

**THE GREENING OF MARKETING IN A RECREATION ENVIRONMENT**

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**Abstract**

**RESEARCH PAPER:** The Greening of Marketing in a Recreation Environment

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No matter where you look, whether it is businesses, neighborhoods, or schools, individuals are finding ways to change their everyday lives to become more environmentally aware. The same holds true for marketing tactics and facility designs for recreation department among universities. Colleges and universities have been encouraged to rethink their existing procedures and processes to see if there is anything they can change to help the environment. Universities have realized that sustainable design projects are the most desirable and are the best decision for the institutions long-term finances (Kennedy, 2010). Facilities that have not jumped aboard the green train need to at least understand the reason why going green is a positive path to take. If you are debating on whether to go green or not, the average school that is completely green saves 33% on energy and 32% on water bills annually (Whelan, 2007). With the research conducted and from work experience, this study attempts to show the most current and popular trends to “go green” in a recreation facility at a university.

The greening of marketing in a recreation environment

**Background Information**

Today, an education alone will not get you a job over another candidate. Showing you can balance a job, your school work and participation in activities will make you a more appealing prospect. When students are choosing a university to attend for their education, the extracurricular activities that the university has to offer are a major factor. Therefore the quality of the campus recreation facility has now become one aspect in their decision-making. Forty years ago, recreation facilities were said to be of the highest architectural stature for years to come (Kampf, 2010). That has all changed now with the students demanding that facilities be state-of-the-art with quality programs to participate in, for example intramurals, fitness classes, club sport, and extramural, versus just the traditional ‘drop-in’ recreation areas (Kampf, 2010). By the same token, when directors of recreation facilities meet with building contractors, they aren’t just configuring square footage and designing floor plans; they are discussing “green” concepts to make the facility environmentally friendly to the campus and more welcoming to the students.

Sustainability and going green are common terms known around businesses and society. The definition of going green is “tending to preserve environmental quality (as by being recyclable, biodegradable, or nonpolluting).” Similar to going green, sustainability “is of, relating to or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). For the purpose of the current study, the definition of going green is the changes a recreation center has done in a way to reduce costs and become more environmentally friendly. Sustainability will be the use of better resources to create a cost efficient environment.

Recreation centers are redesigning, renovating, and rebuilding to incorporate the green concept from the fitness equipment selected, marketing tactics, environmental changes, to the basic design of the facility. Multiple factors tie into why a recreation center should either update their existing practices or plan on decreased participation, whether it is to save money for the facility or attract more patrons to use it on a regular basis. Universities across the country are developing and sharing ways to go green via shifting traditional stationaries to electronic (e.g., utilizing electronic resources instead of printing and sending out flyers and brochures) to help other campuses stay current. Below are ways that universities have changed their processes to become more sustainable.

Recreation centers are not a facility to build if you are hoping to have small energy bills. San Diego State University's recreation center's average annual energy bill is \$300,000. By making small changes, that 10-15% decrease in a bill is a tremendous savings. SDSU's Aquatic Center has a roof consisting of 5,000 solar panels that are used to heat the pool, costing \$100,000 to install. Not even a year after construction, the solar panels have practically paid for themselves by the amount of money saved on energy bills (Steinbach, 2008). According to Smart Money, a financial website, switching from conventional incandescent to compact fluorescent light bulbs, a typical household of five can save an average of \$270 a year (Scherzer, 2008). If a house of five can save that much, just imagine how much a recreation center that hosts thousands of patrons a day could save? It is harder to market these green products to consumers because of their cost. The fluorescent light bulbs mentioned above are quite costly, but the purchaser

needs to realize that over time, the intensity of results they will get from their purchase will be worth it in the long run (Gordon, 2008).

Universities have strayed away from building a new facility because of an obvious reason: funding. Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana is an example of how expensive it is to build a new facility. This expansion and renovation cost BSU \$39 million to add on 200,000 square feet. In this project they added a 5-court gym, 3-level fitness room, indoor turf field, 34-foot climbing wall, outdoor pursuit's center, and new office spaces (Services, 2011). However, the economy is not going in the best direction for every university to be asking for money from the government to help with paying for a construction project. Therefore, student fees are major resource that universities have been obtaining their money from to make these amazing facilities.

According to Kampf (2010), 55% of public institutions and 63% of large institutions use a dedicated student fee to fund the construction of a new facility in the last three years. Students at the University of Georgia agreed and put forth a petition to pay a \$3 a semester "green-fee" to help fund the sustainable project at their facility (Kennedy, 2010). With these funds, University of Georgia expects to generate around \$150,000 in 1-year. Ball State University increased the student's recreation fees from \$45 a semester in the 2009-2010 school years to \$90 a semester in 2010-2011 school year. Of the 22,083 students enrolled in the fall of 2010, the 18,183 on-campus students who were automatically charged the fee contributed around \$1,636,470 in just that semester (Ball State University, 2010). This is not including the amount of money invested by the faculty, staff, or alumni members who wanted to use the facility as well. Instead of

focusing on the fees, patrons are enjoying the architectural, environmentally friendly and technological aspects that the facility brings to campus and to their well-being.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this research paper is to help recreation centers understand the importance of going green and different ways they can implement green strategies into their daily routines. Some questions that were brought up in the process of developing this paper are as follows:

1. Does your campus have a Recreation Center?
2. When was your current facility constructed, and did you make any changes to your design and/or selection of material and products to 'go green'?
3. Is any of your fitness equipment eco-friendly?
4. Do you do internal marketing?
5. How much do you spend in producing print material each fiscal year?
6. Do you currently use soy ink cartridges?
7. What methods of marketing has your department done to eliminate the use of paper in your processed?
8. In what ways does your recreation facility help in the movement to recycle more?
9. Have you ever participated in a going green competition with other departments or universities?
10. Does your university support a going green campaign?
11. Why, if at all, is going green important to your university and recreation center
12. Does your recreation center have a person or team in charge of producing green campaigns to incorporate
13. How do you involve campus organizations in helping your recreation center go green?

### **Review of Literature**

Dating back to the 1970s when the United States suffered a traumatic oil spill, this sustainability phenomenon started its spread (Go green with green living, 2007). To gain the interest of the rest of society, a nationally recognized day was created to focus on going green: Earth Day. The first Earth Day began on April 20, 1970 (Nelson, 1980). The

amount of trash that Americans throw away each year instead of recycle is amazing. Americans throw away 25 billion Styrofoam coffee cups each year and 2.5 million plastic beverage bottles every single hour (Look Great, Lose Weight, Save Money, 2010). But recycling is not the only way to go green; it goes far beyond that.

Recreation Centers have recently incorporated sustainability into their facilities within the past 20 years (Kampf, 2010). There is a phrase that says, “you get what you paid for.” Construction committees that used to be assembled of the Baby Boomers felt that society should build facilities quick and cheap (Kennedy, 2007). However, plan managers of facilities often express their concern of high cost of operating and maintaining the facility that is built on time deadline versus quality deadline. Having a facility that lasts longer and in better condition is more important than a building that is put up in half the time. But, by implementing green designs into your facility, you are not only focusing on the long-term well-being of your staff, students and university, but also the community and the Earth itself (Kennedy, 2007).

The Student Recreation Complex at Arizona State University has made changes to their lighting in order to save money. They have decided to only light their outdoor facilities when in use. As for the types of bulbs they use, the choice of light bulbs was all high-efficiency florescent lights. The T5 bulbs that they use are 40% more energy efficient, run cooler, provide a ven light spread, have a longer bulb life and can turn on and off with limited cool-down or warm up time (Student Recreation Complex, 2010). By the University of California adjusting the time that the custodial crew comes in to clean their Recreation Center to their open recreation hours, they approached a 25%

savings on their energy bill. To get the support of the staff, California has offered a towel-locker membership to those individuals who find alternative ways of transportation to work versus driving (Steinbach, 2008). By providing incentives to individuals, they are more motivated to participate in the going green challenges that their university has implemented. In a typical office building, electronics such as computers and imaging equipment, consume 26 percent of the energy used. By using energy-efficient products that meet the U.S. Energy Star standard could reduce an office's energy consumption up to 40 percent (Case, 2007). These are a few examples of how to reduce your energy consumption by changing your ways to a sustainable use.

The fitness center is a room in the recreation center that can be a big focus in going green. Manufactures are creating equipment that helps make this even easier for facilities. Woodway, a popular fitness equipment company, have created the EcoMill, a treadmill that is all green and manually powered. By using no electricity, the EcoMill generates power by the user while they exercise (Woodway, 2010). The University of North Texas's recreation center has claimed to be the largest human power plant. They have implemented 36 elliptical machines that generate energy as they work out. A typical 30-minute workout could power a laptop computer for one hour, power a television for 10 minutes, or burn a light bulb for two-and-a half hours (Denmon, 2010). A bonus to this specific elliptical is that with the airflow that is generated from the machine running reduces the air conditioning bills for the facility.

A room that may go unnoticed when developing ideas of things to transform is the bathrooms. By purchasing motion activated hand sanitizer stations, hands free towel

dispensers and water faucets in bathrooms will reduce the number of things that patrons actually have to touch, thus reducing the number of germs spread. These motion activated faucets and towel dispensers also save money for the department because only the necessary amount of paper towel is disbursed to individuals and the water is not accidentally left on if a patron leaves without turning it off. Even considering the direction the water flushes in the toilets can be affective. By having the water flush up for liquid waste and down for solid waste can reduce your water bill and save water for the facility (Dabbs, 2010).

For safety precautions, drinking fountain stations are required in a facility, especially in a recreation center. By changing your typical water fountain to a hands-free Hydration Station, you can reduce the number of plastic bottles used daily. Every time someone uses the station to fill up his or her own personal water bottle, the fountain has a counter to show that individual exactly how many plastic bottles have been saved. Southern Illinois University Carbondale has implemented this water station and saved more than 3,000 plastic bottles within the first month (Schneider, 2010).

There are other options for the department or campus if they cannot afford to redesign or renovate the facility. The office is one place to start. With the access to technology today, almost every staff member has a computer to use. By turning off the computer screens when there is no one in the office can reduce the total energy bill. Individuals having their own printers, coffee pots, or even microwaves can also shoot that bill sky high. Eliminating personal appliances for each person will reduce that bill as well (Marsan, 2007).

Re-designing and renovating a facility are not the only ways to improve its sustainability. To promote your programs and the facility in general, you have to do some marketing. Marketing includes flyers, brochures, registration forms for programs, posters, and more. By adjusting how a recreation center conducts its marketing can reduce the amount it costs to run that marketing program, overall decreasing the department's total expenses. Below are examples of how universities and businesses around the country have performed changes in their marketing techniques that have created a dramatic effect on their budget, perspective from the community and the campus.

Florida Atlantic University's Recreation director, Rob Frey, said "if I have to print more than one page of a non-official document from my printer, I use the two- or four-pages-to-a-page command, and I have recommended my staff do the same." FAU has made it a regulation that all photocopiers be converted to double-sided printing (Steinbach, 2008). Maine's Hunt encourages their staff to use recycled paper. If only one side of the paper is used, it has to be recycled. Western Illinois University used to print hundreds of guides for their students about the Intramurals they had going on, but now they have posted the information online (Steinbach, 2008). The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has not gone completely paperless for their marketing materials in their Recreation Center but they do print their semester guides, aquatic brochures and ice skating brochures on recycled paper (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010). National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) president Jodie Adams mentioned that they only purchase copy paper that is made from 30% postconsumer waste (Adams, 2009).

For businesses it is hard to not print material for meetings or conferences. Without that printed material, the chances of potential clients remembering a business' information is slim to none. A way to avoid printing is with the use of kiosks. NRPA has provided all of the information and marketing materials that is presented at conferences on these kiosks and the attendees are able to download the material they want (Everett, 2009). Along with the kiosks, for those conferences, the attendees are encouraged to register online. For the ones that fax or mail their registrations in, they are charged a processing fee (Everett, 2009).

As much as businesses and recreation centers try, eliminating all print material is almost impossible. Therefore, if it is completely necessary to print, then companies should consider a couple options for printing. The first would be to use soy ink cartridges. Soy ink cartridges are made from non-toxic soybean oil, the same that used in cooking oils, dressings and thousands of foods and beverages (Proia, 2001). By using soy ink, departments are not only using natural products, but also helping with American agriculture. Proia lists reasons as to why it is beneficial to use soy ink:

1. Creates a rich, vivid color that pops off the page
2. Helps prevent pollution
3. Comparably priced to most petroleum-based inks.
4. Accessibility: 25% of the nation's offset printers use them
5. Safe, sustainable, and renewable resource.

A second option would be to purchase 100 percent recycled toner cartridges like the NRPA has chosen to do (Adams, 2009). Once a cartridge is empty, be sure to remember to recycle it. Ball State University has installed 65 new televisions around their new recreation center and on these televisions they have the ability to have their programs and announcements scrolling throughout the day. These televisions are

reducing the number of print material that needs to be produced. Also, they are on a timer so that when the building is closed, the televisions turn off and save money on the bills.

Recreation centers may choose varying channels when marketing promotions including word of mouth, handouts, websites, cold-calls, text messages, or letters. One that has become popular is the use of social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. This is a cost-free place to do marketing and promoting. The University of Utah in 2008 had 500 season tickets to sell and after posting an announcement on their Facebook page, within two hours, all 500 tickets were sold (Steinbach, 2010). Having the capability to reach hundreds of individuals through these networks, a department has the opportunity to provide information about upcoming events, scores from previous games, or cancellations of programs at no cost.

At a typical university, after marketing programs to patrons, if they are interested in what you are offering, they will need to register for it. Some universities are still utilizing the paper registration method, but research shows that organizations can routinely save between 80-90% by utilizing an online registration method instead (TelSpan, 2009). You are not only saving the paper from the registration itself, but you are saving time for your personnel and money. If credit cards are being used for the registration, the online version has the ability to process those payments in real time instead of having to wait for a person to process it manually. This is also very convenient for your patrons. When they are ready to register for your program, if the office is closed, they would be out of luck for that day at least if paper registrations were in use. However,

with online registrations, it is available for the patron whenever they get the chance to complete the registration.

### **Discussions and Limitations**

The purpose of this research was to help recreation centers understand the importance of going green and different ways they can implement green strategies into their daily routines. Though many reasons as to why a campus should consider the different transformations that they could implement, there is also a downside for any changes. The same concerns that appear for general construction projects will appear for a sustainable project. These concerns are zoning requirements, permits, unexpected budget cuts, or a failure to complete it on time (Kennedy, 2010). I feel the biggest concern for both sustainable and general construction projects are the unexpected budget cuts. If the plans show that you are going to have treadmills in your facility that will power the entire fitness center, and the word gets out that you are intending on having those, when they do not show up because of budget cuts, the patrons will get disappointed. The true determination if the facility really fulfilled their sustainable goals is not when the center first cuts the grand opening ribbon and the patrons come piling in, it is when the first few months, or even days have passed and the population and staff can truly tell the difference in the facility and budget.

If a recreation center decides to go green and add some new processes to their daily procedures, then they must decide how they are going to fund them and which changes they are going to make. As discussed, a variety of universities have instituted a student fee that helps pay for the construction fee. By implementing this, the users are

helping pay for the facility itself. I feel that this is a perfectly logical operation to run. The faculty and staff members, alumni, and possibly community members all have to pay a fee to use the facility, why should the students be any different. Alumni could say that they have paid their tuition in the past and possibly donating money currently and the faculty and staff put in the time to teach the students so they shouldn't have to pay. But with the economy today, you can almost never attend any event or join a club for no cost. Therefore, having the students pay a fee is a great idea of how to help pay for the facility.

When making the determination on what changes to make there are huge ones, or quite small ones. If you have the privilege of having a bigger financial pocket, then go for the bigger changes such as solar panel ceilings, or install televisions to promote your programs instead of printing out thousands of recreation guides. If you do not have the funds to try out these dramatic changes, then try the smaller changes such as having recycle bins around the facility for bottles and paper, and using the other side of the paper for printing. There are hundreds of changes that a university could make to go green if they truly wanted to. Funding should never be the reason that something is not attempted to better the environment and the university.

With the amount of information that was found pertaining to this particular topic, there were some limitations that were also uncovered. The first limitation that was discovered while conducting this research was that there is not a lot of information found on the number of universities that have gone green within the last few decades. By having that information you would have been able to see that it is a greater trend than just a few universities making a small change here or there. If a university were on the fence of

going green, having other universities to benchmark their changes would be helpful. This information would also make it a stronger topic to debate.

A second limitation that I discovered was the lack of primary data. All of the information that was presented in the paper was pulled from outside sources and used to create a strong background of the topic. If primary data was found, a specific topic could have been focused on and targeted versus having a broad view of the entire topic of going green. With the use of primary data, the information that was being searched for to answer the questions listed in the purpose of study section above could have been answered specifically.

The final limitation that was found in the research was the amount of information that was readily available about the number of patrons that were at the facility after a recreation center went green. Having information stating that the number of patrons increased by 10% every year after the new facility and green aspects were implemented would have given a hard number proving that these tactics work. In the planning process, universities usually require the recreation center to give a projection on what their participation statistics will be because of the construction of the new facility. This way the recreation center and university can see that they have reached their goals. To overcome these limitations in future studies, I would suggest conducting a student that collects primary data with the focus on universities that have gone green versus not, creating specific search questions for the survey that will directly support your research, and what the percentage of user usage was before and after the transformation to a sustainable facility.

## **Conclusion**

After researching ways that universities and business have performed to go green, I see that there is no reasons as to why companies would not want join in this trend. Changing the light bulbs in your facility, or the ink in your printer are small adjustments that you can make without demolishing the facility completely and still create a positive effect. With some universities and companies unaware of the outcomes that could result in making these changes creates a potential market for the businesses that provide these improvements to gain clients. By sharing the basic changes first and then selling the major adjustments, companies such as Woodway, could create a lot of new business for themselves.

With the economy today, it is important to save every penny that you can. You will lose patrons that were previously associated with your recreation center because they refuse to pay the increased membership fees. However, as a department if you are one of the many that have transformed to a more green facility, you can use these changes to sell your membership. Once the patron knows exactly what they are paying for, they are going to be more likely to join because they know they are becoming a member of a facility that is not harming the environment as much as others.

You cannot stop marketing completely or you will lose the amount of information about your programs and facility that is surrounding the community and campus. As stated above, Recreation Services at Ball State University is a great example of how their marketing department is starting to go green. Departments don't have to go out and purchase expensive software and televisions to go green, just reduce the amount of print

material that you create. By developing one general poster that has the information about your website and the department that you are representing will let the patrons know that to get more information about that program, I should go to the website. But, if it is in your budget to create give away prizes, then incorporate two ideas into one. For example, if you are creating a promotional t-shirt to give to the campus, place your website, phone number or a summary of the programs you have to offer on the back or in the design. This way the patrons will get freebies and the information in one.

For future research I would suggest at least four things. The first would be to use primary data as well as secondary data. By creating questions for your study it will provide the researcher direct answers will create a more powerful study. Secondly, when collecting that primary data, send the questionnaire to both public and private universities. This will obtain the information about the type of universities that are making these changes. Next, I would suggest sending those questions to recreation centers that have just been renovated as well as ones that are aged. This will give you data as to why the facilities decided to make the changes and reasons as to why the others have held back. Finally, I would suggest working with multiple facilities that you know have gone green, and study them for at least one year after their transformation. After this year, you will be able to compare the savings the department made from those changes. With this information, other centers will be able to see comparable data to help make their decision to go green. I truly believe that implementing some techniques into your facility that establishes yourself as a green friendly center will be both beneficial to the facility itself, and the environment as a whole.

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