

# Businesses Going Green To Make Green

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Contributing Writer

**W**hile no one wants to be personally responsible for wrecking the planet, businesses also have to turn a profit. Fortunately, intelligent investments in environmentally friendly equipment and practices can actually help grow the bottom line.

“Business acceptance of green practices and technologies – it’s something that’s growing,” says Sarah Mills, owner of Long Beach-based Sarah Mills Consulting, which performs project management and strategic planning services for businesses and public agencies that are trying to plan and implement environmental initiatives.

Two main areas are driving business investment in green technology: Economic incentives offered by governmental agencies and consumer demands. In short, governmental policies driven by voter demands encourage businesses to look for green equipment and practices, and customers are voting with their wallets for businesses that tread lightly on Mother Earth.

“Consumers are becoming more savvy about sustainability issues. From my experience, because their consumers are beginning to realize that one of the best ways to effect environmental change is to wield their buying dollars, they’re going to start wielding their purchasing dollars with companies that are environmentally responsible and sustainable,” Mills says.

“Businesses are realizing that the money they are spending on environmental initiatives is coming back to them in terms of attracting and retaining customers. They’re using that as a



Sarah Mills, owner of Sarah Mills Consulting in Long Beach, won the “Most Innovative Campaign” award from the U.S. Conference of Mayors the last two years for the development of the City of Irvine municipal recycling campaign.

tool to gain and retain customers. Not only are they getting their investment back in savings, but they’re able to leverage it as a marketing and advertising tool.”

Businesses that wanted to invest in green equipment and encourage green practices sometimes have concerns about the potential costs, but recent governmental economic incentives have the potential to tip the scales, says Blake Christian, a tax credit specialist with Holthouse, Carlin & Van Trigt, LLP in Long Beach.

Incentives available include:

- Businesses owning or leasing buildings that are more than 50 percent more energy efficient than a standard building can take tax credits of up to \$1.80 per square foot, Christian says.
- Hybrid vehicles, light truck/fuel cell vehicles, alternative fuel vehicles, biodiesel vehicles – all can be eligible for tax credits.
- Geothermal or solar energy buildings can qualify for tax breaks.
- Pollution controls and soil remediation activities (cleaning up polluted properties) can also qualify for certain tax advantages.

In addition, as environmentally friendly technology matures, it becomes easier to integrate into the operations of more and more businesses, Mills says.

“There are models for businesses available now,” she says. “You don’t have to start from scratch.”

But to bring these concepts to fruition, businesses and agencies need a plan to make “the rubber meet the road,” Mills says.

“You need stakeholder buy-in and stakeholder participation. If you don’t have that educational piece to get your stakeholders to buy into the plan, all you have is good intentions without making any positive change,” she says.

“Unfortunately, this is where some companies get involved in accusations of ‘greenwashing’ – they haven’t taken the action steps to make the strategic plan a living part of their activities. That’s where I come in. It’s finding the right motivators, finding the way to incentivize the behavior.” ■