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# Dallas Business Journal

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## LEED certification efforts remain strong

Businesses see green building, sustainability as keys to success even in economic downturn

Dallas Business Journal - by [Lena Dirbashi](#) Staff Writer

Despite the economic downturn and a depleted work force, corporate commitment to environmental responsibility is more evident than ever.

A study by the U.N. Global Compact and Accenture Sustainability Services showed that 93 percent of CEOs see sustainability as key to their companies' success.

Revenue from green building projects made up half of the \$240 million total gross revenue for HKS in 2009, according to Kirk Teske, chief sustainability officer for the Dallas-based architectural firm. Those projects were either registered or certified in Leadership in Energy and **Environmental Design** — or LEED — an internationally recognized green building certification system. The **U.S. Green Building Council** developed the certification based on a point system that determines the four certification levels: certified, silver, gold and platinum.

"We've been promoting sustainability for many, many years," Teske said. "We were the designer of the very first LEED (building) for Sabre in Dallas, which opened in 2001."

HKS has completed 54 million square-feet of LEED-certified projects. Since 2001, the company has had 79 projects certified or registered.

According to Quayle Hodeck, founder and CEO of **Renewable Choice Energy**, a supplier of green power for LEED certification and partner for HKS, Texas leads the nation in LEED certification. North Texas alone saw a more than 350 percent increase in LEED-certified buildings last year, from 14 in 2008 to 51 in 2009, according to the **North Texas Chapter** of the U.S. Green Building Council.

Teske said HKS clients want LEED-certified buildings to save money on energy costs and to attract the nation's top talent.

"The generation coming out of universities today place a very high priority on sustainability," he said.

HKS "greened up" in 2010 by using 100 percent renewable energy and distributing a Green Operations Policy that encourages all HKS employees to save energy. HKS hopes its sustainable-friendly corporate culture will have a spill-over effect to its clients. Teske regularly invites clients for educational sessions early in the design process to encourage them to set energy-efficient targets that the design team can work toward.

"I want our designers to think more 'sustainability,'" Teske said. "If I put them in an environment that is more sustainable, it will get better results."

Thomas Bathgate, principal and project executive with Philadelphia-based PWI Engineering, said 100 percent of his company's projects have been LEED certified in the past two years. Bathgate was among more than 700 executives who attended a construction industry tradeshow on sustainability in Grapevine last month.

"Everything is LEED," he said. "We used to talk about it and discuss it, but now we don't even discuss it anymore. What we do discuss is what level (of certification)."



It's purely a business decision, Bathgate said of LEED certification pursuit.

"The cost premiums are negligible," he said. "And though there are additional costs in going for the extra level like silver or gold, (clients) don't go for the gold because they wanted to be gold. No, they were going to get a quick payback."

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### **Weighing LEED CERTIFICATION Costs**

The best way to understand how to estimate the cost of a LEED building is to study the LEED certification point system. The points represent an array of attributes aimed at implementing practical and measurable green building design, construction, operations and maintenance standards. Some of these points target energy savings, water efficiency, CO2 emissions reduction, improved indoor environmental quality and stewardship of resources and sensitivity to their impacts. Some points cost more money to implement than others, leaving it up to the design team to customize how they choose what LEED attributes to apply. For example, renewable energy features and building proximity to banks and public transportation are more expensive points. Generally, the more points a building has, the higher the certification level.

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