

10
things
you think
you
know
about
CSR

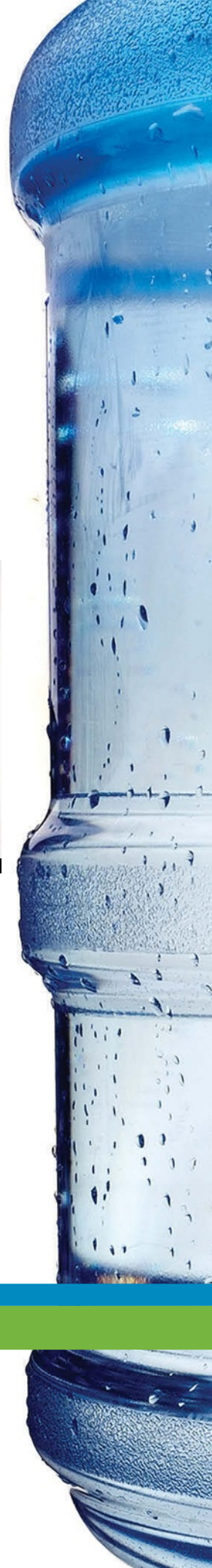
By Amanda Gourgue, CMP, LEED AP



I attended a conference that was marketed as “green,” but couldn’t have been further from it. It seems that some meeting professionals could use some straight talk on common CSR misperceptions and myths. A socially responsible meeting is much more than just water stations.



One of my biggest pet peeves with sustainable menu planning is that water glasses are filled before the meal event. Don't fill the water glasses until people are sitting. Or ask attendees if they want water. Some people don't drink their pre-poured water and others won't even make it out to the meal. Filling water glasses beforehand is a waste. Let's say you have a meeting for 200 people and 20 people don't come to lunch. However, each eight-ounce glass of water was pre-poured. Right away there's a waste of 2.5 gallons of water. What if 20 more people don't drink the beverages in front of them? Now you're up to five gallons—and that's without even considering water used to re-wash the unused glasses.



Sustainable Vocab 101

Even the most common terms for a sustainable meeting or event get used incorrectly. Here are some of those common terms—know before you go (green).

Carbon Footprint: The total set of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions caused by an organization, event or product. For simplicity in reporting, this is often presented in terms of the amount of carbon dioxide, or its equivalent of other GHGs, emitted.

Carbon Neutral: Producing no net release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Carbon Offset: A financial instrument aimed at reducing GHG emissions. Emissions are measured in metric tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent (CO₂e) and may represent six primary categories of greenhouse gases. Each carbon offset represents the reduction of one metric ton of CO₂e.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Also known as corporate responsibility, corporate citizenship or sustainable responsible business, this is the deliberate inclusion of public interest into corporate decision making and honoring the triple bottom line: people, planet and profit.

Fair Trade: A social movement and market-based approach to help producers in developing countries obtain better trading conditions and promote sustainability. The movement advocates social and environmental standards as well as paying a higher price to producers and is most often seen in connection with consumables (such as coffee, fruit and tea) exported from developing countries to developed countries.

Food Miles: This is how far your food has traveled to see you. For example, the average carrot travels 1,838 miles to reach your dinner table, according to Rich Pirog and Benjamin Andrew, authors of *Checking the Food Odometer: Comparing Food Miles for Local Versus Conventional Produce Sales in Iowa Institutions*.

Green Meeting: According to MeetGreen, “Greening a meeting or event encompasses all aspects of the strategic planning process. By making choices at every level of planning, from site selection to serving condiments from bulk containers, you can significantly reduce the environmental impact of the event. Green meetings also incorporate social aspects including charitable contributions and humanitarian efforts.”

Sustainable: Conserving an ecological balance by avoiding the depletion of natural resources.

Sources: *Checking the Food Odometer: Comparing Food Miles for Local Versus Conventional Produce Sales in Iowa Institutions*, *MeetGreen* and *Wikipedia*.



Why should we change our ways when we can just throw money at the situation? I hate the idea of carbon offsets—and most of the time, people and companies use them incorrectly. We get the concepts of reuse and recycle, but what happened to reduce? Often people and companies think first of carbon offsetting, not reducing. If used properly, these should be used in concert with one another.

Here is how not to use an offset. Last year, an unnamed city's largest hotel wanted to share details of the great “green” program it had just put in place. This hotel had 35 floors and more than 100,000 square feet of meeting space, and one floor was a self-contained “carbon neutral” conference center. The rationale for this claim was based on the purchase of carbon offsets for every meeting—there had been no reduction in waste, no other changes. Because of the offsets, “nothing has to change, which is the great part,” according to the sales rep. This venue should tread lightly on its green claims; adept meeting planners will recognize greenwashing.



Doing something small is still better than doing nothing at all. Planners get overwhelmed, thinking they must immediately organize fully green meetings. They stress out and fail to do anything at all. Start by greening one or two components of your events and identify how you'll measure success. When you feel comfortable with those items, add more to your sustainability list.



In December 2007, environmental marketing firm TerraChoice released *The Six Sins of Greenwashing*, which found that more than 99 percent of 1,018 common random consumer products were greenwashed. A total 1,753 environmental claims were made, and only one product was found not guilty of making a false or misleading green marketing claim. The six sins to watch out for:

1. Sin of the Hidden Trade-Off
2. Sin of No Proof
3. Sin of Vagueness
4. Sin of Irrelevance
5. Sin of Fibbing
6. Sin of Lesser of Two Evils

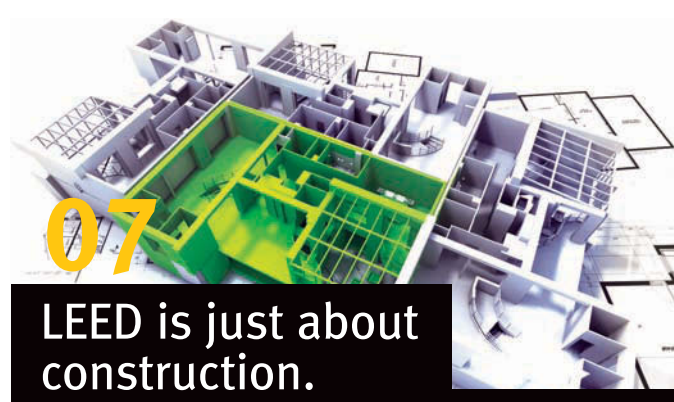
For more information regarding TerraChoice and *The Six Sins of Greenwashing*, visit www.terrachoice.com/files/6_sins.pdf.



This isn't necessarily true, and some green and socially minded products and tactics can actually save you money. Don't put a year on your meeting signage and lanyards; they can be used every year. Print in the community you are meeting in and help the local economy. Yes, some sustainable items will be more expensive than others—Economics 101: Supply and Demand. For more expensive items, either cut back on another part of the budget so you can afford them or get sponsorship. Sponsors would rather have their names on sustainable items than products that harm the planet (think reusable lunch boxes instead of boxed lunches).



Wrong. The soon-to-be-released APEX/ASTM Environmentally Sustainable Meeting Standards help with planning, decision-making, strategic alignment and reporting. The standards will also help suppliers with competitive advantage, operational change and mitigating risk. An existing but still fairly new standard to assist meeting professionals in sustainability goals, British Standard 8901 (BS 8901), is slated to become an international standard (ISO 20121) in time for the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. ISO 20121 is a management system that will work with the APEX/ASTM standards.



This is a topic that is very near and dear to me—I was the first certified meeting professional to earn the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Accredited Professional designation. LEED certification is determined by the Washington, D.C.-based U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). All they do is green buildings, and they're the experts on this topic. A building that has received LEED certification has gone above and beyond a traditional structure to create a healthy facility. A green building saves on utilities, the people inside feel better and, in the end, the building is no more costly than "standard" venues to construct. Meeting professionals can use the USGBC's *Green Venue Selection Guide* in the RFP process and to compare green facilities: <http://tinyurl.com/GreenVenueGuide>.



08

Disposable dishes and utensils are worse than re-usable china.

I'm not an expert in dinnerware, so I asked the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) which option is better. "There is not a clear answer," a spokesperson said. "When looked at from a lifecycle perspective, there are many variables. It depends on the location in terms of availability and source of water, source of electric power, type and efficiency of washing equipment, type of disposable item (plastic, recycled paper, corn plastic, etc.), whether it will be composted, recycled or discarded and other factors. That said, the EPA has a preference for reusables." So there you have it, that debate is clear as mud.



Welcome to one of the leading conference, meetings and incentive destinations in the world

Ireland has the venues, facilities, technology and accommodation options that will ensure your event is a success. Beyond that you'll find a people and a place whose natural creativity and expertise can unleash yours. Welcome to connect with excellence. Welcome to Ireland.



Visit us at www.meetinireland.com/US or contact Marie McKown, Tourism Ireland at mmckown@tourismireland.com or call 847 516 0038



09

CSR puts the planet ahead of profit.

Actually, profit is part of CSR, one of the "three Ps" of sustainability. Think of it as a three-legged stool. If one leg is missing, it can't be used. The same principle applies to the three Ps—you can't have a successful CSR program, event or company if one of the Ps is missing.



10

I think I already know everything about green.

I'd love to meet the person who truly knows everything about sustainable meetings. This industry is changing daily, and education is just a part of it. People and companies vary in their understanding of sustainability, which makes teaching groups a challenge. Don't be afraid to ask questions. And if you think you know it all, become a resource to those just starting in the sustainable hospitality industry, and attend more sessions. Keep up on information, because you never know when someone is going to ask for help.

Help Create Change

Check out the MPI Sustainable Event Management Tool (<http://mpi.sustainableeventtool.com>) or the Green Meeting Industry Council (www.greenmeetings.info). Ask for more sessions on CSR and green meetings at your local MPI gatherings. Get involved with the APEX/ASTM Environmentally Sustainable Meeting Standards or ISO 20121. And if you aren't sure where to start, contact me: amanda@startameetingrevolution.com. **one+**

AMANDA GOURGUE, CMP, LEED AP, is chief meeting revolutionist and founder of CSR- and green-focused event company Meeting Revolution. Next year, Gourgue is releasing a sustainable hospitality and meetings guide.