

I have so many bags for life... I'm gonna live forever!

This week, our writer turns to saving the planet – one count at a time...

Global warming?

When I first heard the phrase, I have to admit I thought it sounded quite appealing!

As a boy from the North East, I have had to freeze myself to death on many a paper round in the cold, biting winds that blast a winter chill off the North Sea. And in later years more than one suit was destroyed from trying to bump start me Vauxhall Chevette on a wet wintry morning, on me way to work.

So any term that conjured up the prospect that all of this would one day give way to a temperate climate of sun drenched summers and moderate winters sounded appealing. As me Old Gran used to say "The sun shines on the righteous." Now, thanks to global warming, apparently I too could bask in the rays! Wahey!

If Whitley Bay could have a climate like the Maldives, bring it on. And actually, that'll be just what we need. Because by that time, according to the latest IPCC Report, the Maldives will be under water and lost forever!

This week's UN report on climate change has been described as 'A code red for humanity.' The good news is not just that there is still something we can do about it, but also the fact that world leaders seem to be coming to the conclusion that they cannot avoid taking action any longer. And when I think how Al Gore took this warning message mainstream as far back as 2006, it is about time we all did our bit.

Naturally businesses will be expected to take the lead in getting us out of this mess. Some will develop the very technology that we need in order to stem the tide of global temperature increases, so that island nations do not become casualties of a manmade disaster. However, all businesses will play a part.

As the biggest stock take company in the world, with a staff of 30,000 employees, clearly WIS will have a part to



play. Not just in making its own business model sustainable and therefore an appropriate partner to work with other global brands, but also to facilitate our customers' aspirations in meeting their own sustainability targets.

However, as I look at the findings of the report and start to think about what we as a business can do to help, I realise that we are thankfully not beginning from a standing start. Actually, we are already changing the way we do business to help save the planet... one count at a time...

I'd like to say that the primary motivation was to help save the planet. But that would be untrue. The reason we have moved all 11 of our senior UK management team to electric vehicles is not saving the planet, but saving the pennies. Yes HM Government told us we could buy vehicles instead of paying taxes and also reduce management's personal tax bills by no longer having to pay a benefit in kind tax. It was a no brainer... the planet won hands down! And the infrastructure is available in some managers' homes for the cars to be recharged from renewable energy too. Bonser!

We also have a fleet of some 45 minibuses in the UK. I am very keen to see those replaced with electric powered vehicles. This week we have been testing an electric Vauxhall Vivaro minibus and it is definitely a move in the right direction, showing great promise.

The range is said to be 180 miles, which probably means a usable range with full team on board of around 120 miles. That's not quite enough for our stock count teams to do their work effectively and in the tight timeframes necessary. However, we are committed to investing in electric vehicle technology as it develops, and transforming our fleet.

Of course when it comes to personnel, much of what was introduced during Covid, in terms of working from home, has provided a useful stepping stone for people to avoid the morning commute, and to work from home at least some of their working hours. This is something we embraced early on at WIS.

Seeing the benefits of home working where it is possible for our executives, we downsized our offices in 2020 and introduced IT infrastructure to facilitate more remote working. Critically remote working only works if you make sure that there is sufficient social integration for people to feel part of a team although spread to disparate parts of the country and working remotely. This is a very important step and any business looking at

relocating workers needs to keep this aspect firmly in mind.

From an operational point of view our latest terminals operate with a longer battery life and more rechargeable cycles than ever before. We also recycle our lithium ion batteries as facilities to do this have come on stream. For five years now we have been operating paperless audits, as opposed to those businesses who destroy a tree every time they stock take a major store. Not only is paperless environmentally friendly, but it also allows greater analysis and insight from the data collected, in terms of trouble hot spots and areas requiring closer inspection or more resources, than ever was possible with physical printouts.

Regular readers will remember my frustration at McDonald's new loyalty scheme and the fact that staff were no more able to work the new scan and collect points function of the app than I was. Now I am not claiming that I am solely responsible, but I would just mention that since writing that article the staff have been trained and between us we worked out how to scan

the coffee receipt to collect points. The only thing here is that you need to print a receipt in order to get the barcode to scan to get your points. Not sure that is a huge step in the direction of sustainability then! I have already amassed enough points for two free cups of coffee. So, I have enough to offer to take the missus out and 'buy her a drink.' I'll wait until her birthday... no point in squandering the freebies!

I suppose my key message to retailers who are now trudging down the sustainability track is this. Outsourcing your stocktake is the most environmentally responsible thing you can do. It is the fastest, cheapest least resource hungry way that any organisation can check stock. What's more the inherently greater accuracy that will be achieved (we routinely deliver better than 99.8% accuracy) means less wrong picks, wasted vehicle journeys and angry customers. All of which are bad for the environment and bad for business.

We can all do our bit to look after the planet. It is not one big thing that will make it work. It is the myriad of small things which cumulatively add up to a major change.

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