

Anita Roddick - a tough act to follow

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IN almost every hotel room that you check in, there will be a "Dear Guest" message hanging in the bathroom. It will read: "Please help us preserve the environment by hanging up any towels you intend to re-use."

Somehow it is too towel-centred. No mention is made about the judicious use of water or electricity, especially the use of central air-conditioning. Or whether the soap, shampoo or bath gel supplied are environment-friendly. Then there's the complimentary "natural" mineral water in a plastic bottle—knowing full well what plastic bottles can do to the environment.

In other words, hoteliers could do much more for the environment, if they are genuinely interested. After all, there are numerous environment-friendly items in the market.

Ethical retail products created by names such as Dame Anita Perella Roddick, the founder of a British cosmetics company, are gaining popularity. Roddick is said to be among one of the first to promote the use of ingredients not tested on animals, besides being one of the first to promote fair trade with Third World countries.



Today, her company carries a full range of over 300 products compared with just 15 when it started some 30 years ago. (See <http://www.anitaroddick.com/aboutanita.php>)

In fact, by 2004, the company was so well-known that it served over 77 million customers from its over 2,000 retail outlets throughout the world, in at least 50 markets in 25 different languages and across 12 time zones.

It is not surprising that it was voted the second most trusted brand in the United Kingdom and 28th top brand in the world. Last year, a leading conventional cosmetic company caused a row when it purchased the outlets, because of the apparent conflict in philosophy and practices between the two entities.

Roddick was like no others when it came to caring for the environment. Her cause was a genuine one.

Right from the start she refused to throw in the towel when she got involved in campaigning for environmental and social issues.

In 1990, for example, she founded "Children On The Edge" (formerly Romanian Relief Drive), a charitable organisation which helps disadvantaged children in Eastern Europe and Asia.

For non-governmental organisations like Greenpeace and think tanks such as Demos, her name is already very familiar. Seven years later, in 1997, she was made an "Eyes on the Environment" honouree by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Her dedication continued to be unsurpassed. On Dec 13, 2005 Roddick decided to turn her back on the world of commerce and gave away her fortune, worth some £51 million (RM354 million). It is difficult to imagine any other businesswoman who would make a similar sacrifice.

One of her daughters, Justine, wrote on Sept 13 that she shared her mother with "all the charities and individuals that she championed. And with everyone who thought of her as a second mother".

Their family home had "a never-ending revolving door through which came people from all walks of life". Some became a part of the fabric that made up her family — the fabric that Roddick nurtured so perfectly. That fabric is what we are now left with after Roddick passed away on Sept 10 at the age of 64. As spelt out by the

mission statement of her business, her overriding commitment was: "To dedicate our business to the pursuit of social and environmental change."

She felt it was impossible to separate the company values from the issues that she cared about passionately — social responsibility, respect for human rights, the environment and animal protection, and an absolute belief in community trade (<http://www.anitaroddick.com/aboutanita.php>).

Because of her commitment, her death resulted in a profound loss not only to her family, but also those who were part of the "fabric" that she so ably weaved together.

It is time other businesses, including hotels, took Roddick's exemplary leadership to the next level by emulating her sincere efforts for a better quality of life.

The next time you check into a hotel, go beyond just the preoccupation with towels. Instead, out of genuine interest, relive the rich legacy she left behind.

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