



OP-ED 'Green' talk must match actions

World Environment Day, like Earth Day, always marks a moment during which everyone pauses and takes notice of the environment around them. For many businesses, it marks an opportunity to flash green credentials in order to be seen as responsible, environmentally conscious, and just plain green. Indeed, many hire PR professionals to promote their efforts, regardless of merit or of a true commitment to environmental sustainability.

They do so at the peril of their business reputations.

Reputation can be understood as the long-term perception of what a company actually does relative to what that company says it does. In practically no other aspect of a business is this more prescient than with regard to a company's actions toward its environment.

To that end, here are a few pointers to make sure your walk matches your talk:

First, if you are not committed to being green, don't bother trying to talk about it. Demonstrate value elsewhere because someone will always call you on it, often loudly and always publicly. This goes for every aspect of a business

and through every phase of a product's life cycle, from concept to end-of-life.

Next, understand that there's a basic cost of entry in the green game — you must strive to manage your business in an energy-conscious, conservation-minded manner. The effort must begin at the top. Senior executives must drive, sponsor, and promote campaigns internally; otherwise, they will not gain steam.

If your "green fees" have been paid and your organization is truly committed to sustainable business practices, then tell the world. There are myriad opportunities to do so.

Forward-thinking companies, such as Sun Microsystems, offer a podcast series highlighting conservation tips in the computing area. Sun CEO Jonathan Schwartz can regularly be seen blogging about the environmental advantages of its products, which consume less power in corporate data centers. These tactics are inexpensive, easily implemented, and global.

Sustainability can also be a core business differentiator. For instance, iGPS, operator of the world's first pool of all-plastic ship-

ping pallets with embedded radio frequency identification technology, has based its entire corporate identity on the potential of its products to reduce deforestation and make the supply chain more sustainable. Indeed, the company has aggressively marketed the fact that plastic pallets are lighter and, therefore, require less fuel to be transported; they are more easily sanitized compared with wood; and they can be easily tracked and recycled for reuse.

Let's face it. The vast majority of companies are not in the business of raising awareness of public interest issues. Instead, they exist to deliver needed products and services, and return investor value. Demonstrable value can be added by developing a strong environmental track record.

The key is simple: Act first, talk later. Then align your campaign with your core business so that it is relevant. Start at the top, with senior management, but drive employee engagement at the cultural level. As you get more engaged, monitor, record, and report progress. ■

Matthew Rose is EVP and GM of MWW Group's New York office.