

PRESS RELEASE

Going green: A business imperative

In today's competitive business environment, sound environmental management is not just the right thing to do – it's good business. We speak to Jurie Hanekom, Chairman of leading windows and doors manufacturer, Swartland – a company that has lead the way in its field with regards to embracing environmentally-friendly practices and going green.

28 November 2016, Johannesburg: The majority of business owners understand that responding to the challenge of going green will greatly affect the competitiveness, and perhaps, even the survival, or their organisation going forward.

Jurie Hanekom, Chairman of leading windows and doors manufacturer and an industry leader in sustainability practices, Swartland, explains: "Today, the green revolution has taken root in society's general consciousness. Operating in an environmentally sustainable way, and offering products and services with verifiable green credentials, is no longer a mere fringe movement reserved for boutique consumer products, but rather, it has become a mainstream movement worldwide."

He says that for the younger generations especially, living sustainably is a fundamental value: "Going green is no longer simply a nice-to-have business ethos – today, it is a clearly identified megatrend. Over the past decade, environmental issues have steadily encroached on business largely due to escalating public and governmental concern about climate change, industrial pollution, food safety, and natural resource depletion, to name a few.

"As a result, consumers are increasingly seeking out sustainable products and services, and leaning towards supporting companies who are making genuine efforts to improve their sustainability rankings. Governments too are interceding with unprecedented levels of new regulation governing green practices and requirements. In South Africa, one example is the SANS 10400-XA National Building Regulations covering energy usage in buildings, which has had a massive impact on the building industry at large. Investors and stakeholders have a keen understanding of how important this megatrend is for business, and so, they too are paying special attention to companies with sound sustainable practices," notes Hanekom.

He says that the trend is clear – a long-term sustainability strategy is becoming increasingly important to any business's key constituencies, including its employees, shareholders and customers, and is therefore critical for any organisation's long-term competitiveness.

There are so many advantages to going green

There are many benefits to embracing environmentally friendly practices – Hanekom provides an outline of some of them:

- **It saves money in the long-term:** It is true, overhauling more traditional, less earth-friendly practices can be a sizeable initial investment, however, if you analyse the investment over the long-term, the savings can be immense. Says Hanekom: “Choosing sustainable products can cost you a little more from the onset, however, if you analyse what they will save you over time, you will see that they will not only allow you to recoup your initial investment, but will also save you considerable amounts of money in the long run.

“Fenestration, for example, remains one of the worst culprits for energy loss in buildings. It has been estimated that approximately 40% of all energy loss in a building occurs through standard, single pane windows. This number can be dramatically reduced if compliant windows, such as those from Swartland, are used instead. These windows won’t be the cheapest windows on the market, but they will end up saving you hundreds of thousands of Rands on your utility bills over the years,” explains Hanekom.

- **Consumers recognise green companies:** Going green is no longer just a PR exercise. Today, we live in the digital age, and consumers are well informed – they can easily go online and check out a business’s green credentials and tell the genuinely committed ones apart from the “fakers”. Says Hanekom: “Surveys consistently show that more than half of consumers prefer to buy from companies with an environmental consciousness – and with the transparency inherent in the Digital Age, that means that a company has to actually be green, and not just seem green.”

Swartland for example has adopted the mantra “think long term”, which embodies the principles of quality and durability where products are concerned, but that also reflects the important values that relate to environmental responsibility and sustainability of everything else it partakes in. Hanekom explains: “Our mantra – ‘think long term’ – guides us at Swartland in everything we do, not just the materials we choose to use, but it includes the manufacturing process, the products we create, the way we distribute them, and even the way the company is run. Our commitment to increased energy efficiency and environmental sustainability is deeply ingrained. These principles are promoted today, more strongly than ever. It may cost Swartland more to produce a green product, but if it means giving back to the environment, then that is a cost we encourage.”

- **It helps the environment:** This might be stating the obvious, but none the less, it remains worth noting – beyond the prudent economic reasons to go green, at its core, it remains an important step in preserving the earth for the long-term. Notes Hanekom: “Cutting emissions of carbon

dioxide and other gasses reduces the impact of global climate change, while cutting back on the use of paper, water, and other materials can help protect natural habitats.”

He says that Swartland only supports mills that follow sustainable harvesting practices and environmentally responsible forestry: “By strategically harvesting individual trees, managed forests remain a natural eco-system capable of sequestering massive amounts of carbon, whilst maintaining the valuable biodiversity balance of our planet. Swartland believes that with responsible management, wood is a renewable resource.”

Taking steps towards sustainability

Developing and implementing a sustainability strategy can be daunting, however, there are some relatively simple, immediate steps that any business can take, which will not only benefit the environment, but the bottom line as well.

Hanekom notes that improving basic energy-efficiency measures is a great place to start: “For example, replacing your windows with energy efficient ones can go a long way to improving the overall insulation of your building, and save you a lot of money on your heating and cooling bills. Other examples include installing new lighting systems, replacing gas-guzzling company vehicles with more fuel-efficient models, enforcing a recycling programme, saving water by installing more water-efficient sanitaryware and faucets, and the list goes on.”

A less tangible, but equally important way of getting the green ball rolling is by increased employee engagement, notes Hanekom: “Once a company-wide sustainability initiative has been established, you will see that your employees will become proactive and innovative in their approach to the new sustainable practices. It is a great exercise in team building!”

He says that once you start reaping the long-term benefits of these practices, there will be no turning back: “Efforts to become more sustainable will boost your long-term prospects for growth and profitability. But even more importantly, by making a choice to go green, we can connect our profit motive with a greater sense of purpose, which is a means of motivating and connecting everybody in your business, as well as your customers and stakeholders with a mission that affects us all: to leave the world a better place for future generations.”

ENDS

Released on behalf of Swartland (www.swartland.co.za) by The Line (www.theline.co.za).

