



GOING GREEN

Can dealers differentiate by

BY MARTYN BILLING

caring for the environment?

PART THREE

There seems to be a stark lack of commitment within businesses, particularly small and medium sized, to reducing their impact on the environment. A recent survey by npower found that 80% of these businesses did not view the reduction of carbon emissions as a priority. Indeed, 42.5% of them said they would never be!

This has to be set against the scenario that the majority of scientists are indicating that we must reduce our greenhouse emissions to prevent global warming and conserve the environment. Indeed, with recent proclamations from both the government and the main opposition parties, it would seem that we are either going to be encouraged or forced, potentially by means of taxation, to adjust our ways, whether in our personal or business life.

The question for dealers has to be whether adopting a greener approach to the way they manage and operate their businesses can not only be kinder to the environment but also a way of differentiating themselves from other providers and enhancing their value proposition: the unique selling points and benefits that can be promoted to potential customers.

Certainly, one has to be cautious of 'greenwash'. This is considered by environmentalists to be the dissemination of misleading information to present a positive green image, while seeking to conceal abuse of the environment. You need to walk the talk!

A dealer that has embraced the need to change in this respect is PDQ Direct of Worthing. Adam Huttly, while admitting that he was originally inspired to become carbon neutral by one of his

key customers, Radio Taxis, certainly now believes that the whole process has provided differentiation from their competitors.

Following analysis of the business by an independent third party, the company has worked through their recommendations and followed a process towards being completely carbon neutral. However, if this is considered to be too onerous, specific elements of the business can achieve this status sooner than others, for example, buildings, the car/van fleet, etc.

Commercial of Cheltenham is another dealer that has completely embraced the need to reduce carbon emissions and waste. They are in the process of implementing a three year programme that targets to reduce their emissions by a huge 75%. Simone Mann suggests that not only should companies reduce their energy consumption, >>

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they should also consider moving to a supply from sustainable sources. There are a number of firms offering business electricity that is 100% from renewable sources.

There are some initiatives that dealers can implement that have efficiency benefits for their business, as well as reducing their environmental impact. An example of this, cited by Mann, includes the promotion of e-commerce and EDI transactions. The fact that these are then paperless is an obvious advantage.

Completely challenging the way the industry works, PDQ have actually suggested to their customers that they can help to reduce the company's carbon emissions by accepting a weekly delivery! Of course, this also saves significantly on costs for the business and would seem to make a lot of sense.

Brother UK is one of the manufacturers to have already been awarded ISO 14001, the environmental standard. To achieve this accreditation, the company had to demonstrate high environmental standards, reduce costs and improve efficiency.

For smaller businesses, such as individual dealers, the requirements can be quite onerous. However, meeting the standard is certainly beneficial and an excellent way to demonstrate commitment. PDQ is working towards complying with all the elements, particularly because ISO 14001 is well known and understood.

Having put your own house in order, possibly by becoming carbon neutral and moving towards the requirements of ISO 14001, the question then is whether this factor can be used as a point of differentiation with your customers. Huttly certainly seems to think so. He comments: "Being carbon neutral has given us something else to sell to both existing and potential clients. We are no longer focusing on price cutting and our sales force has another benefit of dealing with PDQ to communicate."

Commercial has taken this a step further. Two hundred of their customers and suppliers recently attended a special day, which served to demonstrate some of the initiatives that the company has undertaken to reduce its environmental impact. In addition, the company used the opportunity to promote its wide range

of high quality environmentally friendly products, including recycled and fair-trade goods.

Both dealers have also been able to utilise their environmental activities to create publicity and promotional opportunities for their businesses. The Carbon Neutral Company has run a case study on PDQ's activities in this respect. Meanwhile, Commercial was recently used as a case study by BBC World and the company was mentioned in parliament as an example from the SME sector.

Mike Dinsdale, the communications director of Brother UK, advises that they are also active in sponsoring events that promote environmental awareness such as London's Sustainability Week and the E-Well Being awards. Also, third party endorsements such as the company's recent 'Full Marks' accreditation by the Ethical Company organisation all help to raise awareness.

Certainly, the signs are that going green is not only good for the environment but can help to attract new business. Indeed, we may reach the stage where this is one of the fundamental considerations when companies are selecting new suppliers.

The impact may be long term. However, those dealers that take action now can make significant gains. Often, as demonstrated by the above, the right initiatives can not only benefit the environment but also improve efficiency and save costs. Why wouldn't you? ■

