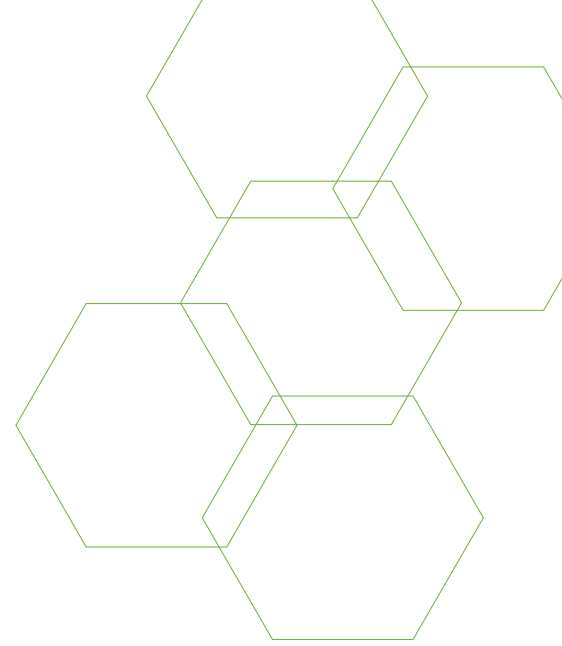




What's
All This
Buzz About
Sustainability?

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Sustainability. It is a word in danger of serious overuse, much like our current cultural fixation on everything 'xtreme.'

One part of the issue lies in definition – sustainability is a complex topic that can mean different things to each individual or firm. This makes it too easy for anyone and everyone to make a claim of benefitting sustainability with almost any product or service. Another part, however, lies in the growing belief that the pursuit of sustainability is truly beneficial. So what really is sustainability and what does it mean for those that serve our built environment?

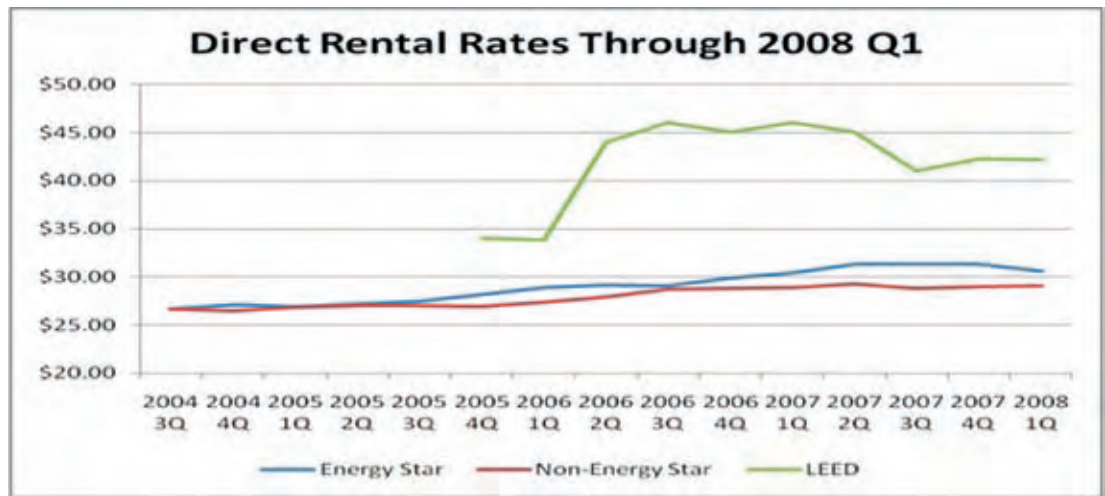
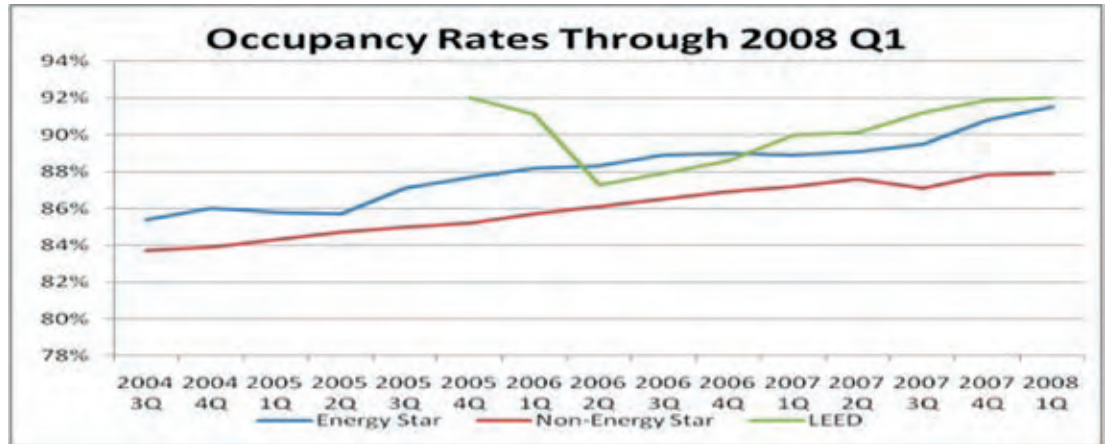
Definition

The pure and original definition of sustainability goes something like this: “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Beautiful, but what does that mean? On a grand scale it means not using up finite resources so that they will be unavailable or prohibitively expensive in the future. It can mean doing more with less. For manufacturing, it can mean changing material inputs and reworking processes to reduce waste or toxicity. For buildings, it

can mean reusing materials, designing for energy and water use efficiency, and positively impacting the quality of experience for building occupants. It does not mean a deprived, miserable existence, shivering in the cold. Let’s have our cake and eat it, too.

Green Buildings

There is an undeniable boom in green buildings today. Too often, people look at the various LEED certification programs and think that LEED is sustainability. I cringe whenever I hear this. LEED is a scorecard that attempts to give validity to sustainability claims by creating a standard of practices that meets with peer-reviewed acceptance. Other scoring systems include Energy Star, LABS-21, Green Guide for Healthcare, and even a carbon footprint can provide metrics to assess certain aspects of sustainability. Still, sustainability is much more than a score. It is about a more livable environment that can be achieved hand in hand with economic benefit. No matter how green a solution might be, if it is not economically beneficial it is still not sustainable.



Source: "Does Green Pay Off?" by N. Miller, J. Spivey, and A. Florance, 2008

Does It Really Work?

There seems to be an arms race going on, where property managers and owners are involved, to see who can build the best portfolio of innovative and efficient buildings to attract tenants and justify higher lease rates. A 2008 study conducted by Norm Miller, Jay Spivey, and Andy Florance for CoStar and the University of San Diego confirms the benefits of more sustainable buildings.

Higher occupancy rates for Energy Star and LEED buildings were also found to coincide with higher lease rates. With the economic meltdown in 2009 and the resulting historic levels of low occupancy rates, building owners are seeing increased competition for scarce tenants and are increasingly competing by making their

building operations more sustainable, offering a better built environment and reduced costs of operation.

Sustainability as Survival Tactic

Sustainability is about finding a better way to make better products, make better built environments, and generate more robust economic performance. Sustainability is about survival. Consider the video rental industry; 10 years ago it was a thriving business, yet beneath the surface it was inherently unsustainable. Using enormous quantities of plastic to make DVDs and package them, energy for manufacturing and transportation of tons of product to each store across the country, and finally the energy (and time) required by the customer to rent and return the movies – each step leading to unnecessary waste

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and cost. Through innovation, we now see opportunities to access movies via the Internet, at lower cost than the old system of rentals and with lower resource consumption and less waste, helping to keep those costs down.

Sustainability as Tool for Growth, Opportunity

In our organization, we define sustainability using four nouns: innovation, optimization, efficiency, and success. For a service provider, developing our own culture of sustainability allows us to unleash innovation to find new and better solutions for our clients, bringing great reward to us in the form of excited, engaged staff and a boost to reputation that helps us compete in the marketplace. Whether helping to rethink a client's manufacturing process, investigating opportunities to improve existing building performance, or bringing new products or methods to the construction of new buildings, there are almost endless opportunities to help improve the physical and financial performance of our clients' operations. The innovative firm builds a competitive advantage through the added value it brings to the job, but it also reaps the rewards of becoming a desirable place to work, especially for young professionals who increasingly value the mission of helping society innovate, optimize, become efficient, and succeed. Much of the history of sustainability services in the building trades has seen a focus on grudging compliance, but ask yourself: Which firm will be better suited to compete in the future marketplace: the firm that does the minimum to comply, or the firm that embraces the opportunities for innovation that the sustainability challenge brings?

Continual Improvement

An additional element of providing sustainability services that is beneficial to the service provider is that sustainability is unlikely to ever be fully achieved. Sustainability cannot

be reached by implementing a single project; rather, it is a path for continual improvement where innovative services will always have a place. This sets the stage for development of long term partnerships with clients, rather than the one-off project where you are in and out. In any financial model for the services industry, long-term relationships with clients lead to more success per effort spent bringing in the work, thus reducing a major cost of doing business and improving the bottom line.

Why the Buzz?

The current move toward a more sustainable future brings a lot of potential benefit for a service provider. By embracing the opportunity to move beyond the old standard work practices and products, sustainability brings with it a chance to take a fresh look, to try innovative changes and to develop a new way to make the world a little bit better place by finding that win-win for the environment, society, and the economic well-being of our client. Who wouldn't be energized by that?

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