

THE SUSTAINABLE AGENDA

HOW BUSINESSES CAN TURN SCEPTICISM INTO COMMERCIAL ADVANTAGE BY PROVING THAT THERE'S MORE TO THEIR SUSTAINABILITY CLAIMS THAN JUST MARKETING HYPE.

Environmental and ethical policies may be an essential part of the corporate toolkit but, with many customers now asking for more than just statements of intent when it comes to a company's green credentials, isn't it time for a more systematic approach to delivering the sustainable agenda?

IT can play a key role in helping to reduce the environmental impact of an organisation, but much of the early promise has failed to translate into measurable results. However, with a recent survey revealing that one in five vendors makes an effort to select goods and services that have a lesser impact on the environment than the alternatives, businesses now have the opportunity to turn what was once perhaps just corporate altruism into a significant marketing opportunity.

The first challenge for any business is to find a way of quantifying the benefits of its actions. It's all well and good putting in place a new initiative or claiming to have reduced energy consumption, but the imperative today is to turn this into facts and figures. The IT resources that are so essential to corporate efficiency are also amongst the most power-hungry, greatly adding to the carbon footprint of the organisation. So, for management, it's essential to establish accurate measurements that can be used to gauge progress against the company's targets. For example, just how much energy is being saved by your new data-centre? What is the reduction in carbon footprint that has been achieved by the installation of low-power PCs? In short, what's the payback?

Fortunately, many of the major manufacturers have already made a move in this area and provide useful data regarding the energy consumption of their systems. It's a good start that allows you to assess the progress that your business is making when it comes to the environment but, to really stand out from the crowd, you need to put in place a comprehensive strategy of improvement, measurement and review that takes a complete view across your entire business.

When it comes to measuring the main areas of influence that any business has, it may help to divide

it into four categories: direct, indirect, associated and out of scope. These measures allow you to identify the places where you can achieve the greatest ROI and focus your resources accordingly. At the same time, by providing a picture of your company's peripheral impact, it also enables you to complete the circle of sustainability by engaging with third parties, such as suppliers and customers, enabling you to develop a more flexible strategy based on an holistic approach to ethical and environmental policy.

SO HOW DO WE DEFINE THOSE FOUR CATEGORIES?

Direct area of influence

This is the immediate impact that your business activity has on its surroundings. Obvious measures include energy consumption, waste generation and levels of recycling. Attacking the direct issues is the starting point for most organisations and many have already made significant inroads in this area. However, it's easy to become complacent by simply putting a number of measures in place and then forgetting about them. To remain ahead of the competition, your internal policies should be under continual review.

Indirect area of influence

This covers those areas of activity that, whilst not directly concerned with your business, nevertheless are an essential component of your product or service provision. For the most part, this is your supply chain and, working in partnership with your suppliers, you should seek to optimise the efficiency of your purchasing and delivery processes. Of course, this makes sense from a business perspective too, delivering benefits in terms of cost-saving and improved delivery times.

Area of associated influence

This area is much harder to manage. What are your customers doing to reduce the impact of their activities? How about your employees? Before dismissing this as too broad a goal, consider the possibility of engaging with your customers to discuss

how you can work with them in areas where the supply of products or services overlaps with opportunities for sustainable improvement. They are under equal pressure and, by helping them address this, you may build a stronger relationship and foster greater loyalty.

Out of scope

There are activities that cannot easily be measured but have an influence. It is difficult for any business to exert direct influence in this area. Instead, this is where overall strategy starts to have an impact: for instance, in the energy efficiency of own and partner products (for example, an electronics firm providing low-emission televisions for the expected four billion viewers of the Olympic Games) or through the longer-term green benefits of sustainable consultancy tackling the 'bigger picture' of corporate environmental impact.

Those broad categories are not definitive, instead acting as a starting point or baseline upon which to build a credible and practical sustainable business strategy. To see how it translates into the real world, let's look at how these principles are guiding the delivery of a project that exists under the microscope of media and public scrutiny: the Olympic Games (see below).

There are a number of technological innovations that can help improve a company's performance in these areas. For instance, the emergence of communication and collaboration as a method of remote working will also alleviate some of the travel requirements for many businesses — along with intelligent transport systems and utility networks that can even address areas of influence outside the scope of the organisation.

Organisations should seek to embed innovative policies within their day-to-day business practices, supporting them with a set of measurable criteria that can be targeted and assessed. By defining, building and operating an enterprise-wide set of sustainable practices, a company can transform its approach and build a long-term, profitable strategy that will deliver its commercial goals within the framework of the new sustainable agenda.

The pressure is now on for businesses to start showing the substance behind their claims. It's a challenge, but it's also an opportunity for innovation, and those businesses that win the integrity battle and emerge as front-runners in the new race will leave their less-than-green competitors green with envy.

GOING FOR GREEN GOLD: ATOS ORIGIN AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES

Atos Consulting's parent company and global IT supplier, Atos Origin, has been the Worldwide IT Partner of the Olympic Games since 2004. In this role, the company leads a selection of major companies that delivers the entire IT solution for the Olympic

Games, handling every aspect of an operation that helps to bring the Olympic Games to the world.

In the build-up to London 2012, the company and the local stakeholders will be faced with a number of demanding objectives aimed at minimising the environmental impact of the Olympic Games. With such a high-profile project, just how will it go about this?

“London 2012 is billed as the low-carbon Games and sustainability is a key theme for the event – not just green but also economic and social. For example, local regeneration is a key theme, ranging from the conversion of the Olympic Park into a green space to the regeneration of east London. Our challenges vary from exploring the potential legacy use of the data-centre that will be set up for the Games to encouraging public support via, for instance, a carbon calculator to demonstrate the advantages of using public transport.”

Derek Ward – Executive VP UK Markets with responsibility for London 2012 and Sustainability

The goal for London 2012 is to measure the direct, indirect and associated levels of carbon generation and seek to deliver tangible improvements. One example of how carbon emissions will be reduced is the launch of the Remote CIS (Commentator Information System) by Atos Origin which will be in place for the first time in Beijing, enabling journalists and commentators to access the information remotely, thus removing the need for some of them to travel to the various competition venues in many instances. Other actions include work to optimise the technology infrastructure and configure it in a sustainable way, along with improvements that could be delivered by using low-energy data-centres, as well as placing an emphasis on public transport (2012 is also the public transport Games) and by focusing on a sustainable supply chain across the construction and operation of the Games.

In an interesting development, 2012 may also provide an ideal opportunity to deliver improvements outside the scope of most projects. For example, with an audience of billions, Olympic sponsors are already in the process of launching low-energy, low-emission products or services as a catalyst to promote their use across the world.

If London 2012 can successfully deliver a measurable reduction in carbon emissions, along with some of the other social and economic benefits, it will serve as a model of how organisations can bring together the different values of service, profit and sustainability to mutually beneficial effect, finally delivering the promise of sustainable business.

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