

Executive Transportation Company Takes First Steps to Go Green

BY ROBERT MACKASEK ■ CEO ■ Valera Global

Making a corporate commitment to become a more environmentally friendly organization can be a daunting task. For Valera Global, an executive transportation provider that relies on automobiles to conduct business, this was especially true. When the company decided to “go green,” it was important to research all available options to ensure that the decision made sense both environmentally and financially.

FIRST STEPS

Valera Global operates the 14th largest chauffeured vehicle fleet in the United States. At the urging of the daughter of two of the company’s founders in early 2007, Valera Global began looking at ways to reduce its carbon footprint. Once committed to the process, Valera Global’s management team decided that small internal changes would not be enough to create the impact they desired. The company sought a green solution that combined the greatest positive environmental impact while also balancing their business goals.

PROS AND CONS OF HYBRID VEHICLES

Like many other transportation providers, Valera Global initially investigated adding hybrid vehicles to the company’s fleet. However, on closer inspection, the company’s management team determined that hybrids were not the best choice at the time, for a variety of reasons. First, most hybrid vehicles are small, no-nonsense cars. In the executive transportation business, most clients still expect and demand the amenities of a large sedan, SUV or limousine. In addition, a large percentage of Valera Global’s travel occurs on highways, where a hybrid’s electric motors would not be in use, as hybrids use the electric engine primarily at lower speeds. Finally, Valera Global also became aware of the potential negative environmental impact of disposing hybrid batteries. Unsatisfied with the status of current hybrid vehicles on the market, Valera Global looked beyond their fleet and began to consider more comprehensive green solutions.

CARBON EXCHANGE: THE RIGHT CHOICE

Another possibility the company’s management team discovered during this exploration was the concept of the carbon exchange. By signing on with a carbon exchange, Valera Global would submit to a yearly audit of the company’s entire carbon output—from their fleet, to the energy used in their corporate offices, down to executive airfare. Once calculated, Valera Global would be legally bound to offset their emissions by purchasing carbon “shares” on an exchange. Those shares could represent anything from reforestation projects, to methane capture and destruction programs, to wind and solar power initiatives across the world.

After researching many organizations that offer carbon trading, Valera decided to join the Chicago Climate Exchange (CCX), the world’s first and North America’s only voluntary but legally binding greenhouse gas emission registry, reduction and trading system. While adding hybrid vehicles to its fleet would have helped the company to offset some of the environmental impact of its fleet, Valera Global’s CCX membership allows Valera Global to take accountability for its entire carbon footprint.

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

Valera Global is the first transportation service provider in the world to join CCX and is about to complete its first year of associate membership. Valera Global and CCX consider this partnership to be a success, both financially and environmentally. Clients of Valera Global are excited to learn that they are involved with a company that is environmentally conscious, as well as concerned with their clients' needs and expectations. By keeping their standards high, Valera has found a way to create a statement without losing clients. With the first audit set for this year, Valera has high expectations for long-term success in this partnership and hopes other transportation companies will voluntarily work to create a more environmentally friendly industry.

For the future, Valera hopes technological advances in hybrid automobiles will catch up to their needs, as well as their clients' expectations. Overall, with more attention being paid to green alternatives throughout all industries, Valera anticipates many positive changes ahead for their next steps in becoming more environmentally friendly. PRN

■ Before Choosing a Carbon Offset Program...

When looking for a carbon offset program, a buyer needs to choose very carefully and consider which program will meet the company's needs and provide the best solutions. The offset market is largely unregulated so extensive research must be made to ensure credibility.

1. Decide which emissions you wish to offset. Do you want to only offset air travel or a particular event or offset the total carbon emissions produced by your organization?
2. Calculate your emissions. You can do this with any of the free carbon calculators that are available on the web. Some calculators are specific to one specific source, so be careful which calculator you choose.
3. Consider "additionality". An offset project is considered additional if it wouldn't have happened without the extra funding from the sale of the offsets. This will assure a net benefit for the climate as result of your purchase.
4. Ask questions. When researching an offset program, ask specific questions to find out how the offsets will be used. Can you choose specific projects? Are the offsets validated by a third-party? Is there any education about environmental issues provided to the buyers?
5. Research third-party comparisons. Do not rely on the offset vendor's website or print material alone. Many third-party organizations track and review offset programs to make it easier for consumers to identify which are credible.
6. Work with programs whose offsets meet recognized standards. This will ensure, when the offset is developed and sold, that specific standards are met and the offsets are regulated.

Once you have signed on with a carbon offset vendor, be sure to review your objectives annually. You may wish to change the emission source you choose to offset, or even broaden your carbon sources. Whichever carbon offset program you choose, make sure it meets your organizations objectives to ensure a comfortable long term commitment.