

Environmental Sustainability Fuels Business Sustainability

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Green is the New Black (*and how going green can put your business in the black!*)

“Going green” has long been the norm—perhaps you recycle, installed CFL bulbs, or bought a Prius. It’s time to expand that approach to your practice. Over the past 5 years as a veterinary consultant, I have seen a surge in cost-conscious practices across the country constructing or renovating with eco-efficiency in mind. Let’s look at the main reasons that are fueling this trend, and why going green can make sense personally and financially.

First, ignoring any fiscal benefits, it’s the right thing to do—green renovations feel good. Dr. Stacia Jung built a highly eco-efficient hospital in St. Croix. “Energy conservation measures are part of our practice philosophy. We are virtually paperless, cleaning products and appliances are energy efficient, and our combination of solar panels, wind turbines, and solar hot water heater have greatly reduced dependence on a utility company that uses oil to fire its plant.”

Green options also appeal to clients, in part because they improve their pets’ experience. Dr. Anne Parker, of East Berlin, PA, chose cork—a renewable flooring material—because she liked how it would feel for dogs to walk on: “It has good grip and feels springy.” In Key West Dr. Doug Mader installed a solar tube in his new hospital: “It lights up the entire cat room just like daylight. They love it!”

“Going green” now makes good business sense, too. Although initial costs can be high, efficient systems have reached a price point and a standard of quality and longevity that makes them highly competitive over time. Five years ago when I started recommending LED lighting, the cost of the bulbs was triple the current price. Similar price drops has occurred with solar panels.

Rebates and tax credits, including the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, make upgrades even more affordable. “We took advantage of our local utility company’s program to update our fluorescent fixtures with more energy efficient ones,” says Dr. Alissa Fairlie of Poughkeepsie, NY. “The utility company covered 65% percent of the cost.”

And, as architect Heather Lewis pointed out: “The greenest building is the one that already exists.” You can save money and create less waste by renovating rather than building. Either way, try to use locally manufactured materials, as transportation is a huge energy drain.

You already know the importance of environmental sustainability—it’s time to apply that knowledge to your practice. Thanks to technology improvements and incentive programs, many upgrades are well within reach, and will pay for themselves over time. But even if that’s not feasible, you can implement simple procedures—like unplugging “vampire” electronics or going paperless—that save your practice money while helping the planet.

Tips for Going Green
Buy locally manufactured construction materials
Pay a small premium to the utility company for electricity from renewable sources, or offset your energy consumption through TerraPass
Install your own photo-voltaic electrical system

Upgrade your HVAC system, and install timers and sensors to automate climate control
Upgrade window and flooring insulation
Install modern double- or triple-pane windows
Replace lights with LEDs (which draw very little power and last for years) or solar tube skylights
Install an on-demand hot water system
Convert to a fully paperless office workflow
Use biodegradable cleaning supplies