

Encouraging customers to go green is good business

Guest Comment

By Larry Weinberg



“Environmentally friendly” is a term we, as consumers and businesspeople, hear nearly every day. Whether you are a residential remodeler like Bowa Builders or another type of business, you’ve likely found that “being green” is a must in today’s business world.

However, many companies are struggling to determine just what this means for themselves and their customers. Is an employee recycling program enough? Or, can we, or should we, be doing more? As business owners, it is our responsibility to encourage each other to do all we can to effect change and move the needle when it comes to protecting our environment.

Think of this example. The last time you stayed in a hotel, you likely saw a sign asking you to forgo daily towel and linen changes to conserve energy and water and minimize the release of detergents into the environment. Most would agree that such a “recycling” program is both a noble practice and beneficial to the environment.

I would encourage the hotel to take this program one step further. I wonder how many more guests would make the environmentally friendly decision to reuse their towels if the hotel took the money it saved from the reduced volume of laundry and either credited the guest directly or made an equivalent donation to an environmental organization.

As responsible businesses, each of us has a duty to examine our internal operations and external offerings to identify what we can do to encourage our customers, employees and business partners to do their part in protecting our environment. If each of us took the extra step of providing incentives for modified behavior, imagine where we would be.

In the residential construction industry, educating and encouraging homeowners to make smarter decisions during their building and remodeling projects can have an enormous positive environmental impact. Further, industry research shows that renovating existing homes with energy-efficient features is four to eight times more carbon-efficient and cost-efficient than imposing higher

standards on newly constructed homes.

In our region, we’re fortunate that homeowners stand to benefit from very generous local and state incentives and rebates, as well as from the enhanced federal tax incentives provided under this year’s economic stimulus package.

A 2008 report by the American Institute of Architects confirms that such “rewards” have been extremely effective in the advancement of environmentally friendly building. I’m pleased to say that Bowa Builders has crafted its own incentive program designed to give our clients even more motivation to make the right environmental decisions when building with us.

For more than a decade, we at Bowa Builders have prided ourselves on using what are now regarded environmentally conscious materials and practices simply because they produce better-quality homes for our clients. This year, we took that extra step by launching our Bowa Environmental Incentive Program, which rewards homeowners who elect environmentally conscious upgrades for their construction projects.

Through this first-of-its-kind program, we rebate our fees on up to \$100,000 in costs related to Bowa-approved environmental upgrades. We expect this new program, which has already generated tremendous interest in the community, combined with our commitment to educate clients on green-construction options and benefits and the advances we’ve made with respect to greening our internal operations, will have a measurable impact on our environment.

It is especially important to push the green envelope in industries, such as construction, where we recognize the practices we employ have a great impact on our environment. We hope other businesses in the many diverse industries in the Washington area will think about what incentives or programs they can offer to their customers to continue making a difference. Incentive programs like these can and will have a significant impact in our communities.

Energy eaters

It is no secret that buildings use a lot of energy and are responsible for a large share of the nation’s pollution. According to the U.S. Green Building Council, in the U.S. alone, buildings account for:

72%

of electricity consumption

39%

of energy use

38%

of all carbon dioxide emissions

40%

of raw materials use

30%

of waste output (136 million tons annually)

14%

of potable water consumption