

GREEN RESULTS

Companies going clean discover it can be a profitable decision

By Special to U-T San Diego ERINN HUTKIN 12:01 A.M. APRIL 21, 2014

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When Pie Roque and his wife, Sol, bought an old [hotel](#) in Chula Vista in 2004, they planned to fix it and then flip the place and turn a profit.

The poor economy had other plans. When they realized they couldn't sell the property at the price they wanted, they decided to run the business, El Primero Boutique Hotel, on their own.

Today, the couple has turned the bed-and-breakfast into an award-winning, eco-friendly property that they say helps the planet and gives guests an experience worth coming back for. They also found that their efforts ultimately save them money.

When revamping the building, Pie Roque said the couple installed windows that reduce outside noise and conserve the heat that ultraviolet light brings in. They installed solar panels, high-efficiency lights, low-flow shower heads and do plenty of recycling and re-purposing.

He said 70 percent of the site's trash is recycled — even their [recycling bins](#) are recycled. And because he said one tree removes the pollution of six cars, they grow the seeds for papaya plants and give them away to guests.

"We were concerned about the environment," said Pie Roque, 75. "We wanted to leave this place better than when we found it."

Across San Diego, many business owners have found that being green with their business is also an effective way to keep their profits in the black.

Jason Anderson, president of CleanTech San Diego, a trade association representing the clean energy sector that promotes the benefits of businesses doing [deeds](#) that boost the environment, said much of the movement centers on the "lowest hanging fruits" of energy efficiency, such as retrofitting heating and cooling systems or opting for energy-efficient [windows](#) or lighting.

But, said Greg Horowitz, managing director of San Diego's T2 Venture Creation, an ecosystem design studio, many businesses are also opting for greener building materials and glass that provides better insulation so less energy is needed to heat and cool the space.

Water efficiency is another area where businesses can be efficient, he said, by using "gray water," which is recycled waste water that's ideal to use in ways other than for drinking, such as for irrigation or toilets.

And as technology advances and the cost of sensors goes down, he predicts it will be easier for both businesses and homeowners to monitor and control how their property uses energy in ways that don't involve human intervention — such as relying on sensors to shut off lights or other utilities, or being able to do so from a smartphone.

“We're now making energy-efficiency sexy, like Apple made computers sexy,” Horowitz said.

WAY OF DOING BUSINESS

For business owners who want to go green, Anderson said there are rebate dollars available through utility companies and groups such as the California Center for Sustainable Energy.

In addition, he said some community leaders are working with businesses to help switch to Earth-friendly measures. The city of Chula Vista, he said, as well as Port of San Diego, have “aggressive” outreach programs where those at the city work with businesses to educate owners about dollars that are available to green their company or reduce energy use. There's also help in matching businesses with service providers that do retrofitting.

“It's just a way of doing business,” he said of companies that go green. “As a business owner, you're looking for ways to reduce expenses. It's less of a trend and more of a smart business decision.”

UTILITIES CAN HELP

Business owners who like the idea of going green but are unsure where to start can turn to their utility company, Anderson said, which will often do an audit at no cost, show what they can do to reduce their energy use and let them know what their options are for being more efficient.

Owners such as Roque did just that by working with San Diego Gas & Electric. He said those at the utility gave him lots of advice — and items to take advantage of — when it came to greening El Primero. For instance, he said the utility introduced him to occupancy light sensors that automatically turn off lights in his [hotel](#) rooms 15 minutes after a guest leaves.

He said between free advice and discounts, it was a “no-brainer” to implement greener measures in the business.

VALUED BY CONSUMERS

One of the perks of being green in business is that earth-friendly measures can be launched in companies both big and small.

For instance, San Diego businesses such as Scripps Ranch's Massage Green Spa were designed and built largely from environmentally friendly materials such as recycled drywall, organically compounded paint, low consumptive lighting and high-efficiency furnace and [water heaters](#).

Inside the building, the spa uses eco-friendly products such as hypoallergenic lotions and preservative-free and chemical-free [facial products](#).

“As a business owner, being green has given us an edge over our high-consumptive competitors and gained us the favor of consumers with similar environmental values,” spa owner Bob Iafate said.

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BIG RESULTS

Larger companies are also on going green.

For instance, San Diego’s Kyocera Communications Inc. has earned recognition from the city for its sustainability efforts. Kyocera Communications Inc. recycled approximately 9,500 pounds of cardboard, 2,500 pounds of mixed paper and 6,385 pounds of miscellaneous electronic scrap in 2012.

The company also held its second annual Kyocera Earth Expo earlier this month for businesses and consumers that showcased what’s new in sustainable technologies and services.

John Chier, the company’s marketing director, said being green has allowed the business to help others. For the past two years, the company has hosted cellphone recycling drives that have generated nearly 1,000 hours of long-distance service for a charity that turns recycling revenues into long-distance calling cards for troops stationed overseas.

“Being a green company requires the focus, resources and dedication to maintain a comprehensive program,” he said. “In the end, however, we see these not as pitfalls, but simply as responsibilities that every [business](#) should share.”

For more information, visit [elprimerohotel.com](#) [cleantechsandiego.org](#) [massagegreenspa.com](#)