

GREEN Returns

BY JAMIE MOORE

LET GUESTS KNOW ABOUT YOUR EFFORTS

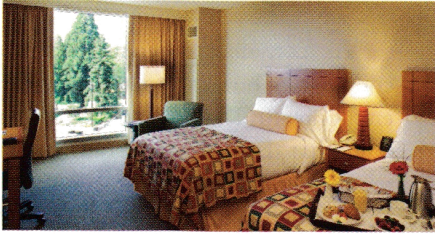
There's no question that the hospitality industry is stepping up its commitment to being green. Environmental initiatives now form the backbone of many hotel and resort strategic plans. And the U.S. Green Building Council has recently awarded its prestigious LEED certification to the first handful of environmentally sustainable hotels.

The good news is that nearly three-fourths of hotel guests in North America willingly participate in environmentally friendly programs offered during their hotel stays. The bad news: Many guests remain unaware of whether these programs are offered at the hotel property, according to the J.D. Power and Associates 2007 North America Hotel Guest Satisfaction Study.

"Since conservation is such an important issue globally, it is vitally important that hotel properties actively market their eco-friendly offerings and make them easy to recognize and participate in," says Linda Hirneise, executive director of the travel practice at J.D. Power and Associates. "Guests are increasingly looking for these types of offerings."

How do you spread the word and get mileage out of your environmental initiatives? We interviewed five hospitality companies, each with a slightly different approach. In every case, success resulted.





Company Hilton Vancouver Washington
Location Vancouver, Wash.
Eco-highlight LEED certification:
 Sustainable building performance including water savings, low-impact landscaping and reduced energy use.

Marketing strategy and results

Hilton Vancouver Washington jumped on the opportunity to promote its LEED certification, a widely recognized and prestigious honor. It hired a public relations company to create a news release and follow up with media. So far, the hotel has received more than \$3 million in publicity from media A-listers including *Travel + Leisure* magazine, *New York Times*, CNN and CNBC.

The resort printed a brochure and added its green news to the company Web site. It also redesigned its ads to target convention and leisure guests with a new tagline: 'The new color of luxury is green.' The ads explain that you can be green without giving up luxury.

That message becomes clear to guests when they arrive at the hotel.

"Meeting attendees and overnight guests see signs about our sustainability and certification posted throughout the hotel or on reader boards. They'll often say, 'Wow. I would've never known this was LEED based on the look of it,'" says Gerry Link, general manager. "We're shattering some stereotypes about what it means to be a green-constructed facility."

Link's best advice: "Don't lose sight of your core business," he says. "We can be all kinds of green, but if someone has a bad night's stay or got a poor night's sleep they're not going to forgive us just because we're green."

At the Hilton Vancouver Washington, interior paint, carpet and carpet glue are low-emissions materials, meaning that they emit few of the hazardous chemicals that traditional paints and carpets do.



Company Evergreen Marriott Conference Resort
Location Stone Mountain, Ga.
Eco-highlight Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary for Business certification:
 The first American hotel to earn it.

Marketing strategy and results

Set among Stone Mountain Park's 3,200 acres of forest and lakes, Evergreen Marriott has a longstanding track record for park preservation, tree replacement and environmental awareness.

But the resort's recent Audubon designation for its onsite wildlife sanctuary has earned the most mileage by far. That is definitely related to the tremendous name recognition of Audubon, says Warren Woodard, director of sales of marketing at Evergreen Marriott.

Press releases and collateral included in meeting information sent to prospective clients top the resort's list of most effective green marketing tactics. Direct sales managers' e-signature lines also help raise awareness. At the end of each e-mail message is a Green Marriott graphic that links to the Marriott corporate Web site's environmental stewardship page.

Woodard can already point to specific results.

"Several meeting planners actually told us they chose our hotel versus a competitor based on our recognition for environmental initiatives," Woodard says. "We secured two separate meetings in the last several weeks based on our green initiatives. One is a coffee company and the other produces satellites used in the telecommunications industry – a diverse range."



Company Leading Hotels of the World
Location 448 hotels worldwide
Eco-highlight Leading Green Initiative:
 A carbon-neutral program where LHW donates 50 cents for every night of a guest's stay to offset energy consumption.

Marketing strategy and results

Leading Hotels of the World exclusively used a word-of-mouth program, or viral marketing campaign, to promote its Leading Green Initiative. The company chose not to do traditional advertising.

"We believe that the conscious consumer responds better to word-of-mouth marketing," says Kristin Glass, marketing manager for Leading Hotels of the World.

LHW launched the Leading Green Initiative campaign by marketing it very heavily internally since its employees are a very strong global network of travel enthusiasts. The company then sent a press release to media and e-mailed an announcement to its 30,000 LHW Leaders Club members.

Last June LHW partnered with the Daytime Emmy Awards party, a green event, to get the word out about its Leading Green Initiative. Celebrities have always been advocates for responsible tourism and travel consumption, says Glass, so LHW included invitations in each gift bag, inviting party guests to visit www.lhwgreen.com. When you book a hotel room on the site, LHW automatically makes the 50-cent carbon/night offset donation.

By every measure, the campaign is a success, Glass says. Many loyalty club members signed up to make all of their reservations carbon neutral. The majority of LHW's hotels wrote or called, wanting deeper involvement in the program. And major mainstream publications such as the *Washington Post*, *LA Times* and *Smart Money* covered the Leading Green Initiative. ➤

How to Generate News About Your Green Resort

- **Use a well-known person as a spokesperson to demonstrate widespread use.** Or, if you're on a tight budget, consider inviting a local media personality to stay at your hotel and talk about it on the air or in a column.
- **Provide editorial comments on a controversial issue.** Is a key executive passionate about environmental issues? Write a letter to the editor.
- **Tie in with a major environmental news story.** Follow local and national news and tie in with an existing story.
- **Offer yourself as an expert media source.** You can talk about green travel in your area or trends you've seen from guests.
- **Organize your own debate on a heated public issue.** You can even do it online.



Hayman in Great Barrier Reef
- a LHW property



Company Kimpton Hotels
Location 41 in the United States and Canada

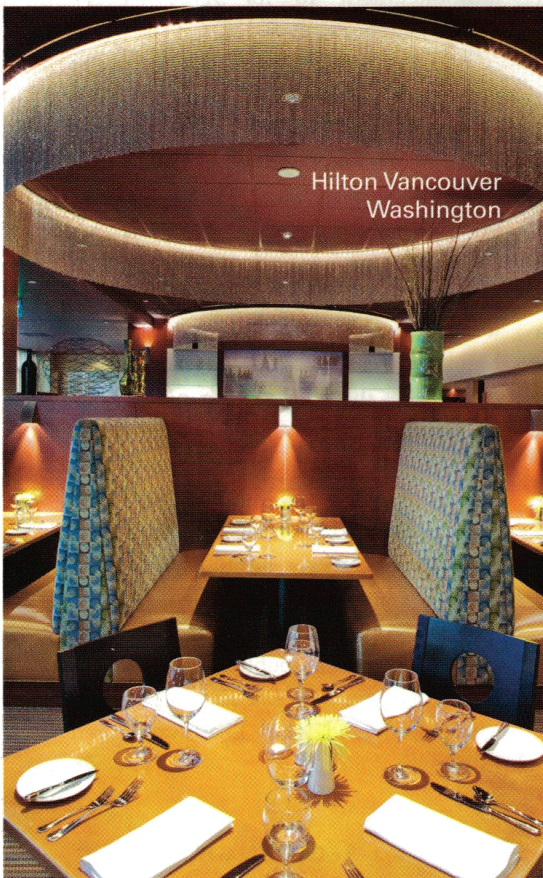
Eco-highlight EarthCare: A program with 40+ eco-friendly products and practices, including fundraising for The Trust for Public Land.

Marketing strategy and results

Kimpton doesn't advertise its green practices. Instead, it promotes them on the company Web site, in stories relayed to the media and through in-room materials. Well-informed eco-conscious staff members also play a huge role.

Each year as part of a campaign during June and July, staff at every Kimpton Hotel organize a fundraising event to benefit The Trust for Public Land. Some plan a trail clean-up day or dog wash, while others arrange silent auctions or wine-tasting parties. The campaign aims to create parks in cities across America.

In a 2005 survey, 16 percent of Kimpton's guests said they had stayed at a Kimpton Hotel because of its eco-sensitive practices.



Hilton Vancouver
Washington

"As consumers become increasingly conscious of how their actions impact the environment, Kimpton hears from guests more that they appreciate our dedication to eco-friendly practices and chose to stay at our hotels because of them," says Steve Pinetti, Kimpton's vice president of sales and marketing.



Company BelleHavens - Equity Destination Club
Location 14 homes in the United States and Mexico
Eco-highlight GreenHome: An energy conservation program for BelleHavens' portfolio of private homes.

Marketing strategy and results

Interestingly, the idea for BelleHavens to 'go green' didn't originate in the marketing department. It was a member who suggested, on several occasions, that BelleHavens try to become more environmentally friendly. At his own home he offsets his carbon emissions every year and conserves energy, and he thought BelleHavens could do the same.

"When we sent the GreenHome announcement to members, several replied with positive feedback and told us about things they do in their own homes to be green," says Michelle Stevens, BelleHavens' director of marketing.

Updating members and prospects of the eco-activities is a high priority. BelleHavens includes its latest green news in its marketing package for prospective buyers, member newsletters and in the resident guides at each home.

"We occasionally get e-mails from members who keep tabs on what we are doing in our homes to be green," Stevens says. "They really care – and they want us to be behaving in environmentally conscious ways."