

# The Inside Scoop on Green Business Networking

by Michael D. Ratner

Many people are interested in protecting the environment and want to engage in positive “green” business practices. They also want to meet like-minded people who also share similar lifestyles that evolve towards sustainability. But where do “green-minded people” go to network? Others may wonder if networking isn’t really just a disguised excuse to have a few drinks at a bar? **GreenYour.com**, “your guide to green anything,” has a good primer on **how to find green networking events** and offers this advice if you are deciding the pros and cons of green networking:

*On the prowl for an eco-job? Recruiting for a conservation project in the community? Simply looking to connect and converse with like-minded folk? If you responded “yes” to any of the above queries, attending a green business networking event may be the solution.*

When thinking about green networking events, there are a number of important green gatherings worth mentioning. One that usually comes to mind is **Green Drinks**, the happy hour network that started

in a London pub almost 20 unbelievable years ago. Green Drinks gatherings now meet in over 400 cities across the globe and are unstructured and ad hoc. Another national green group worth checking out is **Eco-Tuesday**, which offers a monthly networking event that brings together sustainably-minded people after work. It started February of 2007 in San Francisco and has found its way across the country. It too is a place where information, contacts and ideas are passed in a casual atmosphere, and Eco-Tuesdays also feature informal 15-minute presentations on eco-topics.

However, have you ever been to any green networking events that helped you find a new venture partner? How about meeting a new prospect or business consult whose expertise can help guide the growth of your green enterprise? If the green commerce angle appeals to you and you desire meeting other “ecopreneurs” or folks who are also greening their business then you probably want to check out the Los Angeles “organically” based Green Business Networking ([www.greenbusinessnetworking.com](http://www.greenbusinessnetworking.com)).

**Green Business Networking** offers a monthly networking gathering

for business owners and professionals committed to greening our economy. It was formed as a non-profit providing the owners and decision-makers of socially and environmentally conscious businesses a time and place for connecting, sharing, deal-making and networking. Greg Wendt & Jeff Hayes founded Green Business Networking four years ago in Venice Beach and now hold monthly meetings at the Ambrose Hotel in Santa Monica as a way to bring likeminded people together.

**Greg Wendt** heads the Sustainable Investing Practice for Enright Premier Wealth Advisors, which is a well-established registered investment advisory firm with offices in Torrance and West Los Angeles, CA and has over \$700 million of client assets under advisement. Greg and his team offer comprehensive financial advice to high net worth families, privately held corporations and charitable organizations in the areas of financial life planning and “wealth coaching,” investment management, estate planning and life insurance.

Greg aims to help his clients see their money and resources in the broader context of their lives and heartfelt values. His approach of addressing the “big picture” in his wealth consultations has made a meaningful impact to his client’s view of their money and their lives.

**Jeff Hayes**, is also a co-founder of Green Business Networking and is president and CEO of The Vector Group, an LA-based consultancy providing small to mid-market businesses with performance management tools and services. Prior to The Vector Group Jeff created visual effects for films and directed animation for gaming and ride experiences for everyone from Disney to garage startups.

The term “green business” is used in discussions of businesses and business practices that are viewed to be environmentally friendly. In the early 21st century, many companies began capitalizing on growing consumer desire for sustainable business by “greening” their practices to make them more environmentally safe, and a number of entrepreneurs sometimes known as ecopreneurs opened businesses with a green slant. Today, green business is an extremely profitable branch of the business world, and it can include a range of companies, from prestigious multinational companies to small, locally based companies.

## What is the primary purpose of Green Business Networking?

*Greg:* We wanted to bring business owners, professionals and decision makers committed to sustainable business and green economy together to network. Only by having a conversation with each other versus a presentation from any of us can evolve the space because we recognize the most important conversation in the room is the one you are having with the person you are with. So, we want to honor that and incentive the connectivity with everyone in the room.

*The goal of a green business is to keep its environmental footprint small, reducing waste and reusing materials as much as possible.*

## What is the difference between your group and other environmental networks?

*Greg:* We totally love Green Drinks, Eco-Tuesdays, Sustainable Business Council and L.A. business Council and other leading groups in Los Angeles that are doing great work – our focus is pure networking for business owners and decision makers in the green space and we are so happy about it.

*Jeff:* We want our constituents to leave with a deal or two in their back pocket every month.

*Greg:* We want people to say “I am so glad I met that so-and-so that investor, person to partner with,

supplier or new customer. We are all about creating connectivity that evolves the space.

## How many people regularly attend your monthly meetings?

*Greg:* We have had consistently 50 to 100 people attend every month. In total, we have had 3,500 people come to our events and that’s the size of our mailing list which means that many have attended.

*Jeff:* And we have good food too.

## What is next for Green Business Networking?

*Greg:* We are a non-profit and right now we are in the phase from going to a monthly event to become a business membership organization for the region to evolve the space even further. Our goal is to make a rocking green economy for our community.

*Jeff:* We’ve only just begun.

## Why green business and networking?

*Greg:* I am committed to green business and green economy because of my field of money management which focuses on putting money into green business that evolves the way we relate to nature.

*Jeff:* I am committed to being profitable in a way that benefits the Earth and society. I know that is a wild aspiration but that is what I am here for. I see Green Business Networking as a way for me to bridge the gap between the green entrepreneur and the green service provider.

*Greg:* Jeff is also a business consultant with the Vector Group. Jeff helps companies go green. I say it is about ‘people and process’ because if you don’t have the right people and process you won’t get the capital you need. I am the capital piece of the equation. I manage portfolios for individuals. My clients are looking for someone that will look at their investments to make sure they are green, sustainable and socially responsible as part of their financial portfolio.

## Why do Green Business?

*Jeff:* Just look at how *business as usual* is doing?

*Greg:* There are a lot of issues with the old model hurting people, the

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environment and the economy.

*Jeff:* Our mission is to connect those who understand the importance and opportunity of environmentally friendly commerce. If this is you, or you would like to learn more about what that means, we host local gatherings to promote a better tomorrow!

*Greg:* The whole idea of green business is to take into account our practices and impact on nature. To make sure we are energy efficient and that we are using products and services that take into account the resources we are using. Business and green works together to evolve the society and look after the well being of people and nature.

*In order to be considered a green business,  
a company must use practices which are viewed as  
sustainable and environmentally friendly.*

#### **What exactly is a Green Business standard?**

*Jeff:* In order to be considered a green business, a company must use practices which are viewed as sustainable and environmentally friendly. These practices might include the use of organic and natural products to build its factories, tighter protections against emissions, and environmentally responsible sourcing of supplies. For example, a green clothing business would seek out organic, fair-trade cotton to promote an environmentally friendly image, and it might have a factory with a living roof, or power gained from solar panels. Many green businesses are also concerned about social equation taking into consideration human and animal exploitation, and they make an attempt to create cruelty-free products and to pay their workers well in addition to providing them with benefits.

*Greg:* The goal of a green business is to keep its environmental footprint small, reducing waste and reusing materials as much as possible. Many use innovative building techniques for their facilities which are designed to promote energy efficiency, along with building materials which are environmentally friendly like panels fabricated from recycled materials. These companies also encourage their workers to think about the environment when they generate printed material and think about new products.

#### **What type of products and services would a green business offer?**

*Jeff:* A green business can sell all sorts of things ranging from composting toilets to green architecture. When a company offers environmentally products, many consumers also assume that the company itself is environmentally responsible, as its products reflect a concern about the environment.

#### **In these tough economic times is Green Business profitable?**

*Jeff:* The success of green business has shown that it is economically feasible and in fact very sensible to do business in a sustainable, environmentally friendly way. It has also encouraged the growth of initiatives that are designed to benefit the environment, from carbon trading to tax breaks for people who make energy-efficient modifications to their homes.

*Greg:* However, it has also given rise to "green washing," a trend exhibited by companies which want to capitalize on the green revolution in business without actually following through on true sustainable practices. When businesses market themselves aggressively as green, you may want to do some deeper research to ensure that they are not greenwashing in an attempt to win your dollars.

*To learn more about Green Business Networking in LA go to [www.GreenBusinessNetworking.org](http://www.GreenBusinessNetworking.org)*

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