

PRESS RELEASE

Why sustainable building matters

We speak to Cobus Lourens from leading supplier to the building industry, Swartland, about what makes a brand sustainable, and why it is important.

02 September 2019, Johannesburg: It's been officially confirmed in a number of trusted reports and studies worldwide – being a sustainable brand is not only good for the environment, but it is good for business too. Cobus Lourens from leading supplier to the building industry, Swartland, elaborates: “With the current economic climate, many consumers are becoming more risk-averse and careful about where they spend their money. Apparently, this is especially the case with the Millennials, who spend far more carefully when compared to previous generations. However, according to a number of studies, including those from Nielsen and the Shelton Group for example, when money is spent - trends show that sustainable brands are preferred over the rest.”

Sustainability goes beyond green

Contrary to popular belief, a sustainable brand is one that has successfully integrated environmental, economic and social issues – its not just about being green, says Cobus: “Most companies that people think of as being sustainable, only meet one third of the requirements. Being a truly sustainable brand, such as Swartland for example, involves manufacturing sustainable products in a sustainable way, as well as integrating sustainable economic and social pillars in the business operations. A sustainable brand, such as Swartland for example, is one that openly exercises ethical business practices, advocates pro-social behaviours, and applies sustainable manufacturing principles.”

Sustainable manufacturing

Cobus explains that when you think of sustainability, you need to think about the cradle-to-grave theory, versus just looking at the end product: “While it is important to use sustainable products, it is also important to look at whether the product is manufactured from sustainable materials in a ecologically beneficial manner. For example, Swartland’s windows are SANS 613 certified and compliant. They have all been tested for deflection, structural strength, water-resistance, air-tightness, operating forces, and the best possible energy efficiency. However, more than that, they are made from sustainable materials, including timber that is sourced from sustainable FSC- and FLEGT-certified mills, or aluminium that is 100% recyclable.

“Swartland also manufactures its window in a sustainable manner – the best wood cuts are used to create the finest windows and doors. Other grade cuts are used for wood laminate products, and the timber that doesn’t get used in production is used as fuel for the boilers that kiln-dry the wood. Any leftover shavings or sawdust are sold on to local farmers for chicken bedding. Virtually nothing is wasted,” says Cobus.

He notes that Swartland products are also manufactured to last for a long time – thereby minimising their overall carbon footprint: “Whether it is windows, doors, timber mouldings or insulation – all of Swartland’s products offer best-in-class quality and longevity. Knauf mineral wool insulation for example, boasts a high recycled content that is mainly derived from naturally occurring materials. It also features a revolutionary binder technology called Ecosse Technology, which has cemented its place as a truly sustainable building material. It offers reduced impact on the environment through lower embodied energy, as well as diminishing pollutant manufacturing emissions and workplace exposures.”

Ethical business practices and pro-social behaviours

Moving away from a product focus – sustainability is also about ethical practices and dealings, notes Cobus: “Running an ethical business that stands as a pillar within a community goes hand-in-hand with creating true sustainability. Swartland for example, was started in 1951 in Moorreesburg and today it is still owned and run by the same Hanekom family. Over its lifetime, it has built its reputation on honest dealings and quality craftsmanship. Although its reach spreads far and wide globally, Swartland remains an integral part of its hometown’s community. Internally, Swartland has value statements and codes of conduct that are used as guidelines for management, and which relate to its economic, environmental and social platforms. This enables them to run the company in the most ethical and sustainable way possible.”

Sustainability is also about boosting pro-social behaviours and optimising stakeholder engagement, notes Cobus: “A sustainable company should better the society it operates in. Swartland endeavours to make a difference in every dealing it has with the full gamut of its stakeholders – from its employees, though to the local communities in which it operates, its suppliers, shareholders, bargaining councils and trade unions, regulators and of course its customers.

“In Swartland’s many years of operating in an environmentally responsible and sustainable way, we have found that cutting a cost in the present becomes less important when we can see what the real cost will be in the future. As a result, sustainability will always be Swartland’s primary focus and we are uncompromising in our pursuit of this goal, even if there is a financial cost attached. Of course, thinking long-term can be difficult, but it also gives us the ability to turn every action into an investment and at Swartland, we like to think of ourselves as investing in the future,” concludes Cobus.

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