

Is corporate america leading way in sustainability?

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The Oldsmobile Vista Cruiser

Question: Who is the world's largest automaker?

Answer: In 2011, General Motors reclaimed it.

Tougher Question: Who purchases more cars than anyone else in the world?

Lesser Known Answer: Enterprise Rent-A-Car.

I actually have a relatively longterm relationship with both companies in very different ways.

We were a GM family growing up. Lots and lots of really large station wagons. My first car was a pumpkin orange 1977 Oldsmobile Vista Cruiser with no air conditioning, no FM radio, no roof rack, and no wood paneling (nice work dad). I took it four-wheeling once. And oddly enough, my mother even has a longtime professional relationship with GM's CEO Dan Akerson and his wife.

My ties with Enterprise are both personal and professional. I've rented cars from the flagship, as well as subsidiary brands Alamo and National. And as an outside consultant I helped manage media relations for the company through what I would call its "coming out period" between 2005-08. During that time I also edited the company's book, "Exceeding Customer Expectations," and was heavily involved with two major announcements.

One of those announcements was the 50 Million Tree Pledge. Made in 2007 as part of Enterprise's 50th anniversary, the Pledge was a partnership with The Arbor Day Foundation to plant 50 million trees over 50 years at a cost to the company of \$50 million dollars.

The other was a \$25 million gift to the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center — the largest independent plant research center in the world with which I also have ties. The gift established the Enterprise Rent-A-Car Institute for Renewable Fuels which focuses on creating next generation alternative fuel technologies from environmentally sound plant and algae sources.

Were both of these moves great PR? Of course.

But while many companies talk sustainability — often because they feel like they have to, and generally focusing on things like "robust" recycling programs (yawn) — Enterprise has taken actionable, real steps that go beyond mere PR, and towards being a more sustainable

corporate citizen, which is especially important for the owner of the world's largest fleet of vehicles.



GM's Reuss, Enterprise's Taylor, and Gunther during the Danforth Center panel discussion

"Enterprise focuses on the 'triple bottom line' – economic, social and environmental sustainability," according to Lee Broughton, who leads corporate sustainability for Enterprise.

"Understanding this balance – not just in our company and the car rental segment, but within the travel industry and business overall – helps us manage our business for the long term. It also gives us competitive advantage by driving costs down, improving our environmental performance, and being a better neighbor and employer."

And with this as a backdrop, I was more than interested to attend a panel discussion at the Danforth Center held last week that was moderated by leading sustainability writer Marc Gunther about corporate sustainability featuring Enterprise Chairman & CEO Andy Taylor and GM North America chief Mark Reuss.

It was fascinating not only because these two giants of industry were willing to discuss head-on the issue of sustainability by companies whose core products produce polluting emissions, but because they are actually trying to do something about it.

Smart strategy. Smart reputation management.

"The cutting edge in sustainability is in corporate America right now," Danforth Center President Dr. Jim Carrington told Gunther prior to the session. "It's not government. It's not schools."

Could Dr. Carrington be correct? Is corporate America leading the way in sustainability? Understanding that it's both good PR and oftentimes good business, the answer is more than not, "yes."

Fonte: Forbes, 12 June 2012. [Portal]. Disponível em: <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/marketshare/2012/06/12/is-corporate-america-leading-way-in-sustainability/2/>>. Acesso em: 12 June 2012.