



# Is it time for your business to go green?

Whether it's because it's the right thing to do, the market and customers are demanding it or there are cost savings to be realized, the reality is this: everyone is doing it. Going green, that is. And now it has reached the point where you have decided it's time for your business to go green too. But how and where do you start?

The word "green" has become ubiquitous and is used frequently and liberally to label a variety of actions and programs. The reality is that there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution or plan. Different steps will work better for different businesses, and what will work for you will depend as much upon what type of business you run as your commitment to the process. This article outlines five steps that you may want to consider as a starting point. Each of these steps will take time and effort to complete but should allow you to make considerable progress toward fulfilling your green ambitions.

## 1. Become a "B Corporation"

A "B Corporation" is a new form of business that has achieved high levels of sustainability and transparency in its operations, as assessed by B Lab, an independent non-profit corporation. B Lab created the framework for B Corporations based on its belief that the "Green" and "Sustainable Business" communities are incredibly disjointed and lack any kind of standards or certification process to distinguish between what is real and what are merely claims. B Lab provides both a certification process for businesses wishing to distinguish themselves, as well as a stamp of approval for those that have. The plan is for this stamp of approval to be-

come a nationally recognized mark that is integral to green businesses' brands.

B Lab's certification process begins with a comprehensive survey that analyzes businesses from top to bottom concerning their green and sustainable efforts, as well as their commitment to the community and employee practices. The B Lab survey examines everything from a business' mission to its energy inputs, methods of production and community involvement. Once the survey is completed, a score is generated, and businesses that receive a passing grade can move forward to become a B Corp. The final step in the B Corp process is that the business must adopt and build stakeholder values into its charter documents. This means that the people running the business are given the authority to consider – in addition to just the financial interest of business owners – the well-being of the environment and the interest of stakeholders (including employees) when making decisions.

What makes B Lab unique is that it has devised a relatively uniform approach for assessing the sustainability or "greenness" of a business. In addition, B Lab's methods and approach is open source, meaning anyone can take its survey to see how they do as well as explore ways that they might improve. Finally, B Lab is helping companies improve their financial performance and increase their social and environmental impact by using the numerous tools for business to use in the greening of their operations. These include items such as best practices and network information and support, allowing businesses interested in sustainability to con-

nect with like-minded businesses in different areas of need. For these reasons, any business interested in greening its operation should consider becoming a B Corp and definitely look to B Lab for information and resources on where to begin. You can learn more about B Lab and B Corps at [www.bcorporation.net](http://www.bcorporation.net).

## 2. Get Certified

Each county in the Bay Area participates in a program known as the Bay Area Green Business Program. Like B Lab, this program verifies and certifies that businesses meet higher standards of environmental performance. The main difference is that it is locally run and offers practical advice. You will note that this article does not focus on some of the specifics that you often hear about when discussing how to green a business. This is because the Green Business Program will do this for you. In particular, the office responsible for the Bay Area Green Business Program in your county should be able to advise you on such things as:

- cutting water use and waste
- conserving and reducing your use of energy – using more environmentally friendly paper (and less paper overall)
- reducing or even eliminating toxic substances, such as certain cleaning products
- greening your real estate

Some of these changes will take some time, resources and getting used to, but your business may see significant cost savings in the long run. For instance, printing on both sides of a sheet of paper should more than offset the costs of more modern printers as well as recycled paper over

time. Energy audits, CFLs and power-conserving technologies pay for themselves very quickly. And switching from bottled water to tap has immediate environmental and financial benefits. For more information on certifying your business go to [www.greenbiz.ca.gov](http://www.greenbiz.ca.gov).

### 3. Get Your Employees Involved

Greening an office is something employers can do to unite and bring out the creativity of their workforce. You should search for ways to involve all of your employees in the process, since these are issues that your employees likely care about just as much as you do. Educate your employees on your goals as well as your plans to realize them. Solicit their advice and input on what you are doing right, what you can do better and how they can help. Your employees know the ins and outs of your business, and chances are they have ideas that never crossed your mind. Giving employees a say in the development of your policies will make them a member of your team, which will surely add to retention. Also, giving employees recycling bins and switching to organic, fair trade coffee will make your employees feel good about where they work.

Employee involvement can be used to green your business beyond just the office. Consider, for instance, encouraging employees to use public transportation or carpool, which will have the added benefit of getting your employees out of traffic and to your business sooner. Your business and technology may allow for employees to work productively from home. The result of all of these efforts is likely to be significant dividends in the form of increased employee morale.

### 4. Reduce or Even Eliminate Your Carbon Footprint

Numerous companies are now offering businesses mechanisms to reduce or even eliminate their carbon footprints. This is done through the purchase of "carbon credits." Credits are generated through

the production of green and clean energy as well as carbon reduction projects throughout the world (e.g., solar energy and wind farms). The verifiable and measurable reductions in greenhouse gases resulting from these projects generate credits that can be purchased from a number of different sources for reasonable prices. By purchasing carbon credits your business is funding environmentally friendly energy projects in a way that offsets the carbon footprint you generate. In addition, you will demonstrate leadership and show your employees, customers and vendors how important these issues are to you and your business. TerraPass is one of many firms offering businesses different plans to reduce or eliminate their carbon footprints. You can find more information regarding TerraPass at [www.terrapass.com](http://www.terrapass.com).

### 5. Buy Green

Being green means supporting green. Despite the focus and attention on green business as of late, many of these efforts are in their early stages. Some of the steps described above will require capital outlays without any immediate financial return. It is therefore incumbent on businesses committed to going green to support other businesses that already have or that are moving in that direction. And just how may you do so? Return to steps one and two above, and visit the websites for B Labs and the Bay Area Green Business Program. These websites list and provide details on all businesses that have successfully completed their respective programs. Hopefully your business will soon be listed there too!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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