

GREATER MANCHESTER VCSE DEVOLUTION REFERENCE GROUP

Inclusive Economy case study: Carbon Creative



Carbon Creative is a low-carbon, ethics-based design agency, doing its bit to make the world a better place. It aims to be the ‘go-to’ branding, design and digital agency for people who care, and to help organisations grow and promote green and social change.

Carbon Creative is a private limited company, incorporated in 2002.

Carbon Creative loves to help organisations grow, transforming the fortunes of its clients by building beautiful brands and wonderful websites. Its services are at the intersection of art, technology, science and sustainability. Its work covers most sectors, but its bias is toward health, sport, science, technology, and third sector / charity.

Carbon Creative promotes social value. It engages with clients that make a positive impact on local communities and environments. Carbon Creative often invests in local projects that benefit the wider community. One good example of this is its tree planting campaign, “Buy one, get one tree”, though which over 14,000 trees have been planted since 2007. In this programme, for every client order processed, Carbon Creative plants a tree in and around Greater Manchester with the help of rangers / environmental officers to find suitable managed areas and volunteers (such as clients, schools and community groups) to help with the actual planting.

Carbon Creative always looks to use local / carbon-friendly suppliers first and put those above profit margins. It audits and sense-checks each supplier’s environmental credentials. Other activities include: a gardening club for staff to use work time with trained gardeners at Ordsall Hall; creating an Alzheimer’s book for Age UK; and a bicycle Ride2Work scheme, allowing staff to purchase a bike at reduced costs.

Carbon Creative has faced several key challenges in making a positive impact:

- Good versus growth: Carbon Creative balances paid, non-paid and non-profit work whilst still trying to grow as a business. Retaining the best staff in the digital industry requires a balance between industry-standard salaries and the benefits and opportunities for personal growth and job satisfaction from helping local and charitable businesses.
- Reduced or discounted rates for social value work: Branding, digital design and web agencies are numerous and the competition is fierce. To estimate a project cost, Carbon Creative must understand a client’s design expectations or budget which they are sometimes reluctant to share. Its standard rates have to be competitive in order to win commercial projects, so when it offers reduced or discounted rates for social value work, the same issues of expectations versus budget are still in play but the risks are much higher.
- Direct impacts on sustainability, clients and behaviour change: While Carbon Creative’s new home from 2017 at MediaCityUK is BREEM rated, things such as carbon neutral gas and electricity or food recycling were no longer in its control. Through engaging with other tenants and the landlord, however, it has influenced behaviours including food waste recycling, glass-bottled milk from local dairies, and volunteer litter picks at MediaCityUK.
- Promoting sustainable choices: Carbon Creative tries to persuade clients to make sustainable choices on marketing materials (such as FSC or 100% recycled paper), although this is not always the cheapest option.

The most successful things that enable Carbon Creative to make things work effectively are:

- Personal development: Investing in increasing skills and knowledge that benefit both the team and positive behaviour change in clients.
- Gardening club: Time out to break from work, improve mental health and well-being, and keep staff engaged with community and environmental issues.



- Environmental improvement: Tree planting and litter picking break up monthly personal development Fridays with fun but impactful sessions, while keeping invested in local engagement to help spread awareness of social value.

Further details at <https://www.carboncreative.net/>