

By Derek Hairon, Jersey Kayak Adventures

Going green touches the bottom line



For a small company like Jersey Kayak Adventures meeting Green and eco standards can seem like yet another distraction from the daily task of running a business. It can all look like a load of hassle at a time when holding down costs is more important. Some might argue that eco credentials during a recession are considered less important by consumers.

Yet, when staff at Jersey Kayak Adventures and our sister company Jersey Walk Adventures looked at customer responses we discovered that our green awards were giving us a competitive edge. Many customers reported that eco awards were a positive factor and encouraged people to book a guided kayak or walking tour.

It is not just clients who have spotted the importance of green standards. We know that in the travel and leisure industry guide books there are separate sections on eco friendly companies, and a listing can help give a business an extra competitive edge and catch media attention.

Becoming more environmentally conscious also saves money. Whether it is the installation of low energy light bulbs, using a different font style to save printer ink, reassessing the need to print single/double sided or not at all, or better scheduling of vehicle journeys, it can impact on your balance sheet. Certainly EcoActive certification has made us look more closely at costs and work practices.

By switching to online and advance bookings, Jersey Kayak Adventures saw both environmental and cost benefits. By employing office staff we improved the booking process and got better group numbers on tours. We also managed to schedule events better. This improved profitability and reduced vehicle running costs. The trick was to look closely at our operations and the EcoActive and Green Tourism standards were a good focus.

Over time little actions can make larger impacts. By changing our brochures we extended their life span so they do not go out of date at the end of each year with a consequent reduction in waste and print costs.

Customers also often respond positively to environmental initiatives. On kayak tours both staff and clients are encouraged to pick up discarded bits of fishing gear from remote beaches. Some clients tend to treat this as a competition for who can bring back the most. The current record is a large wooden cable drum which ended up being recycled into a coffee table.

The use of tap water in reusable cycle bottles instead of bottled water is encouraged and on overnight stays at Seymour tower clients are asked to remove excess packaging on packed food. This has the added advantage of lightening their baggage and encourages people to buy locally produced fresh products. Clients who arrive by bus or bicycle are offered a discount.

If staff are knowledgeable and enthused they are also more likely to work well and customers appreciate staff knowledge. Our staff are often the first "locals" visitors have a chance to talk with, so in 2012 we aim to get staff trained to the Bronze Badge Guide standard. Each is an ambassador for Jersey at a time when customer service is a key factor in getting repeat business.

The eco credentials of a business are definitely becoming more important. Organisations – particularly in the UK – are starting to ask about our green, corporate social responsibility and supplier screening policies. At some stage the big local firms that deal with large contracts are going to start asking their smaller contractors and suppliers about this. It's better to be up to speed before this starts to become the norm.

At least for Jersey Kayak Adventures eco policies have had a positive impact on the bottom line of our balance sheet.

