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The Eco Metrics System

By: Dan Calabrese



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It's common for business consultants to spend as much time selling and explaining the value of their services as they spend providing them. But not for Sam Pobst, at least not these days: A former construction firm owner who had long found his love of the pristine outdoors to be at odds with his profession, Pobst in 2002 founded [Eco Metrics](#) with the specific mission of helping companies make their buildings ecologically sustainable.

An advertisement for Founders Bank & Trust. It features the bank's logo at the top, followed by the text "Managing Your Investments Locally." Below that is the phone number "616-956-9030" and the website "www.foundersbt.com". At the bottom, there are logos for "Local First Business" (Member FDIC) and "Lender" (with a house icon).

Eco Metrics puts an especially strong emphasis on certification under the [U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design](#) program. With interest in LEED exploding in recent years, Pobst has found it possible to pursue a very simple marketing strategy:

"I answer the phone," he says "In about 2005 and 2006, we saw a shift in the marketplace from people like me, who were actually having to peddle what LEED was doing, to a comprehension – certainly in the business community – that LEED had the potential to improve the bottom line. And this was coming not only from facility managers, but also from business owners and CEOs, from Wall Street."



The LEED program certifies buildings at different levels of environmental achievement and energy efficiency, based on a wide variety of metrics.

Pobst serves as chair of the Heartland Regional Council of the USGBC and is a two-time chair of the West Michigan chapter, so his familiarity with LEED's requirement is coupled with a front-row seat for the market's rising embrace of the program and its principles. Companies' interest in LEED is growing, Pobst says, because they are beginning to recognize the bottom-line benefits of sustainability. He cites two areas in which those benefits are most stark – energy cost savings and employee health.

"The most obvious thing is that people look to is the energy conservation side of it," Pobst says. "That's the most tangible piece of it. The [improved health](#) of the occupants is a little harder, less tangible, because you have to actually see the building perform before you can realize the benefits of it. But we're seeing significant improvements in productivity. We're getting measurements of anywhere from 2 to 18 percent improvements in productivity."



While business opportunities abound with new construction, Pobst chooses mainly to focus on existing buildings, since there are a lot more of those. Some current projects include the historic Felt Mansion in Saugatuck – which was almost left for demolition until some historic preservationists stepped in – and the new Hines Building in Muskegon, home of the Muskegon Area Chamber of

Commerce.

At present, Pobst is consulting with local facilities of companies such as C.B. Richard Ellis,

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McDonald's, Starbucks, Target, Meijer, Nichols Paper and Ford Motor Company – assessing existing buildings and looking for opportunities to make modifications that can help achieve LEED certification.

Pobst considers his marquee engagement to date to be his first – starting in 2002 with the injection-molding manufacturer [Cascade Engineering](#). Because Cascade has a culture very open both to LEED and to change in general, Pobst said the engagement achieved a great deal.

“They’re really an exceptional company,” Pobst says. “They really get it. That was the first LEED Platinum building in the state of Michigan, and it got to that level largely because they were practicing that level of sustainability in their day-to-day operations, just because that’s the mindset of their leadership.”

The Cascade engagement involved far more than just enhancements to the building. It also involved promoting employees’ use of alternative modes of transportation and cleaner fuels, changes in landscaping strategies, pollution reduction, increases in water-use efficiency and improvements in waste practices.

Because Cascade took such a sweeping approach and realized such large savings as a result, Pobst often presents the engagement as a case study to show other companies what is possible.

The report shows that a total investment of approximately \$95,000 is yielding an annual return of \$305,000.

“The credit-for-credit economic analysis shows the return on investment, and the returns were just mindblowing,” Pobst says. “It was stunning what they were able to do with what they invested.”

Pobst emphasizes the culture at Cascade Engineering because, he says, that is often the most important variable in determining whether a company can realize the full benefits of LEED.

“Because we’re doing a culture change, we’re looking for that to become something that happens within the company,” Pobst says. “It’s not something I can do within a package and impose on a company, so you have to develop an education process that allows that to happen. I provide templates for people to work with, and I kind of sit on the side and guide the process. But I try not to be so infused into the process that I’m the one that’s making it happen. If it doesn’t become part of the culture, then it’s not going to happen.”



Pobst founded Eco Metrics with his daughter Rachael, who recently stepped away from the firm to pursue her education in Chicago. For now, Pobst works with the cooperation of several part-time associates, and as you might expect, he works out of his home (no commuting).

And as busy as he remains consulting with companies, Pobst said he spends just as much time these days training other LEED-accredited professionals – an indication that demand for this knowledge will only grow.

“I’ve developed with a friend of mine, John Stivers, a LEED AP exam prep class, and we take that around the Midwest and work with private companies and other USGBC chapters to present it,” Pobst says.

As Pobst's success has shown, demand for LEED knowledge is growing because there is a market for it. The more companies recognize how they can reward themselves by achieving LEED certification, the more that market is likely to grow.

Dan Calabrese is the co-founder and editor in chief of [North Star Writers Group](#) and previously owned a West Michigan public relations firm by the same name. He has written for the Macomb Daily, the Royal Oak Daily Tribune, the Journal Newspapers in Wayne County and the Grand Rapids Business Journal. He previously wrote for Rapid Growth about [couture carpet maker Scott Group](#).

Photos:

Sam Probst outside of Cascade Engineering

The Felt Mansion in Saugatuck (courtesy of Sam Probst)

A snowless exterior of Cascade Engineering (courtesy of Sam Probst)

Sam Probst

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