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Sustainable by design

David Finn - Kyocera Mita

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David Finn

As discussion of climate change, drought and environmental issues generally continue to saturate the media, more and more companies are attempting undertaking 'green' initiative. In the first of a series of articles over the coming months featuring discussions with CEOs about this issue, we speak to **David Finn**, Managing Director of Kyocera Mita, Australia, about why green programs have become important, and how those programs were being implemented in their organisations.

ceoforum.com.au: Why has your company implemented an environmental program?

David Finn: A lot of the original impulse goes back to the founder and chairman emeritus of Kyocera, Dr. Kazuo Inamori . As an ordained Zen Buddhist monk, Dr. Inamori has always felt very strongly about the welfare of the planet – in fact, the company's motto is "respect the divine and love people".

"Just having the right information is a problem for some companies..."

As such, our products were always engineered for sustainability, and the company was a pioneer in the total cost of ownership (or "cradle to grave") concept, where we would look to manage the environmental impact of our products across the entire product life cycle. Worldwide the company has had an environmental charter since 1984, so we are certainly not new to this!

While there is certainly that very strong global direction, it is up to each local CEO to work out how to work out those commitments locally. In my case, I have been campaigning on environmental issues for at least 10 years.

ceoforum.com.au: What are some of the most important initiatives you have undertaken locally?

DF: We have been a sponsor of Clean Up Australia's 'Business Clean Up Day' since 2001, and we have just concluded a four-year project cleaning up Brush Farm Park in North Ryde . For years this had been an illegal dumping ground, and after four years work from many company volunteers and others, and the removal of many tonnes of rubbish, we have now made the park beautiful again.

We've also worked with Clean Up Australia on the issue of e-waste (i.e. discarded computers, monitors, mobile phones, printer cartridges etc), to investigate business attitudes to this issue, and see how they

are evolving. Basically, people think they are doing a lot better than they are: for example, 40% of respondents claimed they recycled their waste, when we know less than 2% is actually recycled!

As well as all our products being designed to minimise impact on the environment, our building is also very ecologically sound – lights will automatically turn off, waste is sorted for recycling and so on. We are also certified to the ISO 14001 standard for environmental management systems.

ceoforum.com.au: Standards like ISO 14001 are voluntary, yet they have an audit process associated with them as well. How do you see the balance between compulsion and voluntary standards in getting businesses to change?

DF: Just having the right information is a problem for some companies – they want to do better on the environment, they are just not sure how to go about it! Clearly providing that information is something we and others are trying to do.

Sometimes the information is not broad enough. A good example is printers. Most people know about the issue of printer cartridges, and how they should be recycled, yet many don't consider the impact of the packaging the printer comes in. Polystyrene foam is very hard to recycle – basically, it is like disposable nappies, it goes straight into landfill! All our packaging, on the other hand, is made from recycled materials, so this also needs to be considered.

Auditing is important, as sometimes claims are made about things like recycling that may not, in fact be true. I think it is important to have an independent authority verify that recycling does, in fact, occur as it is claimed.

I have also been active in lobbying the Federal government to mandate environmentally friendly policies for their e-waste in their IT contracts. The Federal government is the largest purchaser of IT services, so it has an ability to use that purchasing power to get some important changes. If it is left to the individual agencies, the progress will definitely be much slower, as inertia is a powerful factor.

ceoforum.com.au: Do you think your environmental policies give you an advantage in attracting and retaining staff?

DF: I'd like to think it did – but you can't really be sure.

Where it is an issue for employees, it tends to be more with the under thirty group – they seem to have a stronger awareness of the whole issue. For the older staff, it doesn't seem to have the same importance.

The reality is, however, that it is just one factor in staff retention – in a tight job market, for instance, as we have currently, the lure of extra dollars may be hard to resist for some people, regardless of your environmental policy.

ceoforum.com.au: What would be your advice to other CEOs considering their own environmental policies?

DF: You have to want to make a difference, be prepared to make changes, and drive the policy with persistence and passion. If you do that, the values and behaviour will permeate the organisation, and change it for the better.

The great thing is that, if you do it right, it won't actually cost you money – you will save it over time. A better environmental result, at less overall cost, should be a no-brainer for any organisation!