

## Going Green Without Going Broke

These days, many corporations, associations, and ad campaigns are increasingly focused on “Going Green”. From electric cars to solar and wind products, the idea of reducing your carbon footprint is becoming more and more popular.

In the big picture, this conservation-centric approach can be a very good thing. With oil prices creeping back toward \$100 a barrel, the trickle down effect of high energy costs can negatively affect the event and festival industry just like it does other travel-oriented ones.

After all, if gas and other related costs are higher, the possibility of decreased attendance is very real. In response to this, some have suggested that a silver bullet of sorts is to “go green” and rely on alternative energy sources.

While this sounds good in theory, if the cost of alternative energy is still higher than even elevated conventional energy costs, an event planner may not realize an immediate financial benefit from adopting a “greener” strategy. Indeed, like many things, a balanced approach is key.

This month Current Events considers three steps that can balance the benefits of going green with the costs of doing so.

### Consider the Extended Cost and Value

Every year, hundreds of festivals gear up for the Christmas season with huge displays of holiday lights. These thousands of strands of bright lights get plenty of “oohs” and “aahs” from guests fascinated by the brilliant array of well-lit displays.

Unfortunately, conventional Christmas lights can be very energy-inefficient. Worse still, they can be very expensive because of the high power bills they generate. Despite this, you can’t really have a light-centric festival without actually using lights. As a result, many event planners feel trapped into the seemingly inevitable combination of wasted energy and big electricity bills.

This is a false trap though as new technology has altered the equation and, in doing so, provided another option. In the case of lighting displays, Disney’s Hollywood Studios theme park offers a good

example since it has adopted a strategy of reducing power costs while still keeping the guests interested in their brilliant Christmas light display.

As home to the popular Osborne Family Spectacle of Dancing Lights special event each winter, this theme park knows a thing or two about energy costs. Traditionally, the park used conventional Christmas lights that numbered into the tens of thousands of strands.

Several years back though, Hollywood Studios began to use LED lighting. While the LED lights cost more than their non-LED cousins, this upfront expense can be offset by the fact that the lights required less electricity and, in general, last longer.

For a large company like Disney, absorbing a bigger front end cost in order to later save money is more plausible even in tough economic times. That’s not always true for smaller events with tighter budgets.

Even so, when your festival is calculating the cost of going green, it’s critical to count both the short term and long term expense. Only looking at the immediate cost can cause you to miss savings down the road. Indeed, if you can afford the bigger investment at the outset, you might find that going green can, in the long run, save your event big money well into the future.

### Get Your Guests to Get Involved

Another option to increase your event’s “green-ness” is to offer guests the opportunity to get green rewards in exchange for green activity. For instance, at least one summer music festival is providing guests with a free bottle of water if the guest brings in several empty bottles for recycling.

The idea is to persuade guests to assist in an event’s sustainability and provide them a small incentive for doing so. This could range from free “green” samples by companies wishing to introduce their

new products to special access for guests who bring in items for recycling or some other green activity. The access could involve something as simple, and typically inexpensive, as early entry to the festival or a short behind the scenes talk or tour about the festival.

By incentivizing guests to go green, a festival can expend relatively little cost (an important reality for tight budgets) while actually providing a potential route for increased attendance.

### Turn Your Green Strategy Into Its Own Attraction

Each year, the Montgomery, Alabama-based MAX Federal Credit Union hosts an EcoMAX conference that invites guests to explore energy-efficient technology and practices in an entertaining yet informative setting. One of the event’s strategies is to make going green an attraction in and of itself.

To do so, EcoMAX partners with green providers such as an electronics recycler. With many households filled with old computers and other unused electronic gadgets, the opportunity to dispose of these outdated products in an energy efficient and fun setting turns the practice of going green into part of the event’s fun.

Other parts of the event include using entertaining displays to show schoolchildren how green practices (such as growing food locally) plants the “going green” seed (*pun intended*) early on—a great example of investing in your event’s “green strategy” by making it more than a back of house activity but, instead, bringing it to the forefront and turning into an actual attraction.

The end result could be that going green in a fun and interesting way could actually generate greater interest in your festival—leading to the distinct possibility that your green strategies could pay off through increased attendance down the road.