

Harmon on BPM Paul Harmon

Sustainable Business Processes

I've written in the past about sustainability and about the need for companies to increasingly extend their business processes to include save and recycle. In May of this year, for example, I wrote about the Colruyt Group, a family-owned Belgian supermarket chain that uses solar power to capture energy that they then use to power their forklifts and cars.

This past weekend I visited – Blume Distillation -- a company in Monterey California that is working to make it possible for a wide variety of companies to use bio-waste products to provide fuel for transportation. In essence, Blume is focused on delivering turnkey packages for converting bio-wastes into alcohol.

Historically, corporations and governments have tried to accomplish this conversion on a large-scale. They have grown sugar-rich crops, harvested them, and then converted them to fuel. The economics of this large-scale approach have not been very good.

It turns out that it's much more economical to only use bio-waste products – husks left over after the corn has been harvested, leaves, skins and pulp left over after grapes have been squeezed for wine – and to process them on a small scale. Thus, a single farm can feed its bio-wastes into a biorefinery and generate enough fuel for its farm vehicles for the year. The process can be paid for by what it would otherwise cost to dispose of the bio-wastes. And, by recycling the waste, the cost of acquiring fuel for the farm's vehicles can be reduced to about \$1 a gallon. The same can be done for food processing plants that generate bio-wastes.

The problem with this small-scale approach is that farmers, vintners or food processors may not know – or want to know – much about distilling bio-wastes. The company I visited, Blume Distillation, has solved this problem by creating turn-key systems that allow small-scale organizations to acquire and set-up small refineries with minimal knowledge and at modest cost.

Just as computers, which were once large, required teams of highly trained operators, and were too expensive for small businesses to acquire, and are now ubiquitous, so bio-waste distilleries are about to become common-place utilities in a variety of industries.

From a process perspective, you would glance at a high-level business flowchart and look for an activity that involved the disposal of bio-wastes. By incorporating a fuel distillation activity, one can change the disposal of one's bio-wastes from a cost of

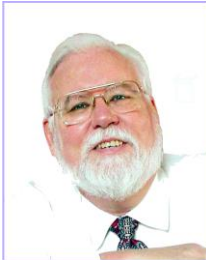
doing business to a profit-center, while simultaneously eliminating the cost of acquiring fuels for vehicles or heating devices.

For some organizations this will be a major improvement in their overall business model. For most it will simply represent a modest savings. In all cases, however, it will represent a step in the right direction and a public-relations coup. In a world in which water and energy are growing more expensive, and the side effects of industrial processes and waste disposal are increasingly scrutinized, efforts at sustainable processes are going to be increasingly necessary and rewarded.

For more information, see blumeditillation.com or contact tharvey@blumeditillation.com

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