



Posty Cards, Inc: Journey to Sustainability Background

Posty Cards has been helping businesses nationwide build and maintain relationships with clients and employees for more than 63 years. The company designs, manufactures and sells corporate birthday cards, thank you cards, holiday greeting cards, calendars and more at the lowest prices available. With a minimum of just 50 per order, products are personalized with names, signatures, logos and other sentiments under the verse and return addresses on envelopes. In keeping with their corporate philosophy of sustainability, all cards are printed with soy ink and many are printed on recycled or Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified paper. Plus, cards are packaged with recycled, recyclable and biodegradable materials. Posty Cards' Sustainable Sentiments® line of recycled greeting cards includes environmentally inspired designs for users who want to portray concern for the environment. Catalogs are printed on FSC-certified paper and all electricity use is 100 percent offset by renewable wind power.

The challenge

Posty Cards has grown and prospered in Kansas City's urban core for three generations. In late 2009, the building the company had built 20 years before was bursting at the seams. In order to grow the family-owned and operated business, more space was needed. With the goals of staying in their urban neighborhood, adding enough room to increase their workforce by more than 50 percent and upholding the corporate philosophy of minimizing their impact on the environment, the company set out to enlarge the facility. Early on in the project Posty Cards decided to seek LEED Platinum certification from the United States Green Building Council for the entire facility.

"The need to expand spurred this entire project," Posty Cards President Erick Jessee explained. "Originally we looked at it purely to add square footage. The vision for a green building came with the realization that the expansion gave us the opportunity to bring our entire operation in line with company sustainability goals, he said.

Achieving LEED Platinum, the highest distinction available to green buildings, is very rare for manufacturing facilities, and almost unheard of for small, privately held operations.

Solution

Jessee took the challenge and began searching for funding opportunities and assembling a team that would make the dream a reality. In the beginning, a business expansion, especially one with lofty sustainable goals, seemed risky in a down economy. Instead, the sluggish economy combined with other components provided the perfect opportunity for growth.

"We had done all the preparations for expansion, and then the economy took a downturn and interest rates fell," Jessee said. As a result, subcontractors were hungry and

aggressive in bidding and local, state and federal agencies were offering opportunities to help fund the green features of the building.”

Since Jessee wanted a renewable energy solution that was cost-effective and would help the company achieve the LEED certification, a solar rebate from Kansas City Power & Light (KCP&L) helped influence the solar system that was installed.

Making the most of natural resources

“We discussed all the options including solar photovoltaics, solar lighting, solar hot water, solar air heating and small wind,” Susan Brown of Brigherty Solar recalled. “Because of the new KCP&L solar rebate, it was soon apparent that solar photovoltaics would be the best option for this project – the best payback and the best fit for the type of facility they were building.”

To reach a goal of offsetting 11 percent of the company’s energy usage, a 45-kW grid-tied array was installed, consisting of 198 solar panels. Six inverters in the mechanical room convert the DC energy produced by the panels into usable AC energy.

From the native landscaping surrounding the building to the highly efficient heating and cooling system to the interior finishes of recycled carpet, water saving toilets and programmable lighting, Posty Cards uses both established and cutting-edge green technology.

The building has the city’s first variable refrigerant volume HVAC system, which is based on the principle that you have different heating and cooling loads depending on the needs of the area. “If you can vary the heating and cooling based on the load in an area, you’re going to be a lot more efficient,” Jessee explained

The system uses constant incoming data to determine if an area should be heated or cooled. Traditional systems are either on or off, but with a variable system it might be off in one room and on in another, dependent on need. This type of system is expected to reduce energy usage by 40 to 45 percent, he said.

To help meet water conservation and storm water mitigation goals, native plants are a prominent feature of Posty Cards’ grounds. “Once they are established, they are not expected to need any irrigation,” Jessee said. “They evolved to thrive in the climate we have. Another goal met with native plants is to reintroduce native vegetation to the area, which benefits and strengthens indigenous wildlife.”

When rain falls on the 2.19 acres of Posty Cards’ property, it has a good chance of staying there, instead of contributing to Kansas City’s aging rain/sewer water system. Water is retained in rain gardens and a large retention basin under the parking lot.

One of the most noticeable structures in the courtyard is the 8,300-gallon water reclamation tank. The tank stores rainwater that is collected from the roof. That water is then used on the landscape and in the toilets. “It’s one of those things we got away from in the last 100 years,” Jessee says about collecting and using rainwater. “We just became accustomed to in-house plumbing and getting water from the water department. Now we’re going back to what people have done for millennia, just in a more high-tech way.”

While Posty Cards is working to keep as much water as possible on the property, visitors won't find any in the company's urinals. "Our low-flow sinks, faucets, and waterless urinals are all part of our water conservation plans," Jessee said.

Besides housing the rainwater reclamation tank, the courtyard is a key feature in the building design. "The big idea is the courtyard," says Jessee. "It meets our goals in so many ways. It allows us to bring in a lot of natural light, but it also transforms the work environment, providing views and a visual connection across the expanded facility. I love knowing that our employees are able to look out the window and see trees from the production line."

Recycle, reuse and recharge to protect the environment

Even using recycled or reused furniture in the executive conference room wasn't enough for Posty Cards. The company did both. The AllSteel #19 chairs are made from 100-percent recycled aluminum, and 88 percent of the materials used in its manufacture are recyclable. Jessee bought them and a matching conference table from an architectural firm that was closing its doors. Cubicles and other office furniture purchased for the new space was all previously used.

Leaving no stone unturned, the Posty Cards parking lot (in the electric- or hybrid-only parking section up front) is equipped with an electric vehicle charging station. Employees are invited to plug in while they are at work.

The fascinating transformation to a state-of-the-art green building caught the attention of *Greenability* magazine's publisher Julie Koppen. "We immediately realized that Posty Cards was in the midst of a cutting edge renovation and we were pleased to feature it as a cover story so we could share their experience with our readers."

Putting all the right pieces in place for a winning solution

Reaching the goals of a sustainable facility with double the space and a \$6.4 million dollar price tag was a community effort. The Kansas City MO Community Development CDE (Community Development Entities) New Market Tax Credit Program was a perfect fit for the Posty Cards project. The tax credits allowed Posty Cards to make the expansion a one-phase rather than a two-phase project, which saved the company both time and money. It also helped Posty Cards incorporate many of the green elements that were vital to the expansion.

The new Posty Cards facility was designed by Kansas City, Missouri-based McHenry Schafer Mitchell Architects. Other partners were Pearson Kent McKinley Raaf Engineers in Overland Park, Kansas, KH Engineering Group in Lenexa Kansas, SK Design Group also in Overland Park, Patti Banks Association in Kansas City, Missouri, and Turner Construction Co. also in Kansas City, Missouri.

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