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Ten Ways I Freed my Distillery from Environmental Irresponsibility

by KAREN HOSKIN

Does your distillery have a “deathprint”?

Every kilowatt-hour of coal-generated electricity is 670 times more likely to kill someone than wind power. Every plastic cup used at tasting events will hang around for 450 years or more in piles of waste. Airline travel and freight shipments will produce 27% of greenhouse gases. These facts, back in 2008 when I started my distillery, made it hard for me to sleep at night.

Then I realized that I could use a computer keyboard for a few minutes and turn my company’s energy green. I could choose a different URL on my computer browser and prevent 17 trees, 380 gallons of oil, three cubic yards of landfill space, 4,000 kilowatts of energy, and 7,000 gallons of water from being wasted on the printing of my shelf talkers. So began my crusade to break my distillery’s cycle of waste and environmental degradation. Here’s how you can, too.

Convert your distillery’s electricity use to renewable wind energy.

This can be done on the telephone or sitting at a computer, and doesn’t require installing expensive infrastructure. Contact your electricity utility and ask if they have a renewable energy purchasing option. Typically, you flip a switch on your account and begin buying

wind or solar power rather than traditional coal or natural gas-generated electricity. If they do not, or you are not satisfied with the price, there are a number of independent companies that allow you to convert your power origin. The Department of Energy provides an interactive map listing providers by state (<http://bit.ly/1mUDh1T>). All you need to get started is the average monthly kilowatt-hours of use in your total operation, which you can find easily on your electric bill. Consider choosing a company that is Green-E certified (green-e.org) so you know the power they generate is truly renewable.

Install solar panels on your distillery roof or land.

Companies like SolarCity, SunPower and Nextility install leased photovoltaic solar systems on distilleries with no up-front investment. Owners then pay the solar installer for power as a utility. The same companies often install complete systems owned by the distillery and financed over time.

Most states have hundreds of solar programs which provide rebates, refunds and incentives for solar installations. Colorado has 147 such programs, according to dsireusa.org, which lists incentives by state. Power utilities will buy solar electricity that is generated in excess

of what is used on the property. It is even possible for me to use solar power to formally offset carbon emissions from other sources. A list of companies installing commercial solar systems is available at energysage.com.

Buy carbon offsets for your natural gas use, airline travel, driving and freight shipping.

As distillers, aspects of our work produce carbon emissions that we cannot always avoid. Our stills at Montanya Distillers are fired by natural gas. I often hop on a plane to attend general sales meetings or visit accounts with distributors in a distant state or country. We load pallets of spirits onto trucks all the time to be moved across the country and overseas. Some distilleries ship glass from overseas makers and route it to a silk screener along the way, adding a freight leg.

In my efforts to green my own company, I calculated the carbon emissions equation for my company and began to buy carbon offsets using a company called TerraPass. This partner (and others) remove from the atmosphere the carbon that companies like mine emit by planting trees, managing forests, capturing methane from landfills and composting organic waste. A good carbon-offset partner will provide an impact form on which to record your use of natural gas therms, car travel distances, volumes of freight and miles flown for use when calculating your distillery's carbon emissions. They allocate some portion of the benefits of their carbon-reducing projects to your distillery at a marginal cost. I prefer to be carbon negative, meaning Montanya Distillers offsets more than we emit.

Convert your cartons and labels to FSC-certified paper or 100% recycled.

For your next cardboard box or label order, ask your supplier to print onto papers that meet the highest green standards for forest management, tree harvest, recycling, reuse and emissions at the production facility. The beauty of FSC certification is that it takes the responsibility off me as a distillery owner to find the right paper company and be sure they really "walk the walk." The additional cost of FSC-certified products is a small percentage of the overall cost, and the cost goes down with higher-volume purchases. When I display the

FSC-certified logo on my case boxes or bottles, my customers know that I am taking care of environmental impacts upstream of their purchase.

Buy American glass to decrease the carbon footprint for U.S. sales, and European glass for EU sales.

So many of our distillery colleagues buy their glass from France, Eastern Europe, China and beyond. Beautiful glass is made right here in the USA and can be custom-made for larger orders as well. Overseas glass may be cheaper, even including freight to your door, but I have been pleasantly surprised that the cost of American glass is very competitive. I admit, I find it ironic when craft spirits promote their "Made in America" status but are bottled in big orders of Chinese glass.

There is a lesser-known reason why Chinese glass is so much cheaper. During glass production, decomposition of raw materials during the melting of lead causes the emission of CO₂, which is a greenhouse gas. The U.S. standards for controlling these emissions are much higher than in China.

As a consumer, when you look at two side-by-side bottles of a spirit that have markedly different prices, it may be that the owner of the more expensive bottle has stewarded their responsibility to the environment better than their competitor. A cost is being paid somewhere in the system, even if not at the cash register, probably by the environment and air quality.

Print your publications and collaterals with a green printer.

We all know how many piles of paper our industry puts out into the world—mailings, business cards, pamphlets, sell sheets, shelf talkers, neck tags, posters, trade show displays, case cards, event handbills and more. At Montanya Distillers, our printing companies (Greener Printer, Overnight Prints and TAPP Label) allow distilleries like ours to print all our collateral materials on 100% recycled, FSC-certified or recycled papers using chlorine free, waterless printing techniques. Our printers have a long list of certifications by the Rainforest Initiative and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative. They even carbon offset their shipping to us.

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It is possible via the TTB to find a DSP permit holder who collects and uses heads for fuel oil, firing ambient stoves, for outdoor fireplaces and other applications. Passing your heads down the line for other uses, rather than disposing of them, turns your throwaway distillate into energy.

Consider every single thing you buy and green it.

I sat down one day and made a list of everything my company buys and talked to every supplier about a more ecologically responsible option. I began to buy logo t-shirts made from recycled x-rays; cocktail napkins, toilet paper and hand towels made from 100% recycled content; tasting cups and straws made from biodegradable bio-resin, paper to-go containers made from renewable plant material, trash bags that break down immediately in the landfill, cleaning products from non-chemical sources and reusable bottle bags for our mercantile. I began to ship all of our online store orders reusing boxes and packaging materials from shipments we received.

Commercial composting becomes a real option in more urban areas. When farms are nearby, it is feasible to pass food waste and biomass on to farmers. We buy as many products locally as we possibly can—raw and organic ingredients for distilling, infusing and finishing as well as herbs, greens, fruits, vegetables, cheeses and pastas for our restaurant. When I go to sleep at night, I feel a little more free from the cycle of waste that we are all trapped in.

Recycle your heads or use them to operate your own appliances and vehicles.

Many distilleries throw away their high-octane heads because the alcohols are unflavorful, containing flavor-spoiling congeners, methanol and acetone. However, in this day and age of vehicles, fireplaces, machines and stoves being powered by alternative fuels, there is a secondary market for distillery heads. It is possible via the TTB to find a DSP permit holder who collects and uses heads for fuel oil, firing ambient stoves, for outdoor fire-

places and other applications. Passing your heads down the line for other uses, rather than disposing of them, turns your throwaway distillate into energy. At Montanya Distillers, we are currently developing a fireplace that runs on our heads.

Replace every single light bulb in your facility with LED.

Replacing a 60-watt incandescent light bulb with a 12-watt LED bulb will save 75–85% of the electricity used by that fixture. It is cooler and unlikely to spark, which is great for safety, too. I even found some beautiful LED filament bulbs for my tasting room fixtures. Design has come a long way since the early days of coiled compact fluorescent bulbs, allowing better balance between interior design and energy efficiency.

Consider certifications that confirm your commitments.

Montanya Distillers is a Certified Green Business through the Green Business Network, which means we are “values driven, socially equitable, accountable with radical transparency, and environmentally responsible in sourcing, manufacturing, marketing, and daily operations.” We are in the process of becoming certified as a B Corp. B Corps, according to the licensing organization, are “a new type of corporation that uses the power of business to address social and environmental problems.” Certifications remove the chance of a distillery giving “lip service” to sustainability. Customers will know that you actually did what you said, rather than just wrote about it on your blog and hoped no one would look more closely.

And don't forget to tell the story. It may cost more to make an ecologically sound decision, but most customers will reward you with greater loyalty because their conscience benefits from your efforts.

Karen Hoskin founded Montanya Distillers with her husband Brice Hoskin in 2008. As CEO and President, she stays active in day-to-day production, distillation and bottling, while managing national sales and marketing, brand development, product development, web design, human resources and their busy cocktail bar and restaurant. In 2013, Hoskin earned ADI's Bubble Cap Award for Distillery of the Year.



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