



Article from : Aberdeen Press and Journal

Date : January 28, 2008 Monday

Small business does its bit to be green

There are some commonly held perceptions of business that it is all about profit at all costs, that the environment gets little consideration and that social responsibility is low down on business owners' lists of priorities.

Most small business owners will tell you that nothing is further from the truth. And new research from the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) has revealed surprisingly positive results about small business owners' attitude to these issues.

The FSB has conducted a survey revealing the views of its members on **corporate social responsibility (CSR)**, an umbrella term that includes green business practices, environmental protection and involvement in the community.

The UK's biggest business organisation will emphasise its awareness of environmental issues even more with its national conference in March, which will focus on how small businesses can play an even greater part in combating climate change and environmental degradation - and, crucially, how they can benefit from being more involved. Proof, if any were needed, that FSB members take such issues very seriously.

But the perception still exists that small businesses are not doing enough for the environment.

Despite this, I know that FSB members across Scotland do want to do their bit, with our survey showing that 92% of small businesses say that they already consider their businesses to be socially and environmentally responsible.

This is no small feat considering the daily challenges of running a small business that has no dedicated officer or department to deal with green issues.

The FSB survey shows that 83% of small businesses are already engaged in both waste minimisation and recycling despite the considerable costs and effort of transporting waste to recycling sites, as few local authorities offer a cost-effective service for commercial premises.

But the FSB is currently working with Aberdeen City and Shire councils for small businesses to be allowed to share their recycling facilities.

This would help the local authorities to increase their recycling targets and reduce the waste to landfill.

The survey also shows that more than three-quarters of small businesses say it is simply good business practice to be green, signifying a wider awareness of the benefits of CSR.

The survey seems to show that responsible business ownership is a core quality of small business owners.

There are many reasons for this - not least that small business owners know that the buck stops with them and no one else, an attitude perfectly suited to being environmentally friendly.

There is, of course, a danger of becoming complacent and we should never shy away from admitting there is always room for improvement, but there is more enthusiasm for environmental business practices in the small business sector than many people give it credit for.

The task for Government is to harness that enthusiasm effectively and provide ways in which it can be used to benefit the environment, both locally and globally. In order to do more, small businesses need a far greater degree of practical advice and support, which has not always been forthcoming.

The initiative that has made the most impact, and one which the FSB supported from the outset, was the small business loans scheme in which loans are offered to make environmentally friendly changes, and we hope the Scottish Government will continue to support this.

We have also worked very closely with Envirowise to get some useful guidelines on practical actions small businesses can take to get more green. Businesses in the north-east have greatly benefited from Business Environment Partnership North East (BEPNE) and it is more of this type of effective local support that small businesses are crying out for.

All the evidence suggests that people respond better to initiatives that emphasise simple, but positive, ways to benefit the environment rather than punitive measures designed to shame people into action. This is particularly true of the small business community, which I firmly believe is responding positively to the need to minimise its impact on the environment and reduce costs at the same time.

What the Scottish Government constantly needs to bear in mind, and what we constantly remind them of, is that, with so many varied and time-consuming tasks to carry out - such as dealing with red tape, tax and personnel issues - small business owners have to prioritise.

New ideas to help the owners of small businesses to cut their energy costs and usage must be kept simple, clear and practical to catch their attention, allow them to prioritise corporate social responsibilities more and match Government expectations at the same time.

Andy Willox is Scottish policy convener with the Federation of Small Businesses Scotland