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Is green marketable during an economic downturn?

az April Zubko



**ReSprout
Lean &
Green
Guide**

Yes.
And no.
Let's start with the "no." The sad reality of marketing during a recession is that the old "warm and fuzzy" tactic does not drive sales. Warm fuzzies are not benefit statements. Remember benefits? Those are the tangible differences your company makes in the day-to-day operations and bottom-lines of its clients. Making the president or V.P. of business development feel virtuous because they are supporting the eco-cause du jour by dealing with you rarely translates to bottom line numbers for them. The virtuosity card may work when times are good, sales brisk, and profit margins high, but during a recession, pictures of blue skies, trees, green globes, fat smiling infants, and polar bear families are not going to get the phone to ring, fill your pipeline, qualify leads or close deals; neither are ad headlines about "greener futures" and being "sustainability leaders." Feel good statements about giving back to the community and being good for the environment does not speak to any of the three main reasons C-level decision-makers take action in their businesses.

Which brings us to the "yes" part of making green marketable in a sluggish economy. The top three reasons businesses make buying decisions and respond to marketing initiatives are all benefits that green products, services, and properties can offer. Even better news? Green companies are offering these three benefits exponentially in comparison to conventional rivals. The trick is to figure out how to explain the dollars and cents to your potential prospects without all the green globe photos getting in the way.

Increase Sales

No surprise here, but the number one reason why businesses take action and, more importantly make purchasing decisions, is to increase sales. Association memberships like the U.S. Green Building Council, marketing, product launches, certifications, partnerships with financing institutions and sales staff expendi-

tures fall in this category. Marketing keywords to focus on here: earn, sell, profit, increase, revenue, sales, high return. Does your company offer services or products that make your clients' offerings more attractive or more visible to their customers? Can you help them increase the number or dollar amount of their sales or leases? How? Say it loudly in your marketing. Triple points if you can tout revenue or profit increase data or glowing testimonials from past clients.

Saving Money

A close cousin to increasing sales, and the second most cited

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reason why executives make buying decisions is to save money. Unless your potential prospects are dealing with cash-flow problems, most businesses understand that putting money in now to save in the long run is a smart decision. This is the area where return-on-investment (ROI) calculations really shine. Show how investing a small amount with your company can create huge savings for your clients and they won't mind that you're saving some polar bears on the side. Green solutions like renewable energy systems, waste management programs, and energy auditing firms are examples of companies that do well with this

marketing tactic. Again, triple points if you know the payback period or average savings of your product or service and can hype it up in your marketing. Advertising keywords to focus on in this category: conserve, efficiency, save, reduce, ROI, payback, and cost-effective.

Saving Time

Time is money; money is time. That's why saving time, also known as human resources or non-billable hours, is nearly as important to businesses as saving cash. Green businesses that shine well here are green and health initiatives that increase productivity, value-added programs that reduce employee and tenant turnover, and outsourced business service companies that can do the job better and usually for less cost than keeping tasks in-house. Triple points if you have data that shows cost differences between your services and your potential prospects' current costs.

Bottom Line

The bottom line? Excuse the pun, but sell your company, your services, your products with respect to your prospects' bottom line. If you mention the green benefits, make sure it's a value-added benefit, not the only benefit. In this economy, the green benefit should be the third or fourth one down and never your headline or featured graphic. The harder the dollar data is, the better the ad is and the more likely your marketing will show your business is a solution to the recession and not a green luxury service to be purchased only when times are good.

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Meet the USGBC Member

Tom Kestler is a green energy professional with over fifteen years of experience helping small business startups with energy cost budgeting, mechanical design, and project management. Kestler is V.P. of geothermal systems for GeoPower of Long Island, Inc., a renewable energy company offering turnkey geothermal systems for customers in Nassau and Suffolk. Island Energy Audits, a subsidiary of GeoPower, offers investment-grade energy audits, geothermal systems, and Energy Star certification of homes and businesses on Long Island.



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