



Sense and sustainability

Ivan Ross and Nina James

In a world which is rapidly coming to grips with the colossal implications our impact has on the land and environment, as architects we are in a prime position to make a significant contribution to the solution. We are armed with the knowledge and ability to design and create a world which will efficiently meet the needs of current generations, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. All we lack is the awareness, the motivation and the audacity to ask for more from our projects and clients. As urban designers, architects, interior designers and project managers we have a moral obligation to take a stand and wholeheartedly lead our clients and consultant teams to design solutions that do not degrade our environment.

Nina James
Green Team Leader, Woods Bagot

The Green Team

Several years ago at Woods Bagot we recognised that environmental sustainability needed to be a core part of our design approach. This changed the way we responded to briefs, the way we selected staff, and the kinds of projects we aggressively pursued. In 2008, Woods Bagot can now be confident that our profile has changed and that we are known for our sustainable design capability and services.

The buildings we design will be around for decades and can have an enduring impact on our climate. Initially our sustainability focus was 100% on the work, but we soon realised that to be consistent and credible to both our clients and staff we needed to get our own house in order and reduce our direct impact on the environment. This article outlines our journey to date in reducing the environmental impact of our organisation and operations and our plans for the future. We hope this may be a useful study to inform other organisations in their journeys down this path.

Like many organisations, we struggled initially with how to tackle this practically and effectively. Then our staff showed us the way.

In 2005, a small number of Woods Bagot staff began to feel frustrated that the company was not taking the issue of climate change seriously enough nor getting behind the solution for global warming. Small pools of activity began to muster an interest within the staff teams, to instigate change in the way Woods Bagot behaved as an international player. We wanted to get involved, make a contribution, and feel that at the end of our working week we were having a positive impact on the environment.

This group of passionate but frustrated employees formed what is today commonly known within the company as the Green Team. It was relatively easy to build momentum; there were plenty of quick wins in terms of simple things that could be done to reduce the environmental footprint of each of our studios—an objective identified early by the group.

The Green Team instigated a great idea to drive these quick wins, as an inter-studio 'sustainability challenge'. A simple sustainability scorecard was developed and the studio that improved the most over a defined period was awarded a prize. The objective was to instigate a cultural change within Woods Bagot, to inspire our teams, to arm them with the knowledge and confidence to be bold in their approach to sustainable design.

The response from the wider staff base was overwhelming and illustrated two key two points. Firstly, that the staff already knew a lot about reducing their ecological footprint, and secondly, that there was already overwhelming support behind the cause. Interestingly, the majority of responses came from younger members of staff indicating the generational differences in the views on this issue.

Common sense steps

Out of this challenge, a number of simple but effective changes were driven through all our global studios. These included switching to green power, implementing recycling programs, minimising printing and ensuring lights and electronic equipment, including PCs, were switched off at night. Points were also awarded for items such as the number of staff obtaining Green Star, BREEAM or LEED accreditation, delivering local seminars on sustainability and undertaking related research.

Woods Bagot is an international firm, which prides itself on the modus operandi of 'One Studio Global', whereby we promote and encourage cross pollination of ideas between national and international studios. The Green Team has been an excellent illustration of how this works on the ground. As staff move between studios for projects, word passes around about green initiatives occurring in other studios.

This simple competition had an immediate effect on the studios. It also allowed us to map the change quite distinctly. By way of annual comparison of results, we saw which studios were taking it seriously and which had fallen behind.

Making a commitment: Going carbon neutral

The Green Teams were intuitive enough to recognise that they were taking most initiative with sustainability and that, while they were supportive, senior management's contribution had been relatively minimal. We needed to clearly demonstrate, by actions not just words, that the board was committed to the sustainability journey.

The Green Team had already begun an investigation of how we might offset the environmental impact that we could not yet eliminate. In mid-October 2006 our Director of Sustainability, Mark Kelly, and Ivan Ross, Chief Operating Officer, engaged with the Green Team to determine exactly what was involved in acquiring carbon credits. Together with a few key Green Team members, we investigated schemes in Australia and the UK. We were genuinely surprised by how little it cost to purchase the offsets, although we discovered that the UK schemes cost roughly '£ for \$', i.e. around 2.5 times more than the Australian scheme for the same amount of offset (We would expect that as the markets for trading offsets become more efficient, these differentials will reduce).

After analysing the costs and benefits, we selected the Australian scheme. Because Australia was not a signatory to Kyoto at the time, there were no Kyoto compliant Gold Standard schemes in Australia to invest in. As a result our provider, Climate Friendly, selected a Gold Standard scheme in New Zealand. The New Zealand location was not entirely ideal as some of our employees in the Northern Hemisphere and even in Australia would have preferred the investment to occur closer to home.

We worked through the numbers with Climate Friendly and presented to the board which was unanimous in its support. Within one week, the contracts had been signed, the carbon credits had been purchased and we were 100% carbon neutral.

The intangible benefits

As outlined by Spilker and Sheahan in *Public #3: WorkLife (2007)*, one of the key drivers for Generation Y is to make a contribution. By engaging with the efforts of our Green Team in a sincere and committed way, through supporting their sustainability initiatives and building on them through the purchase of carbon credits, we believe this has generated significant benefits in relation to hiring, retaining and motivating quality staff.

We were fortunate that the passion of our staff bubbled to the surface in a very transparent way, making it easier for our leadership to engage with them. If this is not transparent in your business then we would encourage you to stir the pot a little—create the forums for your staff to engage.

DIY vs consultant support

Going carbon neutral was just the first step, and while we have neutralised our impact on carbon emissions, the key is continual reduction of our environmental footprint. A key question that has to be considered is whether to acquire credits directly or operate through a provider. There are a number of trade-offs in choosing between these two options:

/ Skills – Unless you have the skills in-house, it is far simpler to use an external provider as they can do much of the legwork for you. We were fortunate in that we had collected most of the data we needed through the studio sustainability challenge, but it was helpful to have the independent external input and validation of our process and data.

/ Speed – It took us less than two months to progress from initial investigations to becoming climate neutral.

/ Costs – We were hoping to quickly extend the scheme to our staff to allow them to become carbon neutral. However, using a consultant can mean that only 60% of the payment actually goes towards credits. While for the business this was a choice between internal time and cost versus external cost, for an individual it is a more significant issue. As a result we are investigating the option to aggregate and trade credits directly as a more appealing mechanism for staff.

/ Choice – A further issue with using a provider is that you are limited to the investment schemes that they offer (although we would note that most consultants are now offering several investment options to address this issue).

Either way, we felt strongly that we needed to better understand our current status in order to reduce emissions. We needed to identify where our weaknesses were and where the majority of our carbon emissions are coming from. A team has diligently gathered all the data from each office and has begun the rigorous process of analysis.

Checklist People

Internal	Points
1 Regular Studio Green Team meeting (2 per month)	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
2 Studio representation at Global Green Team Meetings (min 75%)	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
3 20% of staff to be Green Star Accredited	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
4 Four internal sustainability presentations (attended by minimum 80% of staff) (attended by minimum 60% of staff)	<input type="checkbox"/> 2

External	Points
1 WB to present ESD capability to a new or existing client (min 2)	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
2 Send ESD capability statement to selected client data base (minimum 40)	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
4 One key staff member to be on external ESD committee or group	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
5 20% of staff to attend at least four external sustainability seminars/exhibitions	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
two external sustainability seminars/exhibitions	<input type="checkbox"/> 2

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Has your studio fully embraced cultural change? (Minimum of 50% of checklist complete) 10 points

Maximum Total 100 points

Checklist Place

Internal	Points
1 Recycling: paper (colour and b&w), cardboard, glass, plastic, aluminium and IT	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
2 All stationery products to be from recycled and local sources and recyclable	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
3 Computers, including screens, 'Off' policy at the end of the day	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
4 Set up office ESD email notice board & real notice board in studio	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
5 Printer default set to double sided printing	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
6 Set up Green Product Library in studio	<input type="checkbox"/> 3

External	Points
1 Sponsor or contribute to once local ESD event	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
2 Sponsor or contribute to one regional ESD event	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
3 Sponsor or contribute to local non-profit organisation	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
4 1% of billable hours to pro bono work (approx 20 hrs per staff member per year)	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
5 Implement Innovative ESD initiative in the local community	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

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Big picture

We have encouraged each other to get our own house in order, re-using, reducing and recycling to minimise our ecological footprint. However, with these tasks being addressed, we have looked for more significant objectives and road maps to really focus on how Woods Bagot can contribute globally to sustainable development and climate change. Together we have developed big picture objectives:

- / Targeting staff individually—to encourage them to live their lives in a more environmentally friendly manner
- / Changing the way we deliver our product, processes and methodology in creating working and living environments
- / Bringing sustainability to the forefront by making it a core focus of our practice and ensuring that sustainability is no longer a selective addition, but is an integral part of our product

Collaboration and knowledge-sharing tools

With thirteen studios spread across four continents, operating as One Global Studio can present a significant conflict with our sustainability objectives. While we have neutralised the impact of our flights around the globe, we recognise that we must take key steps to reduce this impact.

We are driving key initiatives, which will allow our project teams to collaborate virtually across the globe. In order to do this, we are beginning by completely rebuilding our entire global IT network infrastructure so it can support the level of data flow this collaboration will require. The key issue is for us to be able to interact with design images and documentation. We are currently trialling interactive whiteboards that allow individuals in different studios to interact with the same image in real time. We are also planning to investigate other tools such as graphic tablets and online virtual collaboration spaces similar to SecondLife'. Video conferencing is being investigated for its capability in allowing us to interact with images.

The primary goal of these initiatives is to allow knowledge, research and experience to be exchanged. Finally, our intranet is being restructured to allow knowledge to be easily codified collected and shared in our system, easing access around the globe. This includes the emerging Web 2.0 formats of forums, blogs, wikis, podcasts and sophisticated databases.

Project application

Green Teams have analysed design development processes and methodology and concluded that there was a lack of accountability when it came to ensuring environmental initiatives were being delivered consistently across all projects. Our challenge is to install a new mindset in every project team whereby sustainability is a constant focus and not an addition. In response to this we have added sustainability processes to our existing quality assurance program. We developed checklists of relevant questions and references to local standards to be included in peer design reviews at significant project phases.

These Environmental Project Reviews are uploaded to our intranet and tested on projects in other studios. These reviews are a fantastic way of keeping the whole project team involved in the process, and more importantly, to make sure the right questions are being asked at the right juncture of project development. The simple checklist means that it is immediately evident when basic environmental initiatives are not being explored. It is the responsibility of the project directors and leaders to ensure these checklists are incorporated and used effectively. In that way, it is a simple, measurable tool to assign responsibility and accountability.

The green standard

To take this review and QA process to another level, we are in the process of further enhancing our QA systems to achieve accreditation under the 'green standard'. Our practice is quality accredited under the ISO 9001 standard. We are currently integrating the requirements of the ISO 14000 Environmental Quality Standard into our practice management processes to ensure a sustainability focus is embedded in all our processes and we are systematically reducing all the environmental impacts within our control.

Accreditation

Woods Bagot has committed to the global accreditation of all staff where possible. All studio staff are enrolled in the local program (GBCA, BREEAM, LEED) and then encouraged to sit and pass an exam successfully. On a studio-by-studio basis, mass training days are convened to ensure all staff receive the minimum training for accreditation. There is now a common language between project teams, when discussing sustainable design solutions and responding to local sustainability rating objectives. Furthermore, to demonstrate senior leadership's commitment to this issue, the board has committed that every Woods Bagot director must be accredited under their relevant local program by the end of this year.

Magic time

As a professional services firm, all our staff and principals have to be conscious of how they charge their time. Internal sustainability activities are not billable work and as a result these are often done in 'magic time' i.e. time outside normal working hours, in the evenings and weekends. There is an ongoing risk that after this initial burst, that these activities will diminish under pressure from client projects and busy lives. It also does not support our corporate responsibility of providing a sustainable work-life balance.

Fortunately, we have a mechanism to support much of our critical sustainability activity through our research fund, Public. Any member of staff can submit an idea for research to the Public Editorial Committee who review these ideas and approve those that meet the criteria. Every research idea is required to provide an outline of the expected benefits and deliverables to our company, our clients, the industry, and/or the wider community. Research in the area of sustainability is something we have strongly encouraged and the output of some of those projects is in this publication.

Green is good, but how to be great

In summary, we have learnt a number of things along our sustainability journey so far:

- 1 Tap into the passion in your staff. They will be a great source of ideas and energy in reducing your environmental impact.
- 2 If you do that, it is critical that you demonstrate leadership support for the environment. Demonstrate your commitment through actions, not just words, supporting staff initiatives and placing resources and money behind the change. Don't do it if the commitment is not sincere, your staff will see through it and you will do more damage than good.
- 3 Furthermore, these days with most businesses struggling to find and retain good staff, engaging with your employees in an effort like this is a great way to increase their motivation and commitment to the firm.
- 4 Reducing your own environmental footprint should be the first step to an ongoing effort of continuous improvement. We have found that creating a competitive element internally has helped to intensify this effort.
- 5 If you are a predominantly white-collar business then you may find that going carbon neutral is a lot less expensive than you expect.

6 If you take the step to partially or fully offset your remaining environmental impact, you will need to work through the trade-offs between whether to drive it internally or use external consultants to validate your numbers and acquire the credits.

7 Our next endeavour is to insist on environmentally sustainable design accountability and responsibility across the business. To achieve this, we are installing a formal review structure, starting with directors and filtering down to project professionals in each studio. Environmental project leaders will be appointed in each studio to sit in on standard project reviews and ensure the delivery of the Environmental Project Reviews developed in 2007. We aim to have measurable targets included in all annual staff reviews, so that all staff will be held accountable for pursuing environmentally sustainable design. If we are able to achieve this, the Green Team will no longer need to exist in their original form as sustainability will be embedded across the entire organisation.

In our experience going green doesn't have to be too complex. There are a number of simple, common sense steps that can be taken. The costs are not substantial and the benefits in relation to talent acquisition, retention and motivation of staff are significant.

It simply makes good sense.

Below/right: Woods Bagot engages in a range of sustainability initiatives including: a. Volunteering at National Tree Day, Australia; b. Recycling, cycling to work, Environmental Project Review Checklists



Below: Woods Bagot sustainability initiatives: a. Moreland School Voluntary Day, UK; b. Clean up UAE Day, Dubai



