

# What's

By Mary  
Westbrook

# GREEN

# is Gold

**Environmentally friendly business solutions can help you decrease costs, attract customers and — oh yeah — save the planet.**

**R**egina Cannon Trembl is not on a mission to save the planet. She is in business to do business — and because she loves the emotional connection between people and flowers — not to change the world. Still, world-changing or, at the very least, earth-friendly business practices have found their way into Belladonna Florist, Trembl's shop in Eden Prairie, Minn. A vase-recycling program. Increased energy efficiency. A delivery pool. "Used" bulb grab bags. Biodegradable products. In fact, since opening the shop three years ago, Trembl, a long-time industry member with experience in grocery floral departments and importing companies, has introduced business practices that have cut costs and increased the shop's "green" factor, all in the name of helping her business.

"With everything that I've done, all of the decisions that I've made, it's been about a good business decision first,"

Trembl says. "But I've found that, in the end, a lot of the decisions are environmentally friendly, too."

Trembl isn't alone. Across the country, small-business owners are responding to increased awareness about the interplay between individuals and the environment. Practices that were outside the mainstream a few years ago, including hybrid cars, composting on large scale and luxury reusable materials, are becoming commonplace as costs come down and consumers voluntarily pay more for products and services that complement their eco sensibilities.

*Eco sensibilities? Hybrid cars? Green factor?* If none of these terms seem like your cup of (organic Ceylon green) tea, don't worry. While the modern environmental movement has its controversies and its detractors, one thing is clear: Ideas such as "green living" and sustainability along with stewardship of the earth are catching on with consumers and influencing how they purchase products and whom they patronize. Being green as a business and marketing that message to your

Photos by Noah Wolf Photography



**QUEEN OF GREEN** Most of Regina Cannon Treml's environmentally friendly business practices started out as a way to cut costs or increase sales at Belladonna Florist in Eden Prairie, Minn. "I've found that, in the end, a lot of the decisions are environmentally friendly, too," she says.

customers is easier than ever before.

"Certain aspects of the [environmental] movement are trendy, that is certainly true," says Billie Blair, Ph.D., CEO of Leading and Learning, a consulting firm that guides companies through transitional periods, including movements toward environmental awareness. "But, just like it has been with all other trends that have gone before, some of the aspects of this movement will endure...And, thus, will make good business sense."

## Rethinking Vase Life

It was good business sense that motivated Treml to start one of her most popular initiatives, The Glass Roots

Project, which has environmental as well as social undertones. The program began in April after Treml realized unused vases were overwhelming her customers.

"People, mostly men, would come in for cash-and-carry orders and say, 'I want flowers, but not in a vase. We have a cupboard full of vases at home,'" she says. "That got me thinking."

Specifically, Treml began thinking about the environmental implications of all those needless vases and how she could reuse the vases for the daily work (thank you, sympathy and congratulatory arrangements) she received from local charities including St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the Children's

Cancer Research Fund and People Reaching Out to Other People (PROP).

"I asked a couple customers if they would participate in the vase recycling program," she says. "They said yes so I got started."

To promote the program Treml posted information her shop's Web site, [www.belladonnaflorist.com](http://www.belladonnaflorist.com), printed a flier to hand out and ran an ad in Eden Prairie magazine, an upscale community publication. (Treml's accountant helped her craft a disclaimer for promotional materials, explaining that donations cannot receive tax credits because her shop is not a charity.)

The response was immediate. At press time, the shop had accepted more than



**WATER WISE** Regina Cannon Trembl took off \$20 to \$25 a month from her monthly electric bill, about an 8-percent drop, by consolidating product deliveries and using only one cooler.

## Set Your Shop to Energy Saver

Solar panels, energy-efficient delivery vehicles and compact fluorescent light bulbs are just some of the solutions experts suggest to business owners who want to increase energy efficiency. Most communities also offer energy seminars to homeowners and builders through power companies or other local organizations. Check with your city government or Chamber of Commerce to find out more.

Non-toxic cleaning products are another area to consider, says Alicia Silva of Synergy Design Studio, an environmental and business consultant in Seattle, as are the paints you use to freshen up your shop and even the toilet paper you stock. (Silva recommends recycled rolls.) "It's very, very simple to be green," she insists. "Do the small things first and build from there."

Carbon offsetting, literally buying credits to offset your personal carbon emissions, also is an increasingly popular component of the environmentally friendly business. The money goes to earth-friendly projects such as reforestation. Many organizations have Web sites, such as [www.carbonfund.org](http://www.carbonfund.org), specifically to calculate carbon emissions and credits.

For additional ideas and detailed articles on going green, visit [www.greenbiz.com](http://www.greenbiz.com). 🌱

— M.W.

70 vases in less than three months.

"I don't think anyone has brought in less than eight or 10 vases at a time," Trembl says. "They're coming in with bags full of vases. We've been getting unique pieces that are worth a lot of money — novelty, hand-blown and ceramic vases."

Trembl stores the donated vase together on a shelf she cleared specifically for the program. When a charity calls an order in, the shop donates the vase and the labor, charging only for the flowers and delivery. Vases the charities cannot use, because they are too ornate or high-end, are given to PROP's thrift shop for resale.

"There's no maintenance," Trembl says. "It's a basic, grass roots recycling program. I'm really surprised by how quickly it took off and how well it's been received."

## Back to Basics: Reuse, Recycle

For her part, Amy Stewart, author of "Flower Confidential," a book that explored social and environmental issues embedded in the floral industry, isn't surprised at all.

"I think what this shows is sustainability is about more than just how the flowers in your shop are grown," she says. "Consumers are so wanting to support that [kind of effort]."

Of course, vases aren't the only supplemental material florists can reuse or recycle, says Alicia Silva of Synergy Design Studio, an environmental and business consultant in Seattle. Many of the boxes, wrapping products and miscellaneous containers used to transport flowers from field to shop needn't end up in landfills.

"Packaging is a huge issue for all industries," says Silva, who recommends that florists visit the Environmental Protection Agency's Web site ([www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)), along with Web sites of municipal organizations, for tips on how to start an in-store recycling program. "Recycling vases is great,

## BY THE NUMBERS

According to the 2007 ImagePower Green Brands Survey, “green is no longer an issue marginalized to fanatical environmentalists; nearly all Americans display green attitudes and behaviors versus a year ago.” The survey also found that 40 percent of the U.S. population calls global warming the “leading issue driving concern around the environment” and 20 percent blame themselves “for the state of the environment.”

“Consumers have woken up to the environmental consequences of their purchase decisions, and are changing their behavior to ensure they limit their negative impacts on our environment,” says Russ Meyer, chief strategy officer of Landor Associates, which funded the survey. 🌱

— M.W.

but there are so many things you can do,” she says. “It’s about going back to the basic principles — reuse, recycle.”

Those two principles were behind Treml’s recent decision to switch to Arrive Alive, a stem-hydration system for hand-tied and wrapped bouquets by Mac Technologies ([www.machortsupplies.com](http://www.machortsupplies.com)) and distributed by John Henry that just happens to be biodegradable — even the product’s rubber band is made of dirt.

“We tell all of our customers about it,” Treml says. “We get a very good response, and it’s less expensive than doing a dozen tubes on a dozen roses.”

The shop also “reuses” flower bulbs, selling leftover tulip, daffodil and hyacinth bulbs (including bulbs that didn’t sell and those used to decorate the shop) in \$1 “grab bags” after bulb season.

“People don’t know what they’re getting,” Treml says. “Neither do we. It’s fun.”

### The Local Connection

For a long time, organic has been a buzzword for eco consciousness, and for good reason in many cases. Still most florists agree it would be impossible to source all of their flowers from organic farms. On the other hand, locally grown flowers also can be an environmentally friendly solution that happens to help your bottom line, Treml says. Even in Minnesota, where spring and summer

come late and leave early, she supplements her product selection with flowers grown, literally, around the corner.

“During the summer we have beautiful, locally grown flowers — from places that are smaller than mom-and-pops,” says Treml, adding that she also takes full advantage of Len Busch Roses, a well-known, larger company with “incredible locally grown product.”

“At first, I questioned the durability of the product and the [smaller] growers’ ability to fill our needs,” she says. “But we brought in samples and the quality level was very high.”

Stewart agrees. “Local is a big thing to consumers, whether that means buying local flowers from the farmers market, selling dried lavender products or locally made candles in the winter,” she says. “I’m talking to a lot of florists who are joining up with local merchants’ associations to get consumers to buy locally.” (To read about a florist in Butler, Pa., doing just that, see Info to Go.)

While it would be impossible for most florists to stock their shop with only locally grown product, the environmental and social benefits of buying local, when possible, are multi-faceted, experts say: Money stays in the community, supporting small growers; less fuel is used in the transportation of the product and smaller growers often use traditional, organic growing methods, even if they aren’t certified.



“I’ve worked as an importer, and I love Colombian roses, but whenever I have local flowers, I point out that it’s ‘Minnesota grown product,’” Trembl says. “[Customers] love to hear that. They just love it.”

## Smooth Operations

When Trembl took over Belladonna three years ago, she operated two coolers, a medium-sized display and a large walk-in. The system provided ample storage, but that luxury came at a high cost. After analyzing her buying strategies, Trembl decided to carry less product, turning it every 48 hours. Suppliers’ delivery fees increased but Trembl was able to unplug the walk-in cooler, reducing her energy consumption — not to mention her electric bill, which dropped by \$20 to \$25 a month (an 8 percent savings).

“It’s a management choice,” she says. “You have to manage what you’re buying, what you’re designing with and where you put it. Now, we only use the walk-in around the holidays.”

Trembl didn’t stop there. Instead of letting the water from her water-cooled cooler slide down the drain, she configured a PVC pipe to carry the excess water into a bucket. The shop uses the water to fill vases and water plants. (It’s the same water that they get from the faucet.) Consequently, “We never have to turn on the water faucet, except for around Valentine’s Day,” Trembl says. “That’s amazing to me.” (Because her shop is part of a common area maintenance, and she does not pay her bill directly, Trembl cannot estimate savings on the decreased water use.)

“These were good business decisions for us that happened to be environmentally friendly,” she says. “But the strategies have really helped us in the end.”

Similarly, while Trembl didn’t join the Tonka Pool to make an environmental statement, the move has helped her shop reduce its fossil fuel consumption, a praise-worthy result by any standard.

**VASE TIME** Through her Glass Roots program, Regina Cannon Trembl collects used vases from customers and reuses them for the daily work she receives from local charities. The product donation helps the organizations and keeps unwanted vases out of landfills.



## All Together Now

Retailers aren’t the only industry members going green: Wholesalers and suppliers are implementing environmentally friendly business practices as well, including:

- Installing high efficiency lighting (something all businesses can do).
- Switching to bio-diesel fuels.
- Participating in social and environmental certification programs.
- Implementing recycling programs for cardboard and packaging material.
- Crafting sustainability platforms.

To find out more about suppliers’ initiatives, see Info to Go. 🌱

— M.W.

“We talk to customers about our use of the pool,” she says. “It’s really fun to tell people about these things,” and,

with any luck, those conversations bring the customers back or at least keep them in the store a few minutes longer.”

## Wanted: 'Sexy Conservationist'

Move over metrosexuals. There's a new trendy demographic in town and its members are all about the environment. **Ecosexuals** are an "evolving breed of city dweller for whom keeping green is every bit as important in their romantic life as in their choice of household cleanser, dinner food, or wall paint," according to San Francisco magazine. According to the story, the group is on the rise and its members take their partners' choices seriously. The result? People are adding "characteristics like 'sexy conservationist' or 'romantic recycler' to the list" of qualities they want in a partner.

For the record, don't even think about delivering a run-of-the-mill arrangement to an ecosexual: The story outlined break-up tales among the group, including husbands who "cheated" on vegan wives by eating fast food on the road and relationships torn asunder by one person's refusal to compost lunch leftovers. Ouch. ♻️ — *M.W.*



All this talk of energy savings isn't smoke and mirrors, says Blair of Leading and Learning, who insists that being green "could be as simple a thing as re-coordinating the delivery trips that are made so that the routes are more tightly scheduled, geographically, and without a great degree of wandering around and repeating the same routes several times a day." (For a list of other energy-saving tips, see p. 24.)

## Cause for Optimism

Wherever you fall on the eco spectrum, tell customers your story: "People love stories and they will tell your story to other people," Stewart says.

Silva, the consultant, agrees, adding that florists also should call reporters, who are often hungry for a local angle on a national story.

"So many consumers are now happy to support businesses that have environ-

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**BACK TO BIO** Lana Stewart, an employee at Belladonna Florist, uses a biodegradable stem-hydration system for hand-tied and wrapped bouquets. "We tell all of our customers about it," says Regina Cannon Trembl, the shop's owner. "We get a very good response, and it's less expensive than doing a dozen tubes on a dozen roses."

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mentally friendly practices," she says. "Advertise and market your environmentally friendly practices. You won't be disappointed." 🌿

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## Info To Go

### Supply Side

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### Really Local

A shop in Butler, Pa., not only grows some of its own product, it also conducts agri-tours to promote the local community. Read more by clicking on the Info to Go logo on SAF's member Web site, [www.safnow.org](http://www.safnow.org), or by calling SAF's Fast Fax (888) 723-2000 and requesting document #925.

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### 'Ad' it Up

Review the ad Regina Cannon Trembl uses to promote her Glass Roots Project by clicking on the Info to Go logo on SAF's member Web site, [www.safnow.org](http://www.safnow.org), or by calling SAF's Fast Fax (888) 723-2000 and requesting document #927.

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