



Web Consulting Inc

Americas Office
398 Columbus Ave. #331
Boston, MA 02116
UNITED STATES

Tel: +1 617 536 5925
Fax: +1 617 536 5926
Email: info@web-na.com
Web: www.web-na.com

It's Not Easy Being "Green" *The Journey Towards Sustainable Business*

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Written by: Michael Flippin, Web Consulting

I've learned a lot from watching Sesame Street, and I have to admit that the show continues to make me think. During a recent visit to Atlanta, I spent a rainy afternoon watching some classic episodes with my young niece and nephew. At one point, my favorite frog began singing how "it isn't easy being green." Boy is he right. Kermit, of course, was upset about blending in with much of the world around him, "having to spend each day the color of the leaves" and "so many other ordinary things." But maybe that's not so bad.

Today, green stands for much more than just an additive primary color (visible light with a wavelength of roughly 520 – 570 nanometers). According to Wikipedia, the word now has 28 associations within our culture. Many of us tend to associate green with environmentalism and environmentally-friendly products. But the printing industry is still struggling with definitions. We likely have a different description -- and that's the problem. There's no standard -- no regulated definition -- of what a green printer is. Some businesses refer to themselves as "green" because of their choice of ink (non petroleum-based). But green should go beyond that; it should apply to overall business practices.

Many advertisers are encouraging graphic suppliers to use products and processes with reduced environmental impact. These shops are pushing manufacturers of printers, media and ink to develop greener products for them to use. To those people, I applaud you. But it goes beyond that too.

In fact, green needs to go *far* beyond that. It's not enough for businesses to use more environmentally-friendly products. Businesses need to be *sustainable*. According to the Resource Venture (www.resourceventure.org), a sustainable business is one that uses the "planet's resources at a rate by which nature is able to replenish those resources." It has been written that *every day* the global economy uses an amount of energy that it took the earth *10,000 days* to create. So what do we do? We become more aware and start taking steps.

One theory suggests shifting the overall goals of doing business. The Hawaiian language has over 100 words to describe rain, because rain is important to that culture. Our present business climate has only two words to describe profit – gross and net.

According to Paul Hawken's *The Ecology of Commerce, the Declaration of Sustainability*, businesses need to be evaluated not only on earnings but also on a social and environmental basis. Entire markets will need to be restructured so that products that harm the environment no longer carry a lower overall cost than those that don't. This has nothing to do with price.

Peter Drucker, founding father of the study of management, said, "The purpose of business is to create and keep a customer." And much of his work has been to support his belief that businesses are created to serve the needs of that customer and not to make money. Instead, people invest in a business to make money.

But hold on - I bet you're thinking that this is very easy for a consultant to say. I don't face the challenges of increased competition from other printers and signage companies, don't have to decide when to invest in new inkjet technology, or cope with rising costs of key raw materials affected by oil prices. You're right, that isn't my business. But that doesn't mean I'm not exploring more responsible ways to do business – economic, social and environmental.

Drucker also said that "The best way to predict the future is to create it." As the planet's dominant species, we have the ability to do that. According to Hawken, the 1.1 billion people living in developed countries metabolize 82.7 percent of the world's resources leaving the scraps for the five billion people in underdeveloped countries. That raised my eyebrows. We – not only as business people, but also as consumers – need to take steps to create and support the effort toward sustainability.

It will take time and will require patience and a lot of education. Confucius said that "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." And we are taking those first steps. After all, according to Tenton Sioux oral tradition, "The frog does not drink up the pond in which he lives." And as Kermit's song continues, "I am green and ... it's beautiful! And I think it's what I want to be."

Me too. I hope that we all want to be green.

Stay tuned.

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Michael Flippin is the president of Web Consulting, Inc a consultancy to the digital printing, traditional signage, screen printing and industrial decoration industries. Founded in 1993, Web Consulting (www.web-na.com) is based in Boston and provides a range of consulting services including primary market research, an annual series of industry reports, market modeling and forecasting as well as strategic analysis and support. Contact Michael Flippin at (617 536 5925) or email michael.flippin@web-na.com