

Clean, Green, Sustainable – What, Exactly, Does That Mean?

By Mary Sullivan

*You cannot have missed the buzz these days about “clean technology”, “green practices and products”, and “sustainability”. And if you think use of these terms is sometimes careless and the phrases themselves are a bit fuzzy, you are at least partly right. KickStart Alliance would like to clear the air and explain what these terms mean and how they potentially apply to **your** business.*

What’s clean about clean technology? – Here’s the KickStart definition:

Clean technology is an umbrella phrase that describes a broad range of technologies and innovations that aim to *minimize waste of resources and/or minimize the pollution of our air and water.*

These technologies contribute toward a cleaner environment, which is how they got that label.

What is the business proposition for developing clean technologies? To oversimplify a bit, in the end, they cost us less — individually, as businesses, and as a society. After all, wastefulness always costs more; efficiency costs us less.

Examples of clean technologies are ones that:

- Generate electricity from renewable sources such as the sun or wind
- Use renewable transportation fuels like bio-fuels or fuel-reducing vehicles such as hybrids
- Use energy in buildings more efficiently such as double pane windows and insulation, low-energy lighting systems (fluorescents and LEDs), thermostats on timers
- Improve storage of energy through more efficient batteries and other technologies to help manage peak/off-peak demand for electricity
- Reduce wasted materials or energy such as capturing and re-using industrial heat or bi-product materials

How is “green” different from “clean technology”?

Although you may see the term “green technology” interchanged with “clean technology”, “green” can be used on its own. An environment, process or practice may be called green without the use of technologies. For example, walking to work rather than driving a car is a green practice that actually eliminates use of technology.

Reuse rather than disposal of products is a green process that may not require any new technology at all. Certainly, the reprocessing of products such as recycling paper or cans

involves processes that were considered new technologies at one time but are now commonplace.

Examples of green practices in businesses are ones that:

- Take environmental specifications into account in corporate purchasing
- Encourage employee carpooling and/or use of public transit
- Use webinars as an alternative to travel to meetings
- Discourage printing of emails and other electronically storable information

Hopefully, your company employs some green practices, but even if it doesn't *you can be "green" on your own* by being mindful of how you use resources and by reducing waste.

What is sustainability, and why might you care?

Wikipedia defines sustainability in a general sense as "the capacity to maintain a certain process or state indefinitely". In the sense we're talking about here it means "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." So when the word *sustainability* is used to describe business practices, it refers to business policies that strive not to use more resources than are necessary and cost-effective.

What are the business benefits of sustainability? It helps your company:

- enhance its public image as being thoughtful and caring about others
- sell more products or services to environmentally-conscious customers
- attract quality employees who want to work for environmentally savvy employers
- keep up with competitors that use sound environmental practices as a business asset

If you can increase your sustainability quotient without increasing costs, your business comes out ahead.

Wrapping it all up

Your company may want to replace some of its existing technology with ***clean technology***, implement ***green practices***, or both, in order to be considered a ***sustainable business***. If it does, as marketers and sales people you will have an additional benefit you can talk about when you sell to new and existing customers.

To talk with KickStart Alliance about how to market your company's sustainability efforts, contact Mary Sullivan at 510.501.5110.

Have a different take on clean, green and sustainable? Tell us about it at contactus@kickstartall.com.