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Asda makes eco savings

And while size is not everything, it does make a difference, which is why Asdas desire to turn from environmental consumer to eco-contributor has not only come under scrutiny but raised some eyebrows in the commercial world.

Owned by American company Wal-Mart, Asdas work plan created in 2005 seeks to implement higher levels of energy-efficiency, increased use of renewable energy and a diversion of 90 per cent of its waste from landfill by 2009.

But it appears that, on the energy front, the best way to make big savings was to look at little changes that can make a huge difference.

Julian Walker-Palin, Asdas Head of Corporate Policy for Sustainability and Ethics, has overseen some of the highs and lows of the companys transformation to eco-contributor.

He says: Weve made huge efforts to cut our energy consumption, but the main way we did this was to make sure we took our colleagues and staff with us.

They were involved in everything and some even notified us about lights that no longer needed to be in stores.

We allotted green champions to each store and their job was to look out for energy-saving measures.

These kinds of changes were linked to performance indicators and they were awarded for becoming more energy-efficient and a bonus was attached to this.

Our stores now use 20 per cent less energy and we were ahead of our competitors on this as we beat our own targets by about three years. Our colleagues understood what that really meant and energy has been a really big thing for us.

Asdas first move in cutting energy was to install doors on the refrigerated units in the food to go areas and also on at the cheese and meat areas.

They tried this in a limited number of stores and although it was a success on the energy front, it was not so successful with customers.

Julian says: Customers had mixed views about what wed done and that was a good exercise for us because it made us realise that sometimes we are moving too fast and making changes too quickly for those we are serving.

Customers felt that the doors were a barrier for them and they didnt like it so we found that although there were energy savings to be made, customers began moving to our competitors.

Moves to increase sustainability and decrease energy consumption were implemented across the business including the Asda service centres where they recycled items on site.

A simple switch from using cardboard boxes to carry vegetables, to using plastic trays meant they could save on the energy and carbon dioxide needed to produce the boxes in the first place.

For more than ten years, we used the service centres for a number of things but when we focused on becoming



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sustainable and more energy-efficient, we adapted them for something else, he says.

We now use them for washing green plastic trays that carry food and for disposing of cardboard trays that carry produce.

We decided to build one or two service centres where these plastic trays could be washed, we also put compostable plastic bags on top of them and weve implemented scanning equipment to check how much produce is used and how much is thrown away.

Bringing in these kind of practices made Asdas consumption rates plunge. We are also aiming to reduce packaging by 25 per cent and one way of doing this is through lightweight wrapping of produce, says Julian.

We now have a focus on carbon intensity for products and looking at the amount of carbon used throughout the supply chain. Weve asked ourselves how we optimise packaging and we presently have experts helping us to tackle that question.

One thing Julian says is key to Asda achieving its aims is working with colleagues outside the United Kingdom. We now know that we cannot focus on the UK market alone, he says.

There are global targets that are being looked at so, as a business, we need to increase our leverage when working on a global scale.

Within the UK we are making sure that we work regionally, rather than just trying to bring in a one-size-fits-all model for all our stores, as it doesnt work.

We know there will be even more European legislation being introduced, but we are looking at ways of reducing carbon dioxide.

From next year we will look at how we can build a low-carbon business and well be working on plans for this.

* Julian Walker-Palin spoke at the The Recycling & Waste Management Exhibition (RWM 09), at the NEC, last month.

* For further details see www.rwmexhibition.com.

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