

$$\begin{aligned} & LCGWP \\ & + LCODP \\ & \times 10^5 \\ & \leq 100 \end{aligned}$$

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Five Stumbling Blocks to Multi-Unit Retailers Going Green

By John Miologos, AIA, WD Partners

Of course, retailers have a multitude of valid reasons to contemplate the environmental impact of their businesses. Many have already jumped in with both feet. But lots haven't. What's stopping them?

Spinning Green: I can save tons of money going green, right?

Yes and no. It's tough to validate short-term savings and ROI to the CFO right out of the green gate. Selling people on green as a way to cut costs is disingenuous. Environmentally friendly wool carpet is flat-out pricier than polypropylene carpet – two to three times more expensive, in fact. An HVAC rooftop unit with variable air controls will run you 15% more. Yes, it could trim utility costs by 25%. But, those savings won't hit the bottom-line for a year or two. Skylights? Costs can run to \$2,000 a pop. Of course, the savings will come. And, savings could be significant – such as a 25-50% reduction in energy costs. However, inspiring green initiatives is best done without the false promises. A pragmatic approach goes a long way toward gaining trust and support from other departments.

The Silo Syndrome: Going green doesn't help my budget, so why should I bother?

In yet another paradox of going green, the extra cost impacts the budget in the design, real estate or construction groups that have to fight for the eco-friendly design. Even though a grateful executive in operations might hunt you down to thank you later for cutting operational costs. This siloed approach simply doesn't work in the era of green retail. The attitude must shift to a more holistic view. We're all in this together! The duty to create efficient and environmentally responsible buildings belongs to everyone – design, real estate, construction and operations executives. It's the only way to make initial higher costs acceptable and future bottom-line gains possible.

Fear of Greenwashing: I don't want to get accused of being a hypocrite.

Selling organic vegetables on a hardwood counter sourced from an endangered rainforest just doesn't cut it anymore. Serving fast food in recycled containers without offering recycling bins isn't a credible way to go to market. Amid the ubiquitous green marketing, the greenwashing backlash has gained traction. Paralysis is not an option, even though it's hard to take baby steps toward green. Measurement is key. Environmental groups and watchdogs recognize and reward companies for getting started. However, if you don't measure where you've been, when you finally get your green house in order, communicating and substantiating environmental progress will be next to impossible. In ten years, when the green imperative becomes the green consensus, being able to show a smaller carbon footprint will mean nothing if you can't point to an original baseline measurement. Do the hard work of integrating the toughest environmental standards now and stand out in a marketplace of parity later.

The Lack of a Legal Imperative: I'll go green when I have to.

Yes, today it's your choice. But tomorrow it will not be. More and more cities require sustainable design. Consider San Francisco, where municipal buildings must meet LEED Silver requirements. Permits for private development projects get fast-tracked when they meet LEED Gold or Platinum standards and cover new private construction projects and commercial buildings as small as 5,000 square feet. All new construction will have to earn green points by offering energy and water saving measures. And in Boston, projects

of 50,000 square feet or more have to integrate green building standards. As gaining zoning approval for retail projects gets harder and harder, you can beat the competition to the best site locations by integrating green design and construction. You could end up breaking ground and selling product before the competition even gets a building permit.

The Sacred Cow of the Store Experience: I can't risk compromising store aesthetics.

Can skylights really showcase product the same way high-powered lights do? Can sustainable materials create an indulgent, luxurious atmosphere at a high-end retail store? Undoubtedly, no retail sacred cow deserves more protection and respect than the brand-right store experience. The design, look and feel of the store environment is inextricably linked to the brand strength of any retailer. The world has changed; reflexively rejecting green materials just doesn't make sense anymore. You might have to give up the marble countertop, but a recycled glass counter achieves the same high-end look. Consider the rapidly growing list of green building materials: recycled MDF without formaldehyde; recycled metals; LED lighting systems with color controls; wool carpet; bamboo and sustainably harvested hardwood. This list only promises to get longer. ■

About the Author: John Miologos, AIA, is Senior VP of Architecture at WD Partners, the leading design and development firm for multi-unit retailers. Before joining WD Partners, John was Corporate VP in the Worldwide Architecture, Design and Construction Group for McDonald's, where he was involved in sustainability efforts.