

A TRANSPARENT KIND OF GREEN

WHEN IT COMES TO SENDING OUT A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL MESSAGE, CELL-A-NET NOT ONLY TALKS THE TALK, BUT WALKS THE WALK- OR RATHER, DRIVES THE DRIVE

by DEANNA NATALIZIO



It has often been said that the road travelled is, in some cases, just as important as the destination reached. This is no truer than in the case of Mississauga, ON-based Cell-a-net, a company specializing in repair and maintenance services for HP printers. When Cell-a-net receives a company's request for an on-site service call, it responds with its fleet of Toyota Prius hybrids. With the company's aim being to extend the life cycles of printers, remaining environmentally conscious on service-oriented trips helps Cell-a-net keep its green mandate on point.

According to Kevin Hiebert, company president, Cell-a-net's fleet is comprised of four vehicles; the first having been purchased in 2002, the second a year later, and the final two added this past year. Hiebert admits that the mitigated environmental impact, coupled with company cost-savings, proved reason enough to opt for his very first Hybrid. "Because of the amount of miles that we do in a year, it was a less expensive alternative to really any vehicle out there, as well as having a reduced impact on the environment," Hiebert said.

Hiebert believes the use of the hybrids brings consistency to the company's philosophy of being an environmental safeguard, as the underlying motive of its on-site service is to allow people to maximize use of their equipment. "We don't want to see the printers

dumped at a landfill, or thrown out and something else bought in its place," he said.

Hiebert thinks most companies take an incomplete approach to greening by typically failing to address the transportation component. "It's an overlooked aspect of businesses... people will claim all the same things we might claim, but then they're going to send some guy out with a 20-year old beater polluting the atmosphere," he said.

While the Prius and its hybrid brethren have become iconic of the green movement and have enjoyed celebrity status, Hiebert said Cell-a-net was ahead of the bandwagon for green vehicles. "When we bought our first Prius, no one was applying on the transportation end at all. There were less than a thousand sold in all of Canada," he said. "You never saw those cars."

The scene has undoubtedly changed today, Hiebert said, not only with the notable increase in hybrids on the road, but also with a more penetrable definition of 'green.' "It's almost becoming a must-have. Larger companies are beginning to have corporate governance around green initiatives," he said. Hiebert also noted that companies' green overhauls are often legislation induced, and thereby can seem forced, and falsely implemented.

"The heightened awareness is great, but the definition needs to be more strongly delineated," he said. "We drive all the time,

so the benefits we are providing to the environment are tangible. I don't think other companies are able to hold up to that kind of scrutiny."

Apart from transportation and the company premise of reversing the unusable status of printers where possible, Cell-a-net has involved itself in a comprehensive recycling program for disowned printers to enter into.

"We want to recycle end-of-life equipment in an auditable, verifiable way," Hiebert said, and added that the idea of recycling equipment has tons of people making claims to be doing it, but without a bona fide support system.

Cell-a-net has partnered with Sims Recycling Solutions, a company that works out of a facility located in Brampton, ON. According to his own knowledge, Hiebert asserts that Sims is the only facility of its kind in the country to perform a full, 100 per cent recycling of IT equipment back to its raw materials. "The distinction I've noticed from other companies is that they audit their suppliers up and down the chain. They have a process in place to certify that yes, it has gotten recycled and is not just dropped off and forgotten about," he said.

The Prius vehicles give the company's green undertakings wholeness, and also serve to provide sizeable financial benefits. "We estimate we're using half the fuel for any equivalent vehicle we would have been using," Hiebert said. In direct fuel costs for two vehicles, he estimates cost-savings to be around the \$4,000 mark per year.

According to Hiebert, the marketable quality of Cell-a-net's green endeavours will not prove as fruitful. While admitting that green is trendy, it has yet to become a prevalent enough concern to translate into express customer pull or retention. "I can't think of a single customer that has said 'I want to get my printer serviced by you because you drive a hybrid,'" he said.

With that being said, Hiebert has noticed an increase in the number of customers green has become top of mind with. "We do have relationships with customers that share that way of looking at business... We'll hear things like 'I don't want to see [the printer] go into the trash,' or they'll come asking about the honesty of our recycling program," he said.

"It's not a main marketing strategy, but a definite part of it," he said. 🇨🇦