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Green Design and the City
Education

NBC

NBC is starting to change. They recently hired a new chairman, one that is 'non-traditional' in the land of broadcast giants. They are making a splash behind new ideas for prime time television shows. And they announced a commitment to becoming more green. Starting the week of November 4th, 2007, NBC launched more than 150 hours of environmentally conscious programming. Ideally, this is a good thing. More awareness, no matter the methodology, is never bad, especially when it starts to make people think, question, and, eventually or hopefully, understand. This paper will focus on NBC as a mode for green education. It will look at their green initiatives, green programming, and green awareness model. The end result will be a critique of a huge media company committing on some level to education, awareness and change pertaining to the environment.

The first mention of the NBC Universal plan for green awareness was made public on their Sunday night football pregame show called "Football Night in America." The Dallas Cowboy and the Philadelphia Eagles were about to kick off their game but before kickoff, Bob Costas informed the viewers that NBC was beginning a week of green awareness programming. Thirty shows in the following week would have a green theme and the viewers would be aware of it because the traditional peacock icon would be totally green. To kick off this event, the studio turned off all of their lights using only a few candles to continue the broadcast. The symbol was not lost on many of the viewers, however. Multiple blogs and articles quickly surfaced about the methodology and motive base behind the public green campaign by NBC. Green marketing is now seen in some circles as less having to do with environmentalism and more to do with the traditional bottom line. In the end, though, is it a bad thing?

NBC has numbers that back up what they are doing. Long term investment may still be questionable, but in the recent past, and in place for the near future, they look to be attempting to put

some money where their corporate mouth feeds. This corporate commitment is shown in the creation of their new West Coast News Headquarters and Content Center. It will be a leading example of everything that is promoted by the United State Green Building Council. This building will attempt to earn a silver rating from the LEED rating system. NBC will also target LEED for existing buildings in the rest of its operations. Universal Studios, part of the NBC family, recently installed a solar grid on its lot in California. NBC changed its car service in New York which resulted in a 75% air pollution improvement with hybrids being introduced to the fleet by the end of this year. They are also in the process of implementing change in paper distribution throughout their company. They are facilitating the use of multi-functional paper processors to scan, email and perform various paper oriented tasks.

NBC is also implementing the use of recycled paper in their offices. Now, this is nothing new. It will save 145,000 gallons of water and 400 trees each year. 81,000 KWH are also saved which are enough to power seven homes for an entire year. This can be looked at with critical glasses or rose colored glasses. Either way, it is saving electricity. That is not a bad thing. NBC is also partnering with Energy Conservation Surveys to identify and prioritize additional internal environmental improvements. This eco-audit is an eye opening step that shows the need NBC needs for change and how they need external assistance to do so. Again, this is not a bad thing.

No matter how green NBC is pledging to become or how many green influenced shows they air, there is still the root cause of this corporate change. What green drivers are actually the formal cause of all of this? Perhaps a good starting point is to dissect the drivers across all of business into four different categories. They could fall into groups concerning regulation, customer interaction, internal interest, and the bottom line. Regulation in the green arena is concerned with, for example, outputs and waste and their end result. A company is regulated by the government as to the level of a certain toxin able to be discarded into the local air supply. The limit is set and the company is fined a certain percentage determined by if they are indeed polluting too much of a certain toxin in a given area. This regulation is repeated over and over. Unfortunately for us and NBC, it does not seem as all possible

that regulatory stress is governing their green change.

Customer interaction is the relationship the company has with whomever is purchasing whatever they are selling. A retail store interacts directly with the general public consumer though a shipping company only interacts with the producer of a certain good. NBC interacts with companies all the time in selling advertisement space. This seems to be constantly selling and there is no evidence of NBC being under any pressure from the companies that buy ad time to become more green. Therefore, it seems unlikely that customer interaction is the primary green driver for this particular change.

The third driver concerns having an interested internal champion of heading in the green direction. This internal interest has a very strong position as this person can usually spearhead proper internal green education, engineer wholesale internal change and influence the rest of the decision makers. Internal interest also allows for more risk to be taken. There is not as much of a need for a short term payback and long term goals are enabled more quickly and efficiently. This person may or may not exist at NBC. The new chairman, however, may be exactly what is meant by having internal interest. Silverman is young, brash, enthusiastic and is charged turning around one of the largest broadcasting corporations. Green, as we know, is becoming, or already may be, the new black. Silverman may see something not seen by his competitors and peers. This however brings us directly to the fourth driver – the bottom line.

The bottom line is what drives every company, large and small, regional or national. Money speaks and saving it or making more of it will always open the eyes, and ears, of any true businessperson. It is quite easy to financially show the validation of greening a business. The easiest step is an energy audit. Where company can save money in utility bills, engage in better technologies, and impart short and long term paybacks upon their energy investments will act as first a simple savings technique. There is no need to be green to see the value in that. It gives a level of validation to the green movement, and it can then act as a gateway green technique. An energy audit is universal

and easily applied.

A second part of the bottom line, and one that gets a lot of critique towards NBC, is the idea of green marketing. Green today sells. Selling yourself as the new green network will sell. NBC has been and still is the lowest performing of the four major broadcast networks. They need that to change. They need it to change yesterday. And that is the root of the largest critique of NBC. Green is the new black. It is chic and hip. Can we always trust what is massively thrown at us the general public? In the case of NBC being green, we can question the driving factors and question the methodology of promotion but in the end, NBC is still doing more towards actually becoming a green broadcasting than its three other competitors. In the end, it comes down to whether or not we, while knowing the green truths, care or mind why they come about, or if it just matters that they do come about.

Whenever a large corporation makes a statement perceived as ill-prepared as how NBC delivered their Green Week message, there will be a backlash of criticism and this is not different at all. There were entire articles devoted just to breaking down the enviro-facts and to number crunch in an effort to disproportionately criticize NBC. It was a good thing that they turned out the studio lights on their Sunday evening football pre-game show. However, they ignored the fact 65,000 KWH of electricity and 35,000 cubic feet of natural gas were used to power the stadium for the game. Remember, NBC is saving 81,000 KWH of electricity by using recycled paper for one year. Now how great does that sound when applied to the numbers of one football game? Also, on average 200 metric tons of carbon dioxide are generated by the fans' commute to the game which is a conservative estimate that could very well include more SUV's.

One of the shows on NBC participating in their green week was "The Biggest Loser" which generated an interesting anecdote about environmentalism. During a contest of lugging recyclables into a diesel power truck, the members of the winning team were each given a hybrid SUV. Too bad that one of the winners did not previously own a car, so all that means is just one more SUV on the road! Good job, NBC! Also, during the spectacular broadcasts from the extreme locations, NBC

created a larger carbon footprint just flying to these locales then maintaining a normalized traditional broadcast. But it was all worth it in the end, right?

The final critique comes from the idea of big business. NBC Universal is owned by General Electric. GE launched its 'ecomagination' campaign brilliantly as a way to be seen as a modern, progressive company with their interests not solely on earning potential. They launched this campaign at their D.C. Lobby office which is a great place if you want to help increase your potential for getting more money from the government. GE is playing upon the new green is chic ethos that is spreading rapidly across our country. While this is not an inherently bad thing, it is not good either. What it means is that the truth is just that much harder to dissect. Yes, it is probably true that GE wants to get close to the government to help make regulations, subsidies, and tax breaks that help promote green technology more favorable to themselves. They have also cornered the domestic market in solar panel production that would be highly necessary to implement sweeping change to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. The green trend and global warming hysteria is good for their bottom line.

The truth is what is most important in the end. GE does own NBC. GE and NBC do want to make money. Perhaps their motives are far from altruistic and only for the creation of added income that piggyback on the current green trend. Perhaps they have internal champions that understand the green crisis and are slowly changing the way they do business. Perhaps they do care and want to remain competitive and ensure profit while helping along this idea of green change. NBC did turn off the lights. NBC is making infrastructure changes. NBC did educate across their entire platform. The news show ran daily specials, CNBC ran green investment shows, and the comedies added a touch of humor. Ultimately, NBC and its Sunday night presentation could have been done without the “creepy” candles and sudden blackout, and with professionalism and intelligent presentation. However, they are doing more in favor of the environment than CBS, ABC and FOX. Which is not a bad thing.

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