

Think Green and Thrive

Due to the challenges we face with global warming and a shift in consumer awareness, businesses are feeling the pressure to change. The good news is that businesses can thrive through implementing sustainability practices; cutting costs and building a reputable presence in the community are just some of the positive effects of environmental action in business. Dan Atkins the Managing Director of the Shaper Group – a group of companies that work with businesses to combine profitability with sustainability – believes that “every single business can make more money by looking at sustainability, from energy costs, sustainable products, an engaged work force to building a better reputation in the community.” Atkins passion for sustainability was seeded when he was a young boy growing up on an orchard where he experienced a strong connection to the environment. But the connection between profit and sustainability also took root as Atkins capitalised on the opportunity to sell the fresh produce from the orchard to make pocket money.

Atkins now has 15 years experience in both international and domestic sustainability practices and, today, is one of Australia’s foremost sustainability experts. So what can businesses do to make a positive impact on the environment while gaining the competitive edge? Atkins states that there are three key factors that should drive business called the “triple bottom line”: 1. Economic 2. Social 3. Environmental. He believes that if all three of these factors are considered there should be no reason why a business doesn’t succeed.



An example of the triple bottom line in action was provided by Atkins: a Newsagency has a number of periodicals that inevitably date and, therefore, will be disposed of. But instead of disposing of the periodicals, they can be distributed to Doctor’s surgeries, other therapeutic practices, nursing homes, etc. as a good will gesture. Immediately this has a positive social impact as it is deemed charitable as well as the periodicals get re-used and don’t end up in landfill which is beneficial to the environment. Word gets out and, for little effort, the Newsagency begins to build a good reputation in the community which can lead to attracting more customers who like the values that underpin the business.

Another simple way a Newsagency, or any like business, can be competitive through sustainability is to offer sustainable stationery. More and more consumers are looking to these types of products to make their own contribution to environmental issues so it’s financially viable while proving sustainable.

A business strategy that Atkins offers to address the triple bottom line is the 5 – 3 – 6 rule: As a business

choose 5 sustainable aspects that are important to you then 3 key reasons why you want to do this. Finally you need to define the 6 things your business can do to implement these practices while ensuring your business makes money; after all, Atkins is a pragmatic: if it costs money for a business to implement sustainability stratagems without any returns then they’re simply not going to do it.

With many businesses keen to implement sustainable practices, care needs to be taken not to leverage off this before solid credentials are established, otherwise know as ‘green washing’. Nadya Krienke-Becker, Shaper Group General Manager, had this to say: “We live in a new era of transparency connected by the internet and social media. Companies have maybe two weeks before they are found out of any misleading behaviour. Green washing whether deliberate or by accident does not wash it. Companies who are well on their way or are just commencing in their sustainability journey need to ensure that what they communicate is fact. More importantly communicate what you have achieved and what you are doing, not just what you would like to do.”

Dan Atkins walks the talk by reducing, re-using and recycling in his commitment to be sustainable.

For more information on Shaper Group go to www.shapergroup.com