

To be or not to be green

The next great debate in the building and design industries will not be whether to build green or not. It will be whether or not to build to third-party standards and seek certification.

Anyone associated with real estate development today knows green building has become an industry trend that's here to stay.



Guest Column
Michael Carlson

In 2005, green building represented \$10 billion in construction startups. By 2010, projections exceed \$60 billion.

The appeal of this kind of growth will accelerate given the soft real estate market.

It's substantial, hard to ignore and even harder to resist.

The advantages of green building are both numerable and measurable. Sustainable buildings result in increased productivity. For example, studies published with the U.S. Green Building Council report that students attending green schools produce 20 percent better test results than their peers in conventional classrooms, patient recovery in green health care environments results in improved discharge rates of two days or more on average, retail sales are higher and worker productivity in offices is reported to increase by 2 to 16 percent depending on the green features employees enjoy in their jobs.

Additionally, operating savings for sustainable buildings can be as much as 50 percent and occupancy rates — as well as rent — are reportedly 3 to 4 percent higher. Building owners who choose green methods of construction or renovation are often rewarded by government with fast-track permits, energy rebates and other monetary incentives.

Sustainable design, also called "green" or high-performance building, provides economic, human and community benefits as well as reduced environmental impacts.

So pretty soon, we won't be talking "if" green; the conversation will shift to "how" green.

Awareness grows

As sustainable architects, our firm encourages our clients to build green. Alright, we actually design green features into every project whether a client requests them or not because the reality

is that it doesn't cost any extra to include basic and practical sustainable design principles, such as building orientation, natural daylighting, energy-efficient HVAC and low VOC paint.

But as green awareness grows and consumers become more savvy with their green purchases, the value of third-party certification will help building owners and tenants distinguish the authentically sustainable design offerings from those offering green lip service.

Doing green business

Earlier this year, we purchased a 1930s-era grocery store in downtown Sarasota for the purpose of renovating it to LEED commercial interior standards to become our firm's new headquarters.

We divided the 4,400-square-foot building and occupy 2,400 square feet. Our renovation costs were roughly \$85 per square foot. Our sustainability features included double-pane thermal windows and doors, added insulation, an Energy Star-rated reflective roof system, energy efficient HVAC, low energy fluorescent lighting and low flow plumbing fixtures.

We consciously made the choice to seek LEED certification for the project — over and above the fact that our building decisions met the criteria — for two reasons.

If we are going to encourage our clients to seek certification, we should walk the walk. And we recognize the investment payoff that third-party certification represents.

We chose the LEED system over other available systems because LEED standards are rigorous. Anyone can say they built green, but everyone knows if LEED says it's green, it's certifiable.

Based on our research, in addition to the operating efficiency paybacks and life-cycle cost savings attributed to our buildout, when we receive our certification level, our property value should increase by more than 7 percent this year giving us a 6.6 percent ROI.

Our industry is transforming itself not only because the health of the planet is at stake but also because there is sufficient momentum and incentive to move in this direction. Regardless of which certification method is selected, green standards are here to stay.

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