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## Green practices can benefit firms' bottom line

Hamilton Nolan - 27 Sep 2007 16:30

**As environmentally friendly business offerings become de rigueur at PR firms across the country, agencies are finding that they must make their internal practices more "green," as well.**

For one, Fleishman-Hillard recently pledged to become carbon-neutral by the end of 2008.

And Burson-Marsteller has taken the mandate of parent company WPP a step further and instituted its own, complementary eco-responsibility code. Efforts include reducing energy consumption through the use of more efficient office equipment; using more recycled materials during construction; and hiring suppliers with sustainable business practices.

Jim Duffy, a Burson director who helps lead the firm's environmental operations, says it does not "aggressively promote" its own green efforts to clients. But those clients are paying attention.

Some RFPs now include questions regarding agencies' internal green policies, Duffy says. Clients consider those responses as factors in determining which firm to hire. Burson's internal experience, he believes, gives the agency a leg up.

"It's an expectation of our clients for us, [and it] shows in the quality of our work," he explains. "There is a business case to doing this."

Weber Shandwick has also found that by incorporating environmentally sound business policies, it can do some good for the planet while helping itself.

The firm is currently seeking to solidify its earth-friendly credentials by securing certification of its green standards, known as ISO 14001. The London office has already been certified, while all US offices are now preparing for the auditing process. That means each will soon have official documentation to tout its proficiency in recycling, saving paper, and using energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs, among other steps. Burson plans to use that certification to help attract clients.

"We'll make it known. We want to be able to walk the talk, and this is part of our commitment to do that," says William Brent, SVP and head of WS' clean tech unit. "We have a sustainability practice [and] a clean tech practice, [but] it does not hold a lot of water if you're not doing the things that you're communicating on behalf of clients."

The actual cost-benefit analysis of conforming to earth-friendly policies, though, can be hard to pin down. But Brent says that "the general data out there now points to the fact that you can create efficiencies through these types of things that save you money."

Boutique and mid-sized firms are facing similar issues. LA-based Ballantines PR, which launched an environmental practice in May, has since been scrambling to bring its own business policies in line with clients' green goals: turning down bright office lighting, buying carbon offsets, and even strongly suggesting that agency employees drive hybrid cars.

Agency founder and president Sarah Robarts says these efforts have not been in vain: Attraction to green offerings and ideals is strong for the firm's luxury-segment clients.

"Travel clients, right up to a safari company in Kenya, have really embraced it," she says. "We

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might feel a little bit of the pinch in the transition [to green practices], but now I wouldn't go back."

**Key points:**

Having sparked changes in their business offerings, a "green" revolution is now changing how firms handle internal business practices

Firms can tout their own policies to sell clients on their "green" expertise

Firms with green practices should anticipate having their own policies scrutinized by potential clients

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