

GREEN BUSINESS QUARTERLY

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Sustainability remains priority to purchasers; businesses have opportunity to increase brand value

GREEN FRANCHISING
Redefining the traditional general store

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'G' GREEN DESIGN CENTER

Providing sustainable and efficient alternatives in a designer showroom

BY ZACH BALIVA



From left: A 'g' Green Design Center located on Cape Cod, and Nicole Goldman, founder.

When Nicole Goldman was working as a writer, she found herself completing many articles about green issues. As an interior designer, she discovered that more and more customers were asking about sustainable products. As a homeowner, she realized just how hard those materials were to find.

"The issue kept coming up again and again," Goldman says. Then she was hired to design for a woman who wanted a green kitchen complete with bamboo cabinets, recycled paper countertops, and zero-VOC floors and paint. "I recognized the disconnect between customer and marketplace and discovered a need for a hub," Goldman explains.

To bridge the gap from demand and supply, Goldman created and opened the 'g' Green Design Center in October of 2007. "I toured all of Massachusetts and there were only two green stores to be found," she recalls. "I knew there was room for me here." The concept behind Goldman's showroom was to create a consumer-friendly, elegant design space and provide convenient and visible access to sustainable building materials, housewares, and lifestyle products.

Goldman has quickly developed criteria for her retail vendors. "It has to be sustainable, functional, and affordable," she says. Although retail products comprise only 15 percent of the store, their inclusion is strategic because Goldman wants to show that greenness is something that anyone can incorporate. Most products are under \$50 and range from welcome mats to rain barrels. "Even if people aren't doing a whole house, they can come in here and take a few small steps," she says.

Those doing a whole house will also be accommodated. The showroom displays sustainable cabinets, countertops, and floors, as well as efficient lighting, ventilation, insulation, and purification systems all made to special order. Popular products include marmoleum, bamboo and FSC-certified wood,



The 'g' Green Design Center showroom featuring green building materials and finishes for residential and light commercial construction.

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Nicole Goldman, Founder

recycled-paper countertops, wool carpet, non-toxic paints, and recycled glass tiling. "We try to carry a vast selection of [sustainable] products because we're asked to meet many different needs in many different ways," says Goldman. "If something shows up on HGTV, people rush to get here the next day."

As the green movement builds, so does Goldman's positive response, and she is quickly discovering that a Cape Cod showroom invites many tourists each year. With so many of them asking for a location in another part of the country, Goldman has easily delineated her next step as a businesswoman—franchising. "We've created a strong brand with a solid logo. As people started to catch on, I started to realize that it's reproducible," she says, adding that the business opportunity was publicly announced at Green Build 2008.

Franchising investments start at \$100,000, which includes capital for a 1,200- to 2,000-square-foot showroom, start-up inventory, and a hybrid company car. Although Goldman's boutique has 5 employees, her franchise model calls for 2.5 per site. "We've done the research and we have great suppliers. I realized that if I could figure it out, then I needed to share it to bring these products to more people," says Goldman.

In addition to running the showroom and planning for franchising, Goldman also offers design and project-management consulting services for businesses and individuals. Services include energy audits, employee training, contracting, installation, eco-events, and even green promotional materials.

'g' Green Design Center is an underwriter of NPR, and Goldman has visited its broadcast studio to record Green Minutes. Her radio segments educate listeners on small steps they can take to make their homes more environmentally friendly. "We're passionate about the planet, and we want to be seen as a resource of information to educate people," she says, adding that she hopes Green Minutes listeners will put ideas into practice by using 'g' Green Design Center products.

There's also a workshop series and something that Goldman calls the 'g' Foundation, a non-profit charitable fund designed



In addition to home remodeling products, the showroom also offers many types of housewares, non-toxic cleaners, books, stainless steel water bottles and other items that help customers engage in a more sustainable lifestyle.

to enable members of the community to explore, initiate and pursue environmental goals. Last year, the showroom played host to an "eco-fashion show" and a juried art show with pieces made from reclaimed materials. Goldman says that the events are fun ways to be engaged in the community and promote her brand.

For Goldman, the company and the foundation are natural results of her passion for sustainable and responsible living. And as she replicates her business model across the nation, she's hoping to find many like-minded partners. GBQ