



Contact: Ann Knight
Vice President, Marketing
Teragren LLC
(206) 842-9477 or ann@teragren.com

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Teragren Measures Footprint, Establishes Blue Print for Small Businesses to Run Environmentally Sustainable, Socially Responsible and Profitable Operations

Fine bamboo flooring and panel manufacturer works with Business for Social Responsibility Clean Cargo and Green Freight groups to demonstrate size is no factor in running a sound and successful business

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND, Wash. (December 3, 2003) – American companies of all shapes and sizes are making positive improvements to join the popular “green” movement with environmentally friendly products and manufacturing processes. Notably fewer smaller corporations, however, whole-heartedly commit to environmentally and socially responsible practices beyond the basics, due to perceived costs and limited knowledge. Bainbridge Island, Wash.-based Teragren, LLC, the nation’s leading manufacturer of bamboo flooring and panels, is proving that a small business can be 100-percent committed to managing a healthy work environment, reducing its impact on the environment, and still reap the rewards of double-digit growth year after year.

Teragren LLC, founded in 1994 as TimberGrass LLC, produces hardwood floors and accessory building products out of bamboo, a highly sustainable natural resource that grows to maturity in six years. Bamboo can be harvested several times from the same plant and it efficiently cleans air and water in its native growing regions. Bamboo building products have caught the attention of architects, designers, the media, and environmentally savvy consumers. As a result, the market is bustling with start-up offshore manufacturers who are banking on the green appeal of the material and hoping to cash in while the trend is hot.

Rather than resorting to green-washing its marketing materials with sustainability jargon, Teragren executives are set on measuring and reducing the company’s overall environmental impact – from the beginning of the manufacturing process through the time the product is shipped to distribution points and finally installed in commercial and residential building projects. It’s no small task to measure ecological impact, energy consumption and emissions from factories in Asia, cargo ships, rail and trucking services and utilities. Last year company president David Knight launched a five year plan to assess Teragren’s total environmental footprint and develop practices to reduce its overall impact. The end result will be a plan that could realistically benefit small companies in any industry with steps for saving the planet and turning a profit.

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Knight is cautious about pushing the environmental angle of his products and practices due to public fatigue of everything “green” being over-sold. Instead he focuses marketing attention on product quality, aesthetics, and customer service first, and then tags on the environmental message. To date the strategy is working. Teragren has demonstrated double or triple digit growth in its sales every year since 1994 and has developed a stellar reputation in the architectural and design community.

“We’re seeing a significant shift in attitudes about environmentally-friendly products and socially-responsible companies,” Knight said. “Even as recently as three years ago no one specifically asked for green products and the image did not necessarily connect with the mainstream. Today nearly all architects and designers look for environmental alternatives first, and spec our products because of our holistic approach to running a responsible business. Even though we’ve soft-pedaled the green benefits of our flooring and panels, the word is out and our strategy is paying for itself.”

Teragren focuses on clean cargo and green freight

Profits are a result, but not the primary driver for Knight, a business-minded, Harley-Davidson-riding, small-town Wyoming-raised environmentalist who is committed to proving that any company, big or small, operating out of any location, can greatly reduce its impact on the environment. Knight is not alone in his thinking. He’s an active member of Business for Social Responsibility’s (BSR’s) Clean Cargo and Green Freight working groups. These groups focus on developing realistic cost effective methods for reducing energy consumption and emissions from transport modes hauling products around the world. According to BSR research, ground freight transportation alone accounts for 19.4% of total transportation energy use and 17% of all transportation-related carbon emissions in the U.S.

The BSR Clean Cargo and Green Freight groups include several of the nation’s largest manufacturers and transportation companies who collectively manage between 30-40% of all products shipped into, out of and around the country. Knight joined the working groups to help determine how to track things like energy consumption and emission generation. Aside from global corporations, most businesses work with freight forwarders who bundle shipments in cartons and flatbeds and transport them around the world. Collectively, small companies produce the overwhelming bulk of U.S.-related shipments yet they’re not held accountable for their environmental impact like global corporations that are closely monitored by the public. Knight is working with BSR to develop guidelines that he and hundreds of thousands of other companies around the world can use to measure and reduce their environmental footprint.

“At a glance, small businesses don’t appear to impact the environment like billion dollar corporations but when you look at the big picture, the opposite is true.” Knight said. “I’m working with BSR to develop a method to specifically document and reduce Teragren’s impact, though in the end, the plan could benefit any number of like-sized companies.”

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Knight knows his plan won't happen overnight so his immediate attention focuses on matters he can control within Teragren, such as factory conditions, fair pay, and reducing formaldehyde used in adhesives during the manufacturing process.

“Since bamboo inherently is an environmentally sustainable resource, most of our competitors don't care about the health effects of formaldehyde in their adhesives,” he said. “We're taking a more responsible approach. It's those small things that make a difference and our customers appreciate the effort.”

About Teragren

Teragren's mission is to develop, manufacture and distribute bamboo building materials by providing a sustainable, mature fiber alternative to dwindling timber resources, while maintaining a company that is environmentally, socially and economically responsible.

Unlike hardwood trees requiring more than 60 years to mature, bamboo is a grass that grows to maturity in less than six years and is renewably harvested over and over from the same plant. Teragren takes it one environmental step further by virtually eliminating the formaldehyde level of the adhesive used in the lamination process, which is 6.5 times less than allowed under stringent European (E-1) standards – much stricter than U.S. standards. In addition, Teragren only uses a water-based, solvent free, 100% solid finish in the manufacture of its prefinished line of products. Teragren products are manufactured in the Zhejiang Province of China in a factory that is ISO 9001-2000 certified.

The green building industry in the U.S. continues to grow as more consumers look for ways to reduce their impact on the environment. Teragren products contribute to the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) certification as “Rapidly Renewable Materials” (MR Credit 6) and “Low-Emitting Materials” (IEQ Credit 4).

Teragren fine bamboo enjoys a prominent position in commercial and residential markets. Teragren presently services customers through established floor covering distributors and dealers nationwide. For more information about Teragren, visit www.teragren.com or call 800.929.6333. For more information on BSR's Clean Cargo and Green Freight research, visit www.bsr.org or call 415.537.0890.

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