

Meeting the green education challenge

By  Leo Van De Polder

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What a difference a decade makes! Ten years ago, the retail environments industry was almost desperate for help in understanding "all that green stuff."



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Shop predecessor organisation A.R.E. had been inundated with requests for information. And a call for volunteers to determine what the association should do had generated the greatest response in the history of the association. These volunteers overwhelmingly chose education – particularly education on certification and credentials – as their greatest “green” need.

In the ensuing years, the association continued to hear about challenges with keeping informed on sustainability issues and maintaining credentials. Today, however, keeping current in the field may be perceived as simply part of the workday. Less than a third of respondents to the *2018 Shop Green Building Survey* find it “difficult” or “very difficult” for their organisation’s employees to stay abreast of green building issues, and 54% find it “neither easy nor difficult”.

Perhaps that’s partly because half of the organisations have a budget for staff education. And the methods they all use to inform themselves are readily available. More than two-thirds of the firms use magazine articles, and 59% use webinars and podcasts while nearly half allow staff to attend sessions at industry events. Other methods include in-house training (39%), online courses (25%), and industry books (18%).



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Challenges to keeping up

If it’s not always a piece of cake, what makes it difficult to keep up? Half of the respondents cite a heavy workload, while

budget and lack of individual interest were cited by 17% each. The top factor, however, is a perception of market need – 56% of survey respondents believe clients don't need for them to be conversant about green building.

This perception may not jibe with reality. While the proportion of retail projects using at least some green building strategies has dropped from last year's high of 95%, retailers indicate they're still using such strategies in 72% of projects this year, according to the survey. So it seems likely that retailers may expect suppliers to maintain at least a minimal knowledge base.



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Important topics

Regardless of their perception of client expectations, many respondents grasp the need to stay informed. Information on strategies for each green building topic mentioned in the survey was deemed at least “moderately important” to 59% or more of respondents.

Weighing heavily on their minds are energy efficiency and sourcing of products and materials, with 89% rating these topics at least “moderately important” to their company and 72% rating them “very” or “extremely” important. Waste minimisation strategies were deemed at least “moderately important” to 89% of respondents and “very” or “extremely” important to 65%.



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Credentials

At least 35% of responding companies find the need for expertise great enough to employ credentialed individuals (another 18% don't know whether their company employs any credentialed individuals).

Credentials administered by Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI) are the most popular: Eighteen percent employ LEED APs with specialty, 17% LEED APs without specialty, 8% LEED Green Associates, and 7% WELL APs. Other sustainability credentials listed on respondents' staffs include Green Globes Professional, Green Star Associate, and Green Star Professional.

Companies that do employ credentialed individuals tend to have few on staff; only 10% employ more than 15 credentialed individuals. Half of respondents are satisfied with their current number of credentialed employees; others incentivise more employees to obtain credentials or cite obstacles such as budget, time, and confusion over the proliferation of available credentials. Only 10% of companies employ individuals that hold more than one sustainability credential.

ABOUT LEO VAN DE POLDER

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