Do good business, do business online

By Leigh Andrews
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The #SustainableBiz16 summit just wrapped up in the US last week. I followed the tweets and noted that most of the learnings, while stemming from global corporations, definitely have local relevance.

The two top insights from Bloomberg BNA's Sustainable Business Summit 2016 in New York really resonated with me.

Firstly, that putting sustainability top-of-mind is **good business practice**…

> To drive #sustainability, you need leaders that "get it." Not nice to do, it's #goodforbusiness #Philadelphia #mayor #SustainableBiz16 pic.twitter.com/Bm0p6HmWz9— Cassandra Garber (@Cass_Garber) October 6, 2016

The *Huffington Post* goes so far as to emphasise the rising focus on sustainability and doing good business by quoting global advertising agency WPP's most recent annual report: "Customers are willing to spend more to reward a company that give back to society, so failing to improve one's practices will damage one's bottom line."

Enough said on that point. Secondly, it makes sense to **do business online** as it minimises any negative impact on the real world.

James Thornton, chief editor at GetApp, agrees that there are lots of reasons why doing business online could make you more socially responsible as a company.

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Firstly, think of the daily costs of running your business. Thornton says: "Brick-and-mortar resources tend to burn through lots of energy given the amount of electricity needed to power display lighting, electrical equipment, and fixtures." He says you could thus argue that there's less need to waste paper, ink, and plastic on product presentation when selling online, so this can have a positive environmental impact.

Then there's also the risk of increasing waste from products being packaged for delivery, as well as the considerable environmental cost of fuel that results from products being hand-delivered to consumers. So Thornton says if you're considering your business to be socially responsible, it's important to minimise packaging to only that which is necessary and take into account the most environmentally friendly and efficient methods of transporting and delivering goods.

If you have 18 minutes to spare, watch the video by CIPS embedded below for further ways to make your business more sustainable by focusing on reversing the cycle of waste production in particular:

While that's definitely a step in the right direction, Thornton admits that it's difficult to measure the true environmental impact of e-commerce over a physical business. While some studies have shown that e-commerce businesses use less energy, others point to the fact that consumers often research online first and then go make their purchase in a physical store, suggesting that it may actually have a negative effect.

But with much of that online research taking place on mobile phones, especially in Africa with the likes of the PriceCheck app, it's likely a good thing.

Share your business tips on how to ensure a more sustainable future below and scroll through the #SustainableBiz16 hashtag for other insights.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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