



## AFFINITY CONSULTANTS

SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS FOR A CHANGING WORLD

### A Business Case For Sustainability

With any business strategy, an initiative needs to "make sense" before resources can be dedicated to pursuing it. This is also true for sustainability. There are many companies out there having trouble starting a sustainability program, or continuing green initiatives, because of the need to gain "buy-in" from both financial and time resources within the organization.

How do companies establish and maintain successful sustainability programs? The basic formula usually includes: developing a core message; starting small with a simple project or projects; and communicating your results.

To make your communication more meaningful, organizations should address results both internally and externally - internal communication can help rally leaders within the organization, while external communication can inform and begin to gain the support of investors, stakeholders, and customers.

A common theme of a successful sustainability program is transparency. This means publishing and communicating environmental information via marketing materials, annual reports, or website. One approach is to highlight major environmental impacts of the organization. While this may appear as if an organization is airing its dirty laundry to the public, it can in fact begin to identify opportunities, such as excess waste, or supply chain partnerships. Studies have shown that "transparent" organizations have more effective sustainability programs, and are performing better than their less transparent counterparts.

In March, Corporate Responsibility Magazine released its list of 100 Best Corporate Citizens, along with the first-ever "Black List" which represented the 30 least transparent organizations on the Russell 1000 Index. The "Black List" organizations provide just enough data to keep a public listing - yet no relevant data among topics such as governance, carbon emissions, and safety information.

This study further evaluates the average three year returns for both lists in comparison to the Russell 1000. Interestingly, the three-year returns for organizations on the "Black List" averaged -7.38 percent, compared to +2.374 percent for organizations in the "100 Best", and -5.4 percent for the entire Russell 1000 list. According to Corporate Responsibility Magazine president and publisher Jay Whitehead, this data "empirically, objectively and definitively proves that transparency is good for returns."

Another study indicates that a sound sustainability strategy can help

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keep organizations afloat during the difficult economic conditions. Management consulting firm A.T. Kearney published an analysis titled Green Winners: The Performance of Sustainability-focused Companies in the Financial Crisis, finding that in 16 of the 18 industries studied, organizations that had committed to sustainability outperformed industry averages by 15% over the six months from May through November 2008.

Organizations that are looking for a business case for sustainability should consider the value within their organization as well as to their customers and stakeholders. With studies, surveys, and other positive correlations indicating improved financial performance rooted in sustainable business strategies, building your particular business case for sustainability is becoming easier by the day.

[Affinity Consultants, Inc.](#) provides a full-range of sustainability and environmental services including: sustainability program development and planning, sustainability assessment, greenhouse gas inventory, life-cycle assessment, cultural evaluation, LEED consultation, energy audit and consultation, and environmental compliance.

If you have any questions, or require more information on climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, and other environmental and sustainability issues, feel free to contact Keith Gaydosh, [Affinity Consultants, Inc.](#)

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