

You Sell Green, but Are You Green?

Building service contractors and distributors in Australia, like their counterparts in North America and Europe, are becoming more and more Green. Whereas a few years ago only the more astute contract cleaners and distributors would offer Green cleaning services and provide environmentally preferable products - and then only to those customers who requested them - now the practice is becoming commonplace.

What we see evolving in the industry are cleaning contractors and distributors now assuming that the client/customer wants Green cleaning products from the start, offering more conventional products only if requested or if a satisfactory or cost-effective Green equivalent is not available.

This means the marketing advantage that some Green cleaning contractors and distributors once enjoyed is fast disappearing. However, in its place a new marketing strategy is coming into play that can help these contractors and distributors differentiate themselves from their competitors. And that is very simply to evolve from a company that provides and sells Green products to one that is a Green company.

What exactly does this mean? It means that contractors and distributors can no longer just 'talk' the benefits of Green cleaning; they must also 'walk' their talk, which can be a bit more difficult to do. A rather dramatic example of this struggle was discussed at the Connections trade recently held in Las Vegas, NV, United States, which is the largest show in North America specifically for the carpet cleaning and restoration industry. One

of the presenters shared that in Canada a carpet cleaning company was recently fined US\$10,000 because one of its staff emptied soiled water from a carpet extractor onto the customer's yard.

Soiled water from carpet extraction can contain an entire host of contaminants and cleaning agents. This is why sections of the US, Canada, and other parts of the world are now instituting regulations requiring that this water be disposed of in an environmentally responsible manner. The presenter then drew snickers and frowns from the audience when he revealed that this carpet cleaning company marketed itself as a 'green' company, one that uses only chemicals, products, and equipment designed to protect the environment. So while this contractor may 'talk the talk', it does not appear this staff member, possibly the entire company, is 'walking the talk'.

So how can cleaning professionals, whether contractors, carpet cleaners, or distributors, start walking their talk? Following are some steps companies can take to truly become Green:

Follow environmental rules

If regulations in your community require that soiled water (as in the case of the aforementioned carpet cleaner), cleaning solution, old finish removed from floors, and certain conventional cleaning products, tools, or equipment be disposed of in a specific manner, understand that

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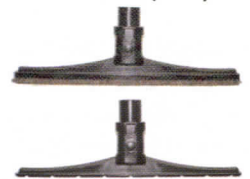


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these regulations have been created for a reason – to protect health and the environment – and they should be followed. Because we can anticipate even more such regulations in the coming years, a good way to stay abreast of them is by reading industry trade publications and joining trade associations.

Green office operations

If one of your Green-focused clients came to your office, would he or she see a company that recycles copier paper and uses recycled copy paper? How about the lighting? Are low-watt florescent bulbs installed? If the client peeked out to the parking lot, would he or she see bicycles used by your staff to bike to work or their service locations along with company hybrid vehicles?

A Green company considers using recycled and recyclable products wherever possible. Staff should be encouraged to bike to work or use public transportation, and with virtually every major automaker now introducing more cost-effective hybrid, electric, or super fuel-efficient cars, there is no reason not to consider one of these vehicles when it comes time to trade out an older model. Further, in an effort to save time and fuel, many contractors and distributors now plan their driving routes so that on any given day the locations serviced are all in the same area.

Green the (cleaning) closet

Many Green cleaning contractors and distributors not only use environmentally preferable cleaning products in their own offices, but they turn this into an opportunity to test different Green cleaning products themselves to see how well they perform. Just because products are deemed environmentally preferable does not mean they all perform the same way. This is a good way to evaluate different Green cleaning products.

Join a Green association

Although trade publications and associations may provide information and environmental updates, a Green association or organisation really helps its members learn the latest in state-of-the-art Green technologies. It also helps members become much more Green focused so that environmental responsibility becomes a major component of who their companies really are. **A final point:** these changes and many more not discussed here do not have to happen overnight. In fact, it might even be best to take them one at a time. To do this, develop a 'Green Goals' program. Decide what your company can do now and in the next three months, six months, a year, and so on to become a Greener, more environmentally responsible member of your business community.

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LLC, an electronic dashboard that allows jansan companies to measure, track and report on their facility's environmental impacts. He is also co-author of both The Business of Green Cleaning and Green Cleaning for Dummies.

Ashkin has worked in the cleaning industry since 1981 and has held senior management positions in leading consumer and commercial product companies. He began his work on Green Cleaning in 1990 and today is thought of as the 'father of Green cleaning'.

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