2005) with over 63 Million consumers wanting to open their wallets for environmentally responsible companies. Socially responsible corporate travel is also exploding as company's take bolder steps in this market; examples include McDonalds serving organic coffee, Pfizer completing its first ever "Corporate Citizenship Report 2005," and Expedia collaborating with the UN to create the World Heritage Alliance. With this social revolution underway, all hotels should be participating with their own environmental program, not only to connect with these consumers and businesses, but also to benefit to the environment.

However, many hotels when presented with the operational aspect of going green face some perceptional challenges. The reality is that these challenges are misperceptions and hotels can tap into this market without much effort. Furthermore, these steps have real positive benefits to the environment and can demonstrate a hotel's commitment to reduce their ecological footprint on the planet.

This approach and these steps are based on the understanding that most hoteliers and hotel management companies were not 'born green,' meaning they didn't start their businesses and hotels with being green in mind. However, we have now seen from hotel groups like Kimpton Hotels and Fairmont Hotels that it is completely viable to incorporate environmental awareness and practices into traditional business models and still continue to provide high quality hospitality experiences. This approach to becoming green creates a much different context for 'eco-friendly,' than those 'born green' businesses such as a Costa-Rican eco-lodge and companies like Clif Bar or Organic Valley.

Quick and easy steps that can make a big difference and put your hotel on the path of being environmentally responsible.

STEP 1 – Use non-toxic cleaners

It is important to recognize that there is a myth going around that non-toxic means it will cost more money. That is not the case. Non-toxic cleaning companies are anxious to be part of this greater environmental movement within the hospitality industry and will work with hotels in creating deals that work for all parties. In fact, several of my clients, such as the Villa Florence in San Francisco and the Hotel Monaco in Seattle, actually saved money through this process. Not to mention the environmental impact of diverting toxic liquids from our rivers, lakes, seas, and water supplies. In only 3 months, Kimpton Hotels' non-toxic program diverted over 10,828 gallons, the equivalent of 208 bath tubs. A quick phone call to your district EPA will provide you with several options.

When getting started, the goal is to replace at least one of the core cleaning products with a non-toxic product, with the long term objective of replacing all cleaning products with non-toxic options. This step has the most significant benefits in terms of health and well being of employees and in reducing our damage to the environment.

STEP 2 - Recycle Coat Hangers and Amenity Soap Bottles

This is a two-for-one, both of these practices simply makes sense. First, coat hangers are odd shaped and when tangled take up lots of space. Considering waste bins are based on volume, by recycling these hangers back to the dry cleaners you save money on your waste costs. Furthermore, the dry cleaner benefits by not having to buy more coat hangers every several months. Lastly, these coat hangers are now eliminated from land fill and less coat hangers need to be manufactured thereby saving energy and waste into our environment.

If your hotel is using soap bottles, time to wash your hands of those old bottles. Again, they are taking up unnecessary volume in your dumpsters and there are many community and non-profit groups around you that will gladly pick them up and put them to good use. Not to mention, this reduces the need to manufacturer more soap and bottles.

STEP 3 – Organic Coffee

Would you like a non-fat double latté with a touch of RAID®? Most people don't know that coffee is usually not grown in the United States and therefore can be farmed with dangerous pesticides some even associated with serious health problems such as cancer. Therefore, bringing organic coffee into your hotel is another easy step that has a big impact and should not cost any more money then current costs for regular coffee.

It is also a great opportunity to engage guests into the program as they become passive-activists by simply staying at the hotel and drinking the organic coffee. There are several organic coffee companies; some may be local to your cities, that are now matching and even besting existing prices to their organic options. Some examples of companies that I've personally seen be competitive with their organic options include Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, Newman's Own Organics, Thanksgiving Coffee, and Starbucks.

STEP 4 – Back of House – Recycling paper and cardboard

One significant step for the back of house is to manage how you treat your cardboard and paper. Tremendous value can be achieved by simply doing a good job with the back of house. In fact, The Hotel Allegro in Chicago started saving $450/week (over $21,000/year), by just managing the disposal and usage of paper products from the back of house. Some of the other simple, easy, and 'business friendly' steps include:

- Cardboard is a space hog and can fill a dumpster before you can say 'useless expense.' It is extremely recyclable and this step alone should result in savings and again, it is very kind to the environment.
- Use the minimum EPA standard of recycled copy paper (35% post consumer recycled). Recycled paper takes approximately 40% less energy and wood resources to manufacture and recycled copy paper has now reached a quality standard that will act, feel, slice, and dice just like the virgin blend.
- Enable all employees to recycle the paper they use in their day to day business. This can be as simple as providing a cardboard box to a proper recycling container at their desk.

STEP 5 - Towel and Linen Reuse

I wasn't going to mention it, as at this point every hotel should have this option available to its guests. If you don't, do it now as it saves substantial amounts of money and is great for the environment. My primarily suggestion with this step is to check-in regularly with your house keepers to ensure the towel and linen reuse process is actually being followed. Many hotels have reported that their policy is in place, but follow through can be erratic.

FINAL AND ESSENTIAL STEP – Internal and External Communication

Simply put, you can't pursue and engage these socially responsible customers and businesses if they don't know what you are doing…and if it isn't being implemented successfully. Therefore, the final step is to create an 'eco-makeover' identity or brand and then communicate the efforts being taken to employees and the outside world. With employees, this communication will create a deeper connection to the effort and support the successful roll-out and execution of the other steps. With the outside world, at a minimum the program should be linked on a web site. This illustrates the importance and sincere commitment of the hotel to being environmentally responsible.

Imagine for a minute if every hotel in the United States took on the above steps and the impact it would have on our environment. No doubt we are on this path. So why not secure your hotel(s) with all these steps and seize not only the cost savings and environmental benefits, but also the financial rewards from travelers and organizations that want to do business with socially minded companies?

As the lead project manager and consultant for Kimpton Hotels and Restaurant's EarthCare environmental initiative, Jeff Slye has been instrumental in creating and executing the hospitality industry's most revered eco program. Mr. Slye founded Business Evolution Consulting to address the growing needs of organizations to become 'eco-friendly,' while continuing to reduce their costs and deliver high quality services and products. In combining his business background and commitment to the environment, he provides a powerful and unique perspective on environmental issues and objectives of organizations. Mr. Slye can be contacted at 415-871-1932 or jeff.slye@businessevolutionconsulting.com

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