



PROCESS

Platinum Plan

Posty Cards is a small business that proved LEED Platinum is attainable

STORY BY FRED BAUTERS | PHOTO BY AARON DOUGHERTY

Erick Jessee, CEO of the 65-year-old family-run Posty Cards, understands the hesitation by small- and mid-sized businesses to go all in on renovating or building with green, sustainable practices in mind. The up-front costs are slightly higher, a lot of technology is newer and the processes are different. But he and many others believe sustainability, and in particular, LEED certification, is the long-term, feasible answer. Jessee wants to help other small businesses in KC make it a reality.

Posty Cards has about 40 employees, with seasonal help brought in depending on the level of need. Before its expansion in early 2011, its offices were 22,000-square-feet. Out of the need for more room for equipment and the desire to create space for further growth, Posty expanded to 45,000-square-feet.

“We doubled our space but are only using five percent more energy, almost doubling the efficiency of the facility,” Jessee says. Interest initially was perceived to be squarely on gaining square footage. “We were squeezed,” he says. “But then we realized we needed to make this pay off in a lot of ways. We felt LEED Gold was aggressive but obtainable.”

While Certified and Silver projects don’t usually require noticeably greater investment for the process, upgrading to Gold adds 1-2 percent more and Platinum can add 5-6 percent up front. Jessee lays out the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental

Design) process, run by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), with five steps focused on design, construction and operations that businesses of any size can handle regardless of the desired level:

- 1) Choose which version of the rating system you will follow. Typically, there are a couple available at any time as the USGBC constantly works to remain up to date.

- 2) Register the project with the USGBC.

- 3) Document the project as it unfolds and tally the points you will attempt to win (all online). The team can log in to sign off on documents and attach them within a single location.

- 4) Submit for a preliminary review, which provides information on how close you are to obtaining a specific level. Make any adjustments and then submit a final application, which may take between 15 days and a month.

- 5) If everything works out, you will be LEED certified.

Before going down that route, Jessee believes the LEED framework should be in mind from day one of the project. Many problems and headaches stem from attempting to take conventional plans and make green additions. For Posty, the focus right off the bat was “How, within the budget, can we accomplish LEED Platinum?” Jessee says. They maintained a budget-conscious plan by using off-the-shelf materials and investing a lot in high-efficiency systems including solar

panel array, water conservation, run-off management and HVAC.

Today, all of this is attainable, no matter the size of business. Posty Cards is one of only seven manufacturing plants in the U.S. to get Platinum certification and by far the smallest—others include Volkswagen and ConAgra plants. So Jessee brings with him a unique perspective. He doesn’t think many of the older hurdles remain.

“There’s no architect or constructor who doesn’t know how to approach LEED projects,” Jessee says. “The landscape for building LEED is drastically different from five years ago. Small businesses assume only large companies can afford it, but additional cost is minimal.”

How long it takes to recoup upfront costs varies from project to project, but most small-business buildings are built with an expected 20-25 years of use or more in mind. By then, the efficiencies will have more than made up for initial cost. With the push federal and state governments have made in the last few years, which require new projects to be Silver or Gold due to the savings in energy over time, there’s plenty of momentum to take into a certification project now.

For Jessee, though, the benefits of a LEED building, and especially Platinum, go far beyond cost savings. “We realized it was an opportunity to rebuild our brand,” he says. “A building can represent a brand, and it reflects that to visitors,



customers and employees. It makes us much more attractive to future employees. It's a very powerful statement to have a LEED building for your headquarters."

The entire building went from a dark, largely windowless manufacturing facility to a warm, inviting home to everyone who enters Posty Cards. "So much of it is about the quality of the work environment—greater

productivity and lower absenteeism," Jessee says. "It's a unique experience in manufacturing. We wanted to align our goals to corporate social responsibility. If we built a conventional space, we'd be stuck with it for 20 years." **KCB**



TIPS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES PURSUING LEED CERTIFICATION ▶

Erick Jessee has gone through the process, made it to Platinum status and learned much along the way. As a champion of the process, and sustainability at large, he offers the following tips for LEED certification:

- ▶ Set LEED goals from the beginning and make sure they are equal to all other goals.
- ▶ Constantly re-evaluate the design. It's extremely valuable to have a knowledgeable contractor on board. Turner Special Projects was invaluable to have and give direction on which points will be most cost-effective and which will be hard to document.
- ▶ Install a measurement and verification system, which gives data feedback on all the systems in the facility. We found that our solar panels weren't as effective as initially believed, so we were able to make tweaks and now the system works as intended. It's the only way you'll know you're getting the efficiencies you paid for. All the design, architecture and engineering teams we worked with now believe it's an essential element that they push hard for in projects.
- ▶ There's no reason not to do solar. Payback is about three to five years and then you have free energy.