

Editor's comment

RECESSION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

WILL the recession be bad for the environment? This question is not apparently on the minds of the merchants of doom and gloom we hear daily. As the financial crisis continues with no end in sight, more companies, including a number in flooring, are struggling to survive. For many this unfortunately means paying less attention to implementing 'green' practices.

'Sustainability' is not the easiest concept for businesses, even in times of prosperity. But in a recession your total focus is on staying afloat. This usually means cuts, often also giving a lower priority to environmental measures, especially if they call for additional expenditure.

Here's an example. The energetic environment manager at one prominent UK flooring company was made redundant recently, along with various other members of staff. I won't name that company, to avoid causing embarrassment. But its owners – although obviously believing that the environment manager's role is expendable – will doubtless claim that their commitment to sustainability is undiminished.

Saying this after sacking the man who orchestrated their environmental policy is rather like laying off half the sales force when there is a decline in sales.

Sadly, some still take the short-term view, considering the setting up costs of establishing a truly sustainable operation, rather than allowing for longer-term returns (which result from reducing or eliminating waste, cutting energy usage, etc). Clearly, there may be an initial investment, but businesses need to look further than the next set of accounts.

Twenty years ago the phrase 'environmentally friendly' was

thought of as weird, especially in business. Today things have gone to the opposite extreme with companies falling over each other to board the green bandwagon, with or without justification. Some manufacturers allegedly design products solely intended to achieve environmental certification.

Exaggeration, even embellishment, is not uncommon in marketing literature. But when it comes to environmental matters there are examples of downright hypocrisy. Claims of sustainability, regardless of their validity or strength, are made the subject of slogans simply to generate sales.

And sales people seem only to stress their products' green credentials and recycled content, glossing over whether they perform in given situations and are easy to install – practical questions that interest flooring contractors. Even supposedly sensible specifiers have been beguiled, with many reportedly selecting green-rated products regardless of their suitability.

Often forgotten in all of the above is why the environment became such a deadly serious issue. It's about nothing less than securing a sustainable future for our planet. And in this context, the recession is really quite trivial; while attempts to exploit consumers' genuine concerns are despicable.



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For starters:

On your broom

Even university graduates are finding it difficult to get jobs in the current economic climate. But one managed to get taken on by a flooring contractor as a trainee.

On his first day he was greeted by the site supervisor who, we hear, explained that his

responsibility would be to sweep the area that would be worked on by the floorlayers.

'But I have a university degree,' replied the young man indignantly.

'In that case,' said the supervisor, 'give me the broom and I will show you how it's done.'



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