

Smaller Steps To The Green Goal

by Anna Wells, Editor, IMPO



I recently had the opportunity to visit a distillery just outside of Kansas City that would tout its efforts as something of a success story. McCormick Vodka of Weston, MO thrust onto the market 18 months ago, a product you might term the world's most eco-friendly vodka—made with energy efficient distillation equipment, the bottle is 85 percent recycled glass, with a reusable stopper. The labels and marketing materials are even printed on recycled paper, using water-based ink. The folks at McCormick will be the first to admit—this isn't all environmental charity. They're a business, and through the introduction of this product, have been able to fill a market niche that the public has embraced. In fact, the product has seen sales growth month after month since its release.

Perhaps I've been looking at this whole "environmental responsibility" issue the wrong way. Instead of trying to sell manufacturers on energy efficiency based on price point, perhaps we simply need to re-focus our incremental, short-term efforts on long-term goals. Remember what that was like—before the recession?

I can already hear the backlash here—broad company evolutions, in this economy, are being consistently trumped by shorter terms efforts to retain jobs. I understand this fully; many of these types of investments require a certain amount of liquidity. Still, I'd argue that many of them don't. One of the efforts McCormick initiated was related to its packaging: consumers who purchase a case of the eco-friendly vodka receive it in a recycling tote. I find this idea to be somewhat genius in its simplicity—cases of bottles need packaging anyway, right? Why not put your brains together and come up with something with the customer in mind?

When I asked the management at McCormick how much cost savings they'd seen from the environmental initiatives at the plant, they indicated that it currently

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Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

wasn't a revenue generator. Still, these company leaders have high hopes for the long term cost savings that will come with some of their more eco-friendly operating practices. Said one representative: "Our ace in the hole is—if we're able to produce a product that the consumer adopts, that will pay for all of the initiatives and more."

I guess my primary point here is that innovation, unfortunately, seems to have taken a back seat during this economic turmoil. Most of the time, making money costs money. If you bring energy efficiency into the equation, you might just be doubling down on that bet. The real question here is—is your long term vision for your company and its products a green one? Whether or not that's the case, it deserves, at the very least, some consideration. Do you know all of your options for utilizing renewable energy credits? Is recycled or biodegradable packaging really more expensive—or is this something we just assume? Asking yourself these questions—and doing a little menial research—is not a tradeoff for retaining jobs or keeping your company financially buoyant. These efforts certainly don't come with a multi-billion dollar price tag. In an economy that begs us to stand in one place and weather the storm, these are simply small steps we shouldn't be afraid to take.

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