

# Cutting-Edge Companies Capitalize on Green Business

How eco-consciousness has moved from fad to sustainable—and sensible—practice.

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After the green frenzy, businesses rapidly jumped on the green bandwagon (or fuel efficient vehicle) to capture their share of the eco-wallet. We seem to be settling into a rational green phase in business, where companies and consumers alike are starting to make decisions based on facts and reality, rather than the desire to be “cool green.” The costs of being environmentally responsible have also come down, and more practical and affordable—options are available. Today, going green encompasses reducing waste, saving energy, and much more than garden variety recycling programs. Some local companies are finding opportunities for growing their businesses by targeting customers interested in riding this next wave of green.

## Customers are More Educated

Despite the recession, consumers are buying environmentally-friendly products and two-thirds of them do their homework prior to settling on a product that makes sustainability claims. Sharon Rowe, CEO/founder of [ECOBAGS.com](http://ECOBAGS.com) of Ossining, New York, who has been involved in the eco-industry for 20 years says, “What might have been considered a green practice two years ago has also changed. Rather than just selecting a green bag, people have begun to look at how it’s made, where it’s made, and whether the product is made in a sustainable way, including manufacturing processes, materials, and labor issues.” To gain a competitive advantage, ECOBAGS markets the fact that their products are made from sustainable materials and are manufactured and produced under Fair Wage and Fair Labor standards.

Large entities, such as the government, universities, and the Fortune 500, have begun to pay attention to sustainability, and small businesses that fit the bill can benefit. According to Gary Survis, managing partner of Go Green Displays of Piscataway, NJ, “If small companies want to do business with these organizations, they’d better do more than talk about their plastics recycling program.” Energy audits, policies on travel, assessments of resources (across all aspects of the business) are all ways that small businesses can go that extra step in building a culture of sustainability.

Go Green Displays target eco-conscious customers by positioning themselves as an expert in everything sustainable. “Establish yourself as a thought leader across the green spectrum and you will be the first one to come to people’s minds when they think green,” says Survis. His company offers to do lunch-and-learns or presentations on green business for clients or prospects. In these programs, Survis talks about best practices and does not try to sell his marketing services. “I make sure that I don’t just know the space I operate in, but that I understand everything from waste reduction to energy use. I attend seminars and educate myself on the full package,” he says.

## Provide Smarter Energy

Whereas eco-practices were viewed as an incremental expense several years ago, businesses have found that the basic principles of environmentalism—reduce, reuse, recycle—can save them money in the long run. Energy use has become a key area of focus for many businesses, with some government entities offering significant benefits for adoption of new practices.

Geoscape Solar of Short Hills, New Jersey, performs energy audits on homes and businesses, and Jeffrey Chavkin, president and cofounder, reinforces that the businesses he deals with do not want to go green primarily for PR or community relations benefits. They are seeking bottom-line savings. “They need solutions that are cost-effective and either pay back or do not adversely affect operations or cash flow.”

Geoscape was founded 14 months ago due to increased consumer demand for energy solutions. Chavkin left a career in commodities and his partner left a career in banking. Chavkin’s partner, Michael Boches, had worked for a solar power company 20 years ago, but because the energy solution was not popular, the company folded. That was in the past; in the future Chavkin sees that wind power will make gains in the years ahead, as will the use of biofuels and electric/hybrid vehicles.

## Marketing for Green Businesses

Options for reducing paper waste are more plentiful and less expensive than they were several years ago. Print-

on-demand technology has begun to deliver great quality, and e-marketing and social media have made many ink-on-paper communications unnecessary. Rick Whelan, founder of Ditto! Design! urges companies who do use paper communications to “let the design solution be appropriate to the message and intended audience.” What seems like an obvious rule of good marketing can, in the long run, help save the environment, as well as unnecessary costs. While Whelan focuses mostly on graphic design these days, Ditto! Design! was Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified nearly five years ago. According to Whelan, helping clients move messages to electronic media, employing print-on-demand technologies, or asking customers if they would prefer print or online brochures are all ways to reduce expenses, as well as satiate clients trying to reduce their own paper consumption.

### **Consultants Take it a Step Further**

Many small businesses feel they are starting to plateau on what they can do to improve their day-to-day activities and are looking beyond the obvious. The definition of sustainability extends beyond buying products labeled eco-friendly. Business consultants can look at how they can use their expertise to reduce waste. “Businesses need to take a step back, to see if their general organization can be shifted in such a way to consume fewer resources, thereby saving money,” says Yale Klat, chief sustainability officer of the Salsberg Group. “One client was able to downsize their facility, while increasing both distribution and sales, by creating separate shifts for their workforce and sharing workspace.” While companies are streamlining and downsizing, consultants can help them consider the side benefits of changing internal processes and legacy systems. Many of these changes, although not initially perceived as “sustainability” initiatives may result in a dramatic waste reduction.

### **Quality for More Green**

Funding sources are also cropping up for entrepreneurial ventures that hold true promise for changing the environmental game. Many startups and small businesses have received significant financial backing. For a complete list of firms funding energy-related businesses, see [www.ecobusinesslinks.com/green\\_venture\\_capital.htm](http://www.ecobusinesslinks.com/green_venture_capital.htm).

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