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# Event Industry Adopts Greener Practices

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*Eco-conscious catering from Windows Catering Co.*

**At first**, going green can take more time, more work and more money. But it's also what clients want, what the public wants, and what Mother Nature wants. Here we look at the practices and philosophies of event professionals who make going green make sense.

**The pro** Steve Kemble, Steve Kemble Event Design, Dallas

**The party** Creating an eco-conscious hospitality suite

An eco-conscious corporate client asked Steve Kemble to design and cost out a "green" suite. Although Kemble was already familiar with the space — a ballroom at the Four Seasons Resort and Club in Las Colinas, Texas — he had to invest plenty of time in sourcing green furnishings. "I believe in paying for education and therefore we absorbed these costs

versus passing them onto the client," Kemble says. With Fun Factory Events of Garland, Texas, Kemble created a comfortable space using recycled cardboard for check-in tables, end tables, coffee tables and ottomans. Cotton linen, green fresh floral, bamboo chiavari chairs and tan carpet completed the serene mood. "Trust me," he says, "our investment in time and therefore knowledge of what is out there in the green furnishings market has paid off for us tenfold, if not more!"

**The pro** Alina Zhukovskaya, Windows Catering Co., Alexandria, Va.

**The practice** Eco-friendly catering

This premier Washington caterer traces its commitment to environmentally friendly operations

“back to our restaurant days 21 years ago,” says Alina Zhukovskaya, director of marketing and public relations. “The more recent focus on the environment has certainly pushed us to be more conscious of our consumption, the food products and purveyors we use, and how we approach our clients with green options.” Windows has created a corporate sustainability policy:

- Sourcing sustainable seafood whenever possible and avoiding use of endangered seafood
- Boosting use of produce from eco-sensitive growers to more than 40 percent by year-end from 25 percent now
- Providing disposable paper products made from recycled content upon request
- Saving food scraps from prep to make sauces, stocks and soups
- Offering 100 percent organic menus upon request.



*The Outland festival uses green electricity from Sustainable Waves.*

**The pro** Mark McLarry, Sustainable Waves, Austin, Texas, and San Diego

**The product** Solar-powered stages, sound systems and lighting

For clients including the ESPY Awards, Pacific Gas & Electric, Sundance Channel, and Outside Lands and South by Southwest festivals, Sustainable Waves offers “sustainable energy solutions for the entertainment industry,” as company co-founder Mark McLarry says. Because the company provides solar-powered stages, sound systems and lighting, clients get a turnkey package. “No electricity or wiring is necessary, and we supply our own sound engineers and crew,” McLarry says. “We simply set up wherever you want us and turn on the music.”

**The pro** Lori Hill, Lori Hill Event Productions, Burtonsville, Md.

**The philosophy** Finding eco-friendly options for “just about everything”

Always an avid recycler — “Sending things to a landfill when they can be reused or recycled gives me chest pains” — Lori Hill says that seeing the 2006 movie “An Inconvenient Truth” sparked her interest in clean energy. She came home and “unplugged everything.” The same thoughtful approach she brings to her personal life, she brings to her events. “With my events, I look at all the components — venue, food and beverage, decor, etc. — and ask, ‘Am I using the most eco-friendly options out there?’” she says. She works off a lengthy checklist that covers everything from suggesting china rather than disposables and printing handouts on both sides of paper all the way to returning floral items such as curly willow to the florist for reuse. “Some clients roll their eyes,” she says, “but they go along with most of my suggestions.”

**The pro** Mandy Swanson, Kehoe Designs, Chicago



*Cans shine in a green centerpiece. Photo by Denise Starkey Photography.*

### **The party** Educating clients with “Ecouture”

To help clients see just how beautiful a green event can be, Kehoe Designs created its “Ecouture” event in August, where designers filled two of the company’s showrooms with decor elements including centerpieces made from aluminum cans, shredded pallet straps and plastic scraps, and plush pillows fashioned from fabric remnants. “Greener choices — organic floral, eco-fabric and environmentally friendly foam board and vinyl — generally cost more,” Swanson notes. “However, our rental items — furniture, fabrics, etc. — have had a good effect on our bottom line. We are designing and building smarter for more versatility and usability. We can measure cost-effectiveness with our utility bills.” Her team believes that higher costs run the risk of compromising the aesthetics of an event. “As a result, we don’t end up changing some of the environments we produce,” she says, “and instead control our

waste and recycle product after an event.”

**The pro** Peter Grazzini, Perfect Settings, Landover, Md.

### **The practice** Reducing trash flowing to landfills

Event rental is inherently green; “You’d be hard-pressed to find a business that more specifically addresses the reuse initiative,” says Peter Grazzini, head of Perfect Settings. But his growing concern about pollution prompted him to look at ways to cut the amount of trash his business generates, 90 percent of which is plastic (shrink-wrap, bags and sheeting) and cardboard. Last month, Perfect Settings kicked off a recycling program whereby the company will pick up plastic and cardboard from clients, bale it and send it to a recycling center. Also, the company will supply low-cost recycling bins, designed to store under bars, to collect recyclable glass, cans and plastic. Grazzini is waiting to see if lower trash-hauling bills will offset the cost of the baler. But after finding he purchased a whopping 37,314 pounds of plastic in the first eight months of the year, “Morally, I felt I needed to be more prudent and try to divert some of this plastic from area landfills,” he says.

**The pro** Laura McCulloch-Carter, Regal Tent Productions, Stoney Creek, Ontario

### **The practice** Creating a company “Giving Back Task Force”

To develop, assess and implement environmental initiatives, Regal has created a cross-functional team, comprising members of its human resources, purchasing, operations, and sales and marketing departments. “This was very important as it gave us the ability to assess the organization from 360 degrees,” says marketing director Lara McCulloch-Carter. The team created a long list of green ideas categorized by level of investment. Many ideas — such as carpooling to job sites and creating a “green suggestion” box — require virtually no cost or time. Clients “love” Regal’s green initiatives, McCulloch-Cater says, particularly the company’s practice of planting seven trees in honor of every new client.



*The bioswale at Henry V keeps rainwater from turning into urban runoff.*

**The pro** Matt Harper, Henry V, Portland, Ore.

**The practice** Leading by example

Event and meetings agency Henry V offers a rich array of green options to clients, such as using projected media in place of hard walls, which are costly and polluting to ship. The company even gives checklists to event attendees before they leave home with tips on how they can help keep their upcoming event green. But as the agency serving such eco-leading clients as North Face and KEEN, Henry V management realized it had to lead by example, says managing director Matt Harper. In 2003, the company turned a derelict building into its Silver LEED-certified head-quarters. The property features a landscaped bioswale that collects 100 percent of rainwater runoff. Office desks are made of pressed wheat board and soy-based glues, carpets of recycled plastic

fiber. The design maximizes use of natural light, cutting conventional overhead lighting requirements in half. The company gives tours of its building to engineers and architects who want to go green. “We make sustainability part of the work we do every day,” Harper says.

**The pro** Clayton Frech, Classic Party Rentals, Los Angeles

**The philosophy** Putting green operations at the executive level

With its sweeping consolidation push, Classic Party Rentals is not only changing the event rental landscape, its impressive purchasing power is changing how its vendor network does business. Last year, the company made sustainability a key factor in purchasing and formalized its SAVE — Sustainable Applications for a Viable Environment — initiative. In January, the company gave Clayton Frech, who worked for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the 1990s, the title of vice president of sustainability and operations. SAVE — which aims to reduce pollution and waste and to develop green best practices for clients — “has resulted in changes to how we purchase virtually everything, manage operations processes and dispose of waste,” Frech says. Although the lofty goals of the program will require initial implementation costs, “As our programs begin to take root, we believe our SAVE Initiative will be at least cost-neutral, with the potential to help drive revenue as the market for green events expands,” he says. “Certain sustainably manufactured products will be more expensive, but we plan to reduce costs such as energy, waste hauling and select supplies. Over time, we should be able to track both cost reductions and revenue increases.”

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