



SHOPTALK

By Margie Johnson



CONSIDERING GOING GREEN? START SMALL – BUT START!



Teri Carter is the owner of EcoChic, a unique “green” boutique that offers products that are not only environmentally friendly but also trend setters for the fashion conscious.

Shop Talk is a continuing series of consumer-oriented retail articles by Margie Johnson, president of Shop Talk, a retail consulting firm that specializes in showing organizations how to become leaders in their marketplaces and industries through customer-centered training. Over the past 15 years, Margie has worked in many Main Street towns throughout the nation. She is passionate about helping small business owners become more successful.

Combining sustainability with small business is a win-win for communities and business owners. Simply stated, sustainability is “the ability to endure.” It became apparent to me while researching this article that while many small business owners understand the benefits of “going green,” they aren’t sure how and where to begin!

The following case studies were selected to showcase the scope and variety of going green—and the rewards! Sustainability and profitability need not be exclusive. The common thread in these case studies is that while “green businesses” have all of the same expenses as traditional businesses, the owners are extremely passionate about their endeavors. If the business model is well executed, the positive impact ripples throughout the business community, both socially and environmentally. These aspects also become a common denominator that resonates well with both potential customers and existing clients.

Small businesses can take steps to underscore the “triple bottom line.” In addition to the traditional bottom line of profit, sustainable businesses have two other bottom lines: people (the effect on the human race) and planet (the effect on the earth). Common

strategies of successful sustainable small businesses include the following:

- Viewing sustainability practices as a new business opportunity, not just a cost center;
- Seeking out organizations and resources to educate and assist in the “ramping up” of their efforts (see resource list on page 23);
- Committing to constant communication with staff and clients on “retooling and rethinking” green practices; and
- Constantly reviewing aspects of the business, i.e., energy efficiency, waste management, water usage, packaging, advertising, etc.

The following case studies offer great examples of business owners who made a commitment to go green as early as 1996 and as recently as the past two years. They exemplify the key to sustainable success: “start small – but start.”

Vines to Cellar, Port Washington, Wisconsin

Established in 2008, Vines to Cellar is a micro-winery that offers its customers the opportunity to enjoy all stages of the wine process, from “conception to consumption.” Customers can choose either to purchase a custom wine or make their own custom batch. Owners Jim and CJ Wirsching-Neuser offer customers the chance to become a vintner at their “U-Vin” where you can make, bottle, label, and cork your very own wine. Jim and CJ also wanted to do their part to become an eco-friendly winery.

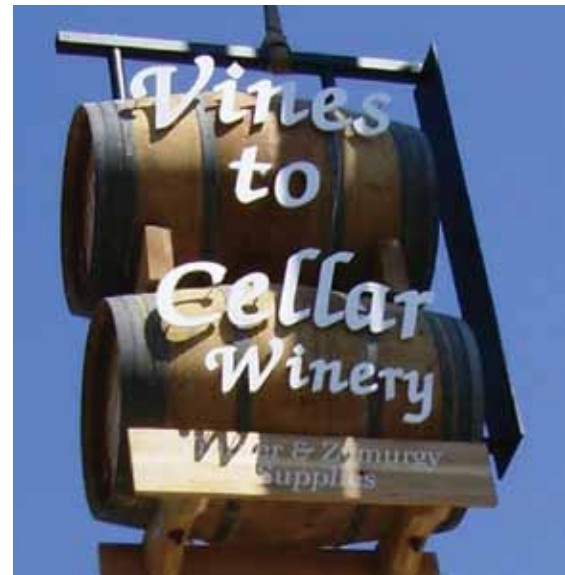
In Wisconsin, alcohol bottles cannot be refilled, but the owners of Vines to Cellar have come up with a way to re-purpose the wine bottles used at their tasting bar. They

take the empty bottles, which have only been used once, rinse them, and repackage them for home wine makers. They charge half the price of new bottles and donate all of the proceeds to the Ozaukee Humane Society. Last year alone, they donated almost \$1,000.

They also put gift certificates in recycled bottles, a creative and sustainable packaging idea that has been hugely successful. People enjoy giving the gift certificates because they can have the bottle custom labeled, and those receiving the gift certificates hate to open the bottles because they want to keep them as a special memento. Vines to Cellars has also begun selling six-pack cloth bags that can be reused and gain the customers an additional 5 percent off on future wine purchases. This will hopefully eliminate the use of cardboard boxes which usually end up in the recycling bin after one use.

Vine to Cellars sells other sustainable merchandise such as wreaths and purses that are made out of recycled corks. By offering recyclable products and sustainable

The Vines to Cellar Winery recycles everything from bottles to barrels in creative ways that include this unusual business sign.





Clothing Matters, in Grand Rapids, Mich., offers a wide collection of “eco” apparel, sustainably manufactured by more than 50 “partner” vendors.

ingredients, Jim and CJ Wirsching-Neuser do their part in the go green movement. Vines to Cellar is currently expanding within its current location to host larger in-store parties and wine tastings. Learn more about Vines to Cellar at www.vinestocellar.com.

EcoChic, Milford, Delaware

Teri Carter opened EcoChic in 2009. Nestled in the historic downtown area of Milford, Delaware, EcoChic is a unique “green” boutique. Repurposed bookshelves from the previous storefront occupant flank the walls and display everything from environmentally friendly household cleaners, organic skincare from Australia, and jane iredale® natural mineral cosmetics to ladies apparel made from sustainable bamboo and handcrafted designer jewelry and accessories.

“The decision was easy,” says Carter, a former registered nurse and the mother of five young children, when asked how she decided on the concept of her store. “I wanted to share my passion for health and the importance of the products we are using in our everyday lives. By choosing products that are safer for the earth, we are also choosing products that are safer for our families. I wanted customers to be able to see, smell, and touch the products I was purchasing for my family and could only find on the internet.”

Frustrated that environmentally friendly products were difficult to find in the Milford area, Carter decided it was time to bring this responsible way of living to her community. “Being eco-friendly is a way of life for my family,” she says. “It’s the future, not just a trend.”

The diverse selection of products offered at EcoChic are not only environmentally responsible, but also the latest trend in the fashion world. Many of EcoChic’s products have been touted in national publications such as *O Magazine*, *Allure* and *Glamour*.

Designed for the fashion-forward, environmentally conscious shopper, EcoChic is where “green” is the new black. EcoChic was voted “Greenest Store Downstate” in *Delaware Today Magazine’s* Best of Delaware. Learn more about EcoChic at www.shopecochic.com.

Clothing Matters, Grand Rapids, Michigan

After an 18-year career devoted to educating clients about sustainability principles and how they can support existing objectives, Marta Swain decided to open Clothing Matters in 1996 after learning about the ills of apparel production. Starting with \$400 and no business experience, she consistently chose products with appeal to a discerning clientele that appreciated quality, comfort, and the opportunity to support practices that prevent pollution, conserve resources, and promote social justice.

For the customers of Clothing Matters, the shopping experience is a delightful way to be reminded that we live in an ecosystem and have the opportunity to improve our personal, social, and ecological well-being. Swain’s formula is to invite, inform, and engage her customers in discovering how great clothing can be. Her store has a world-class collection of sustainably manufactured “eco” apparel from more than 50 “partner” vendors — local and regional, domestic and international.

Swain plans to share her expertise to help others recognize how the everyday act of getting dressed can add a comfortable layer of sustainability to our lives and work. Marta Swain has earned a reputation as a “trail blazer” in the green movement. The momentum created by Clothing Matters reaches beyond the four walls of her store. Visit the shop’s website at www.clothingmatters.net.

“Reuse and Reimagine” is the mantra of Bill Grant, owner of the Grant Design Collaborative. Its retail store sells furniture, clothing, and other items made from materials recycled from previous design projects.



The Store at Grant Design Collaborative, Canton, Georgia

Grant Design Collaborative, a multidisciplinary design firm, was founded in 1996 by President and Creative Director Bill Grant. In 2009, when a first-floor vacancy became available in his historic downtown building, Grant decided to showcase his product designs by opening a retail store. This allowed the company to introduce itself, its products, and its services to the world. The design team wanted to create products that illustrated the concept that “design thinking and ingenuity can transform treasure from trash.”

This concept in turn created Grant’s mantra “Reuse and Reimagine,” which is visible in the products sold in the retail shop. All of the merchandise is made out of recycled materials from previous design projects. The Store offers eclectic products, including furniture, rugs, handmade paper products, and clothing. The Store’s recycle and reuse approach has made it a community favorite because it sells products that are not only interesting, but sustainable. To bring people into the store, Grant has tweaked store hours to accommodate customers and launches new products during popular local events like the Farmer’s Market and Fourth Fridays.

Over the years, as The Store has evolved, its unofficial mantra has become “a retail stream-of-consciousness for cockeyed optimists.” Through this mantra, Grant wants to let the public know that “even with minuscule budgets and unrelenting economic conditions, great design can move people, create change, and advance cause.”



LEFT: Its sustainable business practices have earned the Treasure Mountain Inn numerous awards, including Park City's Environmental Heroes Award in 2010.

RIGHT: Dubbed the "General Store of the Future," Cincinnati's Park + Vine not only sells eco-friendly merchandise but also spreads the "go green" message to customers by hosting several monthly events and classes.



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The design firm wanted to create a store that adhered to the "go green" movement by creating products that were one of a kind and were made out of unused or leftover materials from past design projects. The design team, says Grant, saw this venture as a "chance to reclaim their craft, a real testament to the fact that it doesn't take lots of money to be creative and successful." For more information, visit them on the web at www.Grantcollaborative.com.

The Treasure Mountain Inn, Park City, Utah

Nestled in Park City, Utah, the Treasure Mountain Inn is committed to being an "eco-tique hotel." Owners Andy Beerman and Thea Leonard are stewards of the quality of life in Park City. Operating by the motto "Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle," theirs is a long-term commitment to protect the environment.

In 1996, Beerman and Leonard began their commitment to go green by adopting a recycling program. They recycle everything from glass to cardboard. Not only do they recycle basic materials like tin and paper, but they take the extra step to sort all garbage to see if there are other items that can be recycled. They make it convenient for guests to participate by putting recycle bins at all entry points, in hallways, and in rooms. All of the inn's amenities such as shampoo and soap, are packaged in recycled material. Due to their recycling efforts, the inn has twice been awarded the Utah Business Recycler of the Year (2005 and 2006).

Other sustainable practices include installing Energy Star-approved appliances, fluorescent lighting, high-efficiency cooling and heating systems, and a solar array for heating their hot tub, as well as putting water-conserving shower heads and toilets in each guest room.

For its environmental efforts, the Treasure Mountain Inn has been EPA-certified as a Green Power Partner. In 2010, Beerman and Leonard also received the Environmental Heroes Award, which is awarded to businesses that are committed to sustainable business practices. To keep their commitment alive, the inn's owners donate 1 percent of all their revenue to "1% for the Planet," an organization committed to making the planet a healthier place.

The Treasure Mountain Inn is an inspiration to other businesses because it shows how a few small changes can make the world a better place. Learn more about The Treasure Mountain Inn at www.treasuremountaininn.com or, better yet, visit the inn itself.

Park + Vine, Cincinnati, Ohio

Located in Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, Park + Vine opened in 2007 and has since been dubbed the "General Store of the Future" by *CityBeat*.

Park + Vine offers environmentally friendly merchandise that reduces the use of natural resources and animal by-products. Products include reusable bags, non-toxic cleaning supplies, natural baby supplies, and organic food. Owner Dan Korman spreads his message about the importance of being eco-friendly by hosting numerous events and classes that show consumers how their choices can damage the environment.

Korman's mission is to show "struggling wannabe-greenies the way to environmental salvation." Each week, he hosts classes focusing on environmental topics such as eco-safe cleaning or cloth diapering to show the public how small steps can make a tremendous difference in the green movement. Korman also hosts several monthly events, such as the Veeegan Pizza Party or the Earth Day Kombucha Keg Party.

In addition, he has created pop up shops that have become community favorites. Every Saturday, Korman hosts a Pop Up

Bicycle Repair Shop so customers can get their bikes tuned up before they hit the trails. Another popular shop is the Pop Up Swap Shop where people bring items to sell, swap, or give away. The Pop Up Swap Shop goes back to the notion that one's man trash is another man's treasure.

By hosting classes, events, and pop up shops, Korman shows the public that going green can be easy and fun and hopes to encourage others to follow suit. Through the sale of eco-friendly products and his efforts to spread the word outside the store, Korman has become a leader in the sustainability movement. To learn more about Park + Vine, visit its website at www.parkandvine.com.

GreenSky, Andersonville, Illinois

Tucked away in Andersonville's oldest building, this locally owned emporium offers a variety of decorative arts, eclectic gifts, and everyday goods. "Every item has a story" at this eco shop, which features merchandise ranging from handmade tiles and mosaics to products made from recycled license plates and even old steel drum flying pigs! The basics include recycled milk jug furniture, locally produced soaps and soy candles, recycled yogurt cup toothbrushes, and fair trade chocolates.

GreenSky is housed in an 1898 classic Chicago Victorian corner building recently restored by shopkeeper Nadeen Kieren and her husband, local architect Thom Greene. You can meander through the hundred-year-old rooms discovering pleasures for the eyes and the mind.

GreenSky fun facts:

- Named one of Chicago's top 10 eco-boutiques by the *Huffington Post* in 2010;
- Has been a three-star eco-Andersonville certified business since 2009, one of the first three to be certified by eco-Andersonville;



- Was certified as the first Green Americas certified business in Edgewater and Andersonville in 2007;
- Received the 2007 Commercial Good Neighbor Award from Chicago Board of Realtors for restoration of a commercial building.

Learn more about GreenSky by visiting www.greenskycompany.com.

The Big Bad Woof, Washington, D.C.

When owners Julie Paez and Pennye Jones-Napier started The Big Bad Woof six years ago, they applied their personal philosophies about environmentally friendly practices. Some of the practical applications they have implemented in their store include recycling, utilizing micro-fiber towels in place of paper towels, using green cleaning products, giving customers their shipping boxes as an alternative to bags, and buying organically raised or sustainably manufactured products. These practices have also helped them save money in their operating costs.

Each year Paez and Jones-Napier have refined and added sustainable criteria, such as where a product is made, how it is made, how it is packaged, how far it travels to get to the store and, ultimately, the consumer. They also give priority to local, minority-owned businesses and fair trade products. In the past five years, they have eliminated more than 50 percent of products mass-produced overseas. Supporting local economies is critical, they believe, because it adds diversity to consumer product selection and brings money back to the local economy.

Got to go – just got the “green light.”

Margie Johnson is an Allied Member of the National Main Street Network. Learn more about Margie and Shop Talk at <http://allieddirectory.mainstreet.org>. She can also be reached at shoptalk@shoptalk.org or by visiting her website, <http://www.shoptalk.org>.

Washington, D.C., pet store, the Big Bad Woof, focuses on selling goods produced by local, minority-owned businesses, as well as fair trade merchandise.

The store also has an aggressive calendar of events, including “Woof Clinics” on a wide range of topics. The response from the store’s customers has been overwhelmingly positive since the day it opened its doors. While there is still a perception that the store is more expensive than big-box stores, customers who compare prices note that Big Bad Woof is very competitive in price on similar products and that it has a selection of regional and local products that aren’t available in the bigger stores.

This year, when the owners were ready to open a new store in the Arts District of Hyattsville, Maryland, it was their customers and employees who came forward to provide the bridge loan needed to complete the funding by the State of Maryland and the developer. The new store will be a model for franchising the owner’s concept. Learn more at the website www.bbwoofinc.com.

I hope this tour of sustainable small businesses across the United States has inspired you to think creatively about how your town, your business, and your clients can benefit from this “go green” initiative! Smart companies are starting to innovate around this trend in many creative ways. Things to consider as a way of getting your business involved include:

- **Think eco-cycle.** Recycling, up cycling, down cycling — it doesn’t matter what you call it. If you can figure out ways to eliminate negative environmental impacts (both direct and indirect) from your products and services, do so and educate your clients on your practices. Consumers are increasingly aware of the consequences of their purchasing decisions, and their shopping behaviors are changing to reflect their concerns.
- **Be eco-generous.** Designate a hybrid parking place or two — this gives environmentally conscious individuals a chance to share their passion and receive recognition for it.
- **Nurture the eco-frugal customer.** During the past few years, cash-strapped consumers have embraced sustainability in many ways, from selling their own items for cash, to generously donating to causes,

to partnering with businesses and charities to do what is worthy and prudent.

- **Offer eco-concierge services.** Consider eco-educational opportunities through green home makeovers, green office makeovers, and go-green parties. This new trend is known as eco-concierge, as many firms are beginning to help clients go green. Figure out what eco-concierge services you can offer your clients.

In summary, I strongly urge all small business owners to study the opportunities that abound and to become engaged at some level in the sustainable/go green movement! Involve your team, your customers, and your community. I trust that these “case studies” have inspired you! Get creative — use my short list of resources to assist you in launching your own platform for your business.

Eco-Friendly Websites for Small Businesses

Energy Star Small Business Network is a government-sponsored program that offers free information about the benefits of having an environmentally conscious business.

www.energystar.gov

Greenbiz.com offers valuable articles that discuss various topics of the green revolution.

www.greenbiz.com

Ecopreneurist discusses many different ways that small businesses can go green.

www.ecopreneurist.com

1% for the Planet is an organization whose members understand that being environmentally conscious will lead to the success and longevity of their businesses; the website offers insight about the importance of this concept.

www.onepercentfortheplanet.org

Greenwala has useful articles about the significance of going green for both business and personal life.

www.greenwala.com

GreenAmerica is a not-for-profit organization that focuses on the importance of protecting the environment and establishing a sustainable society.

www.greenamerica.org