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The Green Standard- Why Green Building is not a Trend

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The environmental Greening of America, has reached such a fever pitch that literally everyone seems well versed on the topics of sustainability, all natural, and an all-around sustainable lifestyle: from politicians on both sides of the presidential race, to the local bike shop, and even the international oil conglomerates. The Green train is no longer boarding. Rather, everyone has already found a comfortable seat, and has settled in for the long haul.

If we step away from the media hype and the "Going Green" chats with neighbors, and begin thinking about who can really make our society more sustainable, more ecologically friendly, more Green, the answer is designers and developers. From car design and product developers, to building design and real estate developers, the green scheme has two parts. The creativity comes from the designer, but the developer puts the idea into action. It is these two together that make a Greener society possible.

Truly, the real estate design & development field has the biggest opportunity to make a significant impact on the greening of America. According to the United States Green Building Council (USGBC), buildings consume a staggering 35% of all energy, and 65% of all electricity used in the United States.* Thus, improvements in this industry, incremental or major, have a profound and substantial impact. Recently, much progress has been made in designing and developing Green Buildings-buildings whose environmental impact is minimized, and the quality of life of their occupants is maximized. So much have these improvements changed the way that buildings are designed and constructed, that if a traditional, Non-Green, retail project is started today, it is highly probable that it will be obsolete before opening day. This obsolescence concept is the same as designing and developing more efficient vehicles. If you had the option to build two cars, one that gets 18 miles to the gallon, or one that gets 35 miles per gallons, but costs 2% more to build, the choice is obvious, and that is the exact scenario that we are dealing with when we talk about Green Building.

Due to an increasingly aware customer base, government mandates, and money-saving features, Green building is now the norm for structure design and development. Governments are on board the green train as well, with municipalities in many of the country's largest metropolitan areas having passed legislation requiring that municipal buildings over 10,000 SF be sustainable.* Many of these municipalities have gone so far as to support real estate in sales tax abatements. San Francisco has gone the farthest, mandating that all construction, both public and private, be LEED Rated. LEED is USGBC's Green Building Certification System proving buildings meet their requirements, such as increased energy efficiency, to be

deemed "Green Buildings." The question is no longer, "Do we go Green?" The question is "How Green can we go with our budget?"

Yet, in a free market like ours, more important than these mandates are the informed customers, who expect ecologically friendly retailers. Anyone who is an experienced retailer will say that listening to the customer is a key to a successful retail venture. The second the customer is ignored, retailers begin to fail. Customers are demanding green products and retailers are reacting. Retail giants like Wal-Mart, Lowe's, Home Depot, Crate & Barrel are all taking steps to cut their carbon footprint, and bring Green retail locations to market.

Real estate developers also have to listen to their customers, the retailers. Due to customer pressure, and a desire to do the right thing, retailers are demanding Green LEED Rated sustainable retail spaces to lease. Just like the retailers, the developers are listening to their customers, and they are reacting by providing LEED Rated retail space. Although this costs the developer more money upfront, in the end they can demand higher rent for Green Spaces due to demand for sustainable spaces, even in this slow economy. Depending on the lease terms, either the retailers or developers recoup some money via positive publicity and lower utility costs.

Opus, the world's largest real estate developer, proves this point by stating that they will no longer build non-sustainable buildings.* Other retail development giants like CBL and Regency have full time LEED Accredited Professionals working to ensure that their developments are as sustainable as possible. Powerhouses Simon Property Group, owner of the Battlefield Mall, and General Growth go as far as to publish their carbon footprint data each year to show their commitment.

The notion of green as a trend is over. Throughout the food chain, from customer to international real estate developer, everyone has signed up to make Green the real estate design and development a standard.

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