

Help and advice



Peter Allan on exporting

Going green to boost your business abroad

STRONG environmental policies can give exporters a competitive edge overseas. Even though industry in general is suffering from 'greenwash,' with large companies such as Shell and BP facing criticism for not being as green as they claim, UK manufacturers with strong environmental and waste recycling policies have a strong sales message for international buyers.

Environmental standards differ from country to country, but it is an issue that, to a greater or lesser extent, transcends international borders. For example, while Scandinavia has led the way on sustainability, the US has still failed to sign up to the Kyoto Protocol, which aims to reduce greenhouse gasses. In fact, some US manufacturers have moved their operations south to Mexico where environmental regulations are less stringent.

Contract flooring manufacturers developing overseas markets could therefore find that exporting to Scandinavia is a greater green challenge than the US.

Manufacturers do have a choice: comply and embrace or avoid. We argue that the advantage is with the former. Products with less harmful effect on the environment, manufactured using less energy and water and more sustainable

raw materials, will definitely enjoy increasing demand in the future as the demand and preference for 'greener' products increases.

UK environmental policies are, unsurprisingly, inextricably linked with the EU, which as a body, has developed policy measures on a wide range of environmental issues. The EU is now the world leader in environmental legislation and having a good understanding of these policies and how they can affect business gives exporters a competitive advantage.

It is a common misconception that environmental legislation hinders business by adding more demands on infrastructure, logistics, material handling and dealing with waste.

In fact this is not the case. Business can benefit directly because regulation in areas such as energy efficiency and waste management can deliver costs savings as well as increasing a businesses' attractiveness to the overseas market, and ultimately its products.

The energy cost savings add up substantially and can benefit the entire economy. Research has found that waste minimisation could save 4.4bn euros in manufacturers' operating costs and that industry could save 2.7bn euros through energy efficiency

alone. Typical paybacks for waste management investments are no more than 12 months.

Away from the big picture and looking specifically at the contract flooring industry, there are several possible developments that manufacturers should consider.

In the electronic and white goods markets, established programmes of recovery and recycling have proved effective. Logistically this is complex to achieve, however, as a founding member of carpet recycling UK, we will continue our efforts in finding a solution.

Another major issue are VOCs (Volatile Organic Compounds) and the current drive to reduce their use. VOCs are emitted from many sources, such as decorative coatings, floorcoverings, adhesives etc, and have a negative impact on the environment, contributing to issues such as sick building syndrome.

From January 1, 2010, products that do not comply with EU directive 2004/42/EC will not be allowed to go to market.

Low VOC flooring has a key role to play but will only be truly effective as part of a low VOC interior specification in which all other materials, such as paints, furnishings, fabrics are also low VOC, otherwise the exercise is pointless.

Achieving BREEAM Rating is an excellent way to begin building your company's sustainability profile.

To receive the certification, manufacturers are measured on the impact their products have on the environment and it allows the company to present customers and specifiers with credible, independently assessed, environmental information about its products.

This is particularly important when considering that in a typical building, floorcovering makes more of an environmental impact than any other material.

There are small but significant things that any business can do that will have a positive impact in the future. These can be as simple as recycling paper or not printing out emails.

The government's stringent CO2 targets which coincide with the Code for Sustainable Homes are not going to go away. Neither are their overseas counterparts and as the world looks to become a greener, more sustainable planet, we all have a role to play, and we can all benefit from it. **CFJ**

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Dr Eric Brown on advice for carpet inspectors

Four golden rules for finding the fault

OVER the last months I have discussed a wide range of carpet complaints, some of which have been faults; others the result of misuse, or misunderstanding by the carpet owner.

I want to conclude this series by discussing 'four golden rules' for carpet inspectors:

1. Approach every job expecting that you may end up in court: Many is the time I have carried out an inspection, only to find, months later that the complaint is still festering and litigation is about to start. It is therefore important that, when you prepare a report on any complaint, you write only what you can substantiate under cross-examination.

Your first duty as an expert witness is to the court, not your client. An expert witness must enable the judge to reach a fair settlement, based on the so-called balance of probabilities.

Of course you have an original duty to your client. That is to tell them the truth. If you think that they have a weak case, tell them, and advise them not to get involved in litigation.

Tell them how far you can go in defending their

corner. If you believe they have a strong case and you think you can present it well, it may be reasonable for them to proceed. As an expert, you are the only person who can state an opinion. Others in the case can only present the facts.

2. Only address the complaint you are presented with: More than once I have been to look at a carpet on behalf of a manufacturer only to find that I cannot even see what the complainant is alleging.

I have been asked to inspect carpets with all the curtains closed, at carpets with the electric lights on, even at carpets that turned out not to have been made by the company retaining me. In some cases, although I have been unable to see any defect they might be complaining about, I have seen other faults elsewhere in the room that would be justifiable. However, it is not the role of the inspector to point out other causes for complaint not previously noticed by the owner – unless they are retained by the owner, of course.

3. Don't prejudge the issue: Don't form a snap judgement in front of the carpet owner. You may change your mind after thinking about it, or have done some testing. A word spoken without thought can come back to haunt you later, especially if court proceedings arise.

4. Don't overload your report with unnecessary detail: I have seen many reports that describe ad infinitum the construction details of the carpet, where it is installed, the history of the complaint, and so on.

By all means detail important facts, and it is a good idea to begin with a synopsis to succinctly make it clear to a third party (like a lawyer) the background and what is relevant. Otherwise, the only details you need to include are those pertinent to the actual complaint. **CFJ**

Eric Brown writes manuals on investigating carpet complaints.

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