

Taxi company rolls out fleet of 'green limousines'

by Jennifer Martin - May 9, 2009 07:00 AM
Special for The Republic

5 comments

Chris Okra wears a suit to work because he wants to make an impression on clients.

Okra is a contracted cabdriver who refuses to drive any vehicle besides Discount Cab Co.'s signature "green limousine": the Toyota Prius.

"We (as cabdrivers) have access to (a customer's) disposable income," Okra said. "I want my clients to feel like they are the only client I have."



For Okra, his image is a marketing tool and the Prius gives his strategy a contemporary appeal.

Companies across the country are utilizing marketing strategies to promote sales, marketing firms are taking advantage of go-green slogans and Discount Cab in Phoenix discovered that going green made economic sense.

"We do this stuff because it makes sense," said Craig Hughes, owner of Total Transit Inc. and Discount Cab. "What doesn't make sense is why everyone isn't doing it."

Discount Cab launched the hybrid project on Earth Day in 2008, under the slogan "Green Cabs for Blue Skies," just as gas prices across the nation began to skyrocket. He didn't expect going green to become a lucrative investment. It was and now, Hughes said he owns the largest Prius taxi fleet in the country.

Hughes' initial idea to buy hybrids was inspired by his daughter, Danielle. Her influence led him to begin researching the idea of a hybrid fleet. He bought 20 Priuses from Camelback Toyota in Scottsdale and realized that each Prius would save the company about 4,000 gallons of gas per year.

"She's my social conscience," Hughes said of Danielle. "What really made things work was the price of gas. When we got the Priuses, the timing was incredible."

Now, Hughes owns 84 Priuses and plans to expand the fleet to 250 hybrids amid estimates of annual gas savings of 1 million gallons.

Okra's 2008 Prius - cab number 725- has more than 91,000 miles on it. He hopes to see the vehicle make it to 300,000 miles.

Hotels like the Clarendon in Phoenix see the business value in the Prius cab. Ben Bethel, owner and general manager of the hotel, has taken steps to neutralize the building's carbon footprint. The Clarendon has become the first hotel in the Valley to have all carbon-neutral flooring. He contracts with Discount Cab.

"It helps the hotel image to show that they support green vehicles and the local economy," Bethel said. "It's a win-win for our hotel and Discount."

"The go-green trend is fueled by the fact that companies and industries are now listening to what consumers have to say," said Heather Austin, media-relations specialist at Off Madison Ave in Tempe. "They now understand the consumer demand for more responsible and sustainable thinking."

Austin said "green-washing," or pretending to be good for the environment, won't continue as social-media campaigns force companies to be transparent.

"You need to have a bigger long-term direction," said Mick Dalrymple, partner at A.K.A. Green, a green building and consulting firm in Scottsdale. "The real profit in green is reducing your overhead with what you're already doing. It's all about the margin."

On Earth Day this year, Hughes finalized a deal to convert his corporate headquarters to solar power with PerfectPower Inc., a Phoenix-based company.

- Eight full extension of 10th Ave. approved
 - 3 men posing as police invade Phoenix home
 - Phoenix city manager to retire this fall
 - 3 still sought in Phoenix break-in, car theft
 - Arrest made after threats phoned to DV airport
 - High-pollution advisory in Phoenix today
- [more central phoenix news »](#)



Then look no further.
Enroll now in the
Tempe Elementary
Schools
Kindergarten
Program

Click here to see
"A Day in the Life of
a Kindergartener"

[Watch video now](#)



- Hot or Hype: Angels & Outlaws | [Preview party](#)
- What's hot this weekend | 6/27: 'Daisy of Love'
- Looking for trendy? Try date-friendly Avalon
- 'Real World' heads to Cancun | TV Gossiper
- 4th of July club events in Phoenix | [Where to drink more metromix »](#)

THINGS TO DO

- Plan for upcoming concerts
 - 12 places to reel in fine Mexican seafood
 - Best of azcentral 2009
 - Light rail hot spots
 - 6 Valley mountain-bike trails
- [search the valley's best calendar »](#)

FEATURED

- 'Fecal incident' shuts down pool
 - Boy, 2, fatally struck by SUV in trailer park
 - Phoenix wins All-America City honor
 - CityNorth shifts focus to dining as retailers flounder
- [Photos by You: Phoenix | Submit a photo](#)

MOST READ

- Teen girl may be victim in Mesa murder-suicide
- Sheriff's Office: Woman left starving puppies, dog skull at shelter
- 65 indicted in student loan fraud against Rio Salado College
- Mesa police seek missing woman, 64
- Transient sex offender accused of rape, threats in Mesa
- Chandler employee unions end impasse with city
- Glendale tries new tactic to stop Tohono O'odham casino
- 13-year-old girl on bicycle struck, killed by car in Glendale
- Phoenix city manager Frank Fairbanks to retire this fall
- Gascón, Mesa praised for anticrime program