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Green commercial decision

With an annual turnover of £25million, Cheltenham-based Commercial Group is the largest independently owned office services company in the UK

IN 2006, it also became the first company of its kind to achieve carbon neutral status. According to Jonathan Porritt, chairman of the UK Sustainable Development Commission, programme director of Forum for the Future and Cheltenham resident: "Commercial is representative of the can-do world of sustainability."

Set up 18 years ago by brother-and sister duo Arthur Hindmarch and Simone Mann the company has five divisions: office stationery, networks, print procurement and management, office interiors and recruitment.

So why did Commercial Group decide to go green? According to Simone, it all began after she saw Al Gore speak following the release of his feature film documentary on climate change: *An Inconvenient Truth*.

"I felt profoundly affected by the film," she said. "Guilt is a good thing – it's telling you that everything isn't right."

"I also felt that if we wanted to reduce our impact on the environment, it's also likely to reduce costs as well as differentiating us from our competition."

The stationery and office supplies market is competitive – offering a generic product across all areas of an organisation, so a clear statement on Commercial Groups' commitment to reducing carbon emissions was a savvy marketing as well as commercial decision, but it had to be based to real targets and a company-wide commitment.

Not being one to let the (green) grass grow under her feet, Simone set up a carbon neutral steering group and seconded Commercial Group's IT Project manager Simon Graham to plan the company's reduction programme. Each member was asked to consider ways of reducing carbon within the business and report back. "If it costed money, we needed to know what the return on investment would be," she explains.

Within a few months, Commercial introduced a set of targets to achieve substantial carbon reductions over three years. Within six months, the company had achieved a 25 per cent reduction in carbon emissions, 50 per cent reduction by the end of the first year and it will have hit 75 per cent by the end of the three-year programme. To offset unavoidable emissions, the company supports a number of initiatives such as the



Arthur Hindmarch and Simone Mann.

provision of solar electricity in Sri Lanka, energy efficient lighting in Jamaica and wind power in New Zealand.

Commercial Group also actively encourages other companies to engage with climate change and supports them through the process of achieving Carbon neutral status.

So can a business be profitable and environmentally driven? Absolutely, if there is inspiring leadership and a true commitment from everyone involved.

www.commercial.co.uk