

green

PRODUCT 101

5 ISSUES EVERY TECH COMPANY NEEDS TO KNOW

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Many companies are rushing into eco-marketing their products and services without evaluating the implications on their brand and customer loyalty. Improper planning can lead to decreased sales and bad press. So before making the sustainable leap, take the time to understand what it truly means to be “green” in today’s marketplace. Here are five issues every technology company needs to address before making that leap...

one

DON'T TOUT GREEN IF YOU'RE A FEW HUES SHORT

Companies across all industries are being accused of “green washing” by anyone with the will and time to blog about it. Greenwashing is the act of misleading consumers to believe that your company is more environmentally friendly than it really is. When these half-truths are leaked to the press—whether it’s through mainstream media or the blogosphere—the negative buzz can damage your brand before you even know who attacked you.

For example, are you touting how energy efficient your product is, but having it manufactured in a third world country where there are no environmental controls? Non-governmental organizations, activists and prosumers will eventually find out and let the whole world know. Take the recent attack on Apple from Greenpeace, which claimed Apple’s Mac, iPods and iBooks contained hazardous substances—despite the fact that many of their products are Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool-certified.

two

PLAN YOUR PRODUCT LIFE AT THE BEGINNING, NOT THE END

You can’t start thinking about making your product sustainable right before the market launch. Understanding the desired lifecycle of your product in the early stages of planning and development allows you to find innovative ways to be sustainable. This is commonly referred to as “design for sustainability” and should be integrated into the development process. Some items to consider:

- + How will the product be manufactured, packaged, shipped, used and disposed of?
- + Can the product be recycled?
- + Is the product designed for easy disassembly?
- + Does the packaging take advantage of environmentally friendly or renewable resources?
- + Is the product manufactured locally?

three

INTEGRATE YOUR MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Trying to approach the alphabet soup of regulatory standards such as RoHS, EPEAT, ISO 14000, IECQ 80000, WEEE on a case-by-case basis will get you into a lot of trouble. It’s too costly and takes too many resources to manage compliance within your company and with your suppliers. It’s more effective to integrate the intent of these requirements and streamline your systems, processes, methods and tools to manage them holistically. In order to do this,

take a strategic look at what green means to your company and how you can make sustainability visible internally and externally to all stakeholders. There are many environmental compliance applications in the market that collect and aggregate useful data for various compliance and CSR reporting systems.

four

GET YOUR EMPLOYEES INVOLVED

It doesn’t do any good to create sustainability initiatives and implement new systems if your managers and employees aren’t on board. Yet you can’t simply communicate your sustainability vision to your staff and hope they will get it; you will need to develop a training program showing how employees can incorporate sustainability into their daily work practices. It’s particularly important to train on design for sustainability.

Sustainability incentives need to be tied to team and individual goals because people will work on items that are reviewed and rewarded. Executives and managers will need to support sustainability through their decision-making in order to convince employees that it’s not the next “program of the month” that will disappear shortly after it’s introduced. If you are successful, then you will have unleashed the creativity and motivation of your entire organization to find innovative ways to make your products and services more sustainable. Survey your staff periodically on sustainability to make sure it’s becoming part of the company culture.

five

KNOW YOUR SUPPLIERS

Earlier this year companies around the world learned the valuable lesson of knowing your suppliers. The credibility of Chinese toy manufacturers was destroyed by recurring incidents of harmful lead paint. It was caused by a supplier that provided paint to a contract manufacturer. While most companies take precautions to avoid these types of problems, missteps will tarnish your brand and hurt sales, regardless of who is actually responsible. Ask yourself:

- + What systems do my suppliers have in place?
- + What systems do I need to have in place to ensure their compliance?
- + What kinds of records would I need from my suppliers and their suppliers if I was checked?

If suppliers aren’t properly managed, you can drain your product regulatory resources and slow product launches. For key suppliers, discuss how sustainability is affecting your product roadmaps and find out what new technologies are available that your products can leverage. Establish shared risks and rewards for sustainability improvements.



Donovan Hardenbrook, principal of Hardenbrook Consulting LLC, helps high-tech companies become green and works with leadership teams to transition from tech-centric products to socially responsible brands that customers demand. Visit www.hardenbrookconsulting.com for more information.