

Dell Small Business 360 - Seeing Green In More Ways Than One

How little changes can add up—and help you save the world, one ream of paper at a time.

May 12, 2008 - There's green in the greening of corporate America, at least according to a recent report¹ from CFO Research sponsored by Jones Lang LaSalle, a real estate money management and services firm. The study, which surveyed 175 corporate CFOs and senior financial executives, says CFOs see environmental sustainability as more than just important from a corporate responsibility standpoint. They feel it's a smart way to reap significant financial benefits.

“Most CFOs believe sustainability can lead to cost savings, increased revenues, greater customer retention and a competitive advantage, so clearly this is an opportunity that can not be ignored,” says Lauralee Martin, global chief operating and financial officer at Jones Lang LaSalle. And the best part: what's good for the big guys is also good for the small business owner, according to Byron Kennard, executive director of the Center for Small Business and the Environment, a Washington, D.C. environmental group.

“Often times small business owners assume they don't have any control over energy use or costs; that these are not things you can control,” he explains. “But there's a lot that can be done and collectively, these things all add up over time.”

In fact, you can make changes in every part of your business and achieve real cost savings as well as help save the environment, according to experts. Here's how you can get started.

In the Office

Set your printer default to double-sided printing. You'll save up to 40 percent on paper and dramatically impact deforestation and energy use since paper production and end-of-life paper waste are serious environmental concerns², says Chris O'Brien, Director of the Responsible Purchasing Network at the Center for a New American Dream, a non-profit environmental group based in Washington D.C.

Switch to fluorescent light bulbs. Replacing incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs)—making sure they are ENERGY STAR qualified—will make a tremendous difference, according to an EPA ENERGY STAR staffer. CFLs lower energy expenditures by 75 percent over incandescent bulbs and they last up to ten times longer³, which will save you money on replacement bulbs and your electric bill.

Use “green” cleaning products. There are close to 100 manufacturers and more than 300 green cleaning products that cost about the same as non-green counterparts and work just as well, too, says O'Brien. “You can see measurable improvements, such as better attendance and an overall improvement in the workplace environment when people aren't breathing in chemicals and indoor air pollution.”

Make it automatic. Desktops and laptops not in use should be turned off at night. During the day, enable Sleep mode to save energy.

Buy ENERGY STAR-certified office equipment. The ENERGY STAR designation signifies an electricity savings of up to 60 percent, according to the U.S. EPA⁴. In fact, according to the EPA, ENERGY STAR computers will save consumers and businesses more than \$1.8 billion in energy costs over the next five years and eliminates greenhouse gas emissions that are equal to the annual emissions of 2.7 million vehicles⁵.

Use email marketing. Email marketing helps you get the word out about your business without wasting natural resources consumed by direct marketing such as the paper you might print catalogs on or the gasoline required to deliver them.

Through Employees

Eliminate bottled water. 86 percent of plastic water bottles used in the U.S. become garbage or end up in a landfill, according to the Container Recycling Institute⁶. And according to the Earth Policy Institute, “manufacturing the 29 billion plastic bottles used for water in the United States each year requires the equivalent of more than 17 million barrels of crude oil⁷.” Combining this with the energy used for pumping and processing, transportation, and refrigeration of the bottled water brings the total fossil fuel footprint to more than 50 million barrels of oil equivalent – enough to run 3 million cars for one year⁹. Get rid of bottled water by adding water filters to kitchen taps or installing water filters on water fountains. Also, put a recycling bin in your kitchen for those employees who can’t get rid of their bottled water habit. Your environment will thank you, and so will everyone’s pocket.

Let them work from home. Let every one of your employees work from home one day a week, and you’re making an incredible contribution to the environment. Your employees will save gas as well as reduce emissions. They’ll also be happier, says Jeff Swenerton, communications director with the Center for Resource Solutions, a non-profit environmental group based in San Francisco.

Start company carpools. Transportation accounts for the second largest source of greenhouse gas, after energy generation, according to Swenerton. “Reduce highway miles by encouraging employees to carpool or rideshare and you’re making a big difference,” he says.

Let the light—and fresh air—in. There’s more to pollution than car exhaust. Printer and copier toner, new carpeting, mold and dust, and even viruses and germs can make your employees feel lethargic and sick. You can learn more about indoor air quality from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) A Guide for Building Owners and Facility Managers (<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/largebldgs/baqtoc.html>) but in the meantime, open the blinds so you can turn off overhead lights, and open windows rather than running air conditioning whenever possible—as long as outdoor air quality is good.

During the Purchasing Process

There's still plenty of waste in the purchasing process, says Responsible Purchasing Network's O'Brien. But this is actually good news for businesses willing to do a little research. The top options:

Don't duplicate purchases. This may take a little advance planning, but can save you big in the long run. Simply put: you don't need a printer on every desk or even a server for every application. Network your printers and copiers to cut down on duplication and save money in maintenance, too.

Buy recycled whenever possible. "Recycled and especially remanufactured products are far more energy efficient than virgin ones," says O'Brien. "They often cost less too. For example, remanufactured toner cartridges cost 30-50% less than new ones and their current rate of use saves enough energy every year to power eight nuclear power plants."²

Source locally. This is a bit tricky, says O'Brien, since you can purchase a product from a local retailer, but what you purchase is coming from across the country or across the world. Or you might buy locally but the product isn't in stock in the local warehouse so it ships from a different warehouse much farther away. "You might even run into a situation where one warehouse is more energy-efficient than the other," he says. "Or the marginal offset in transportation reduction will be offset because of too much packaging."

Solve some of these problems by asking questions when you make your purchase, or using one of many green-friendly catalogs or companies that do this type of legwork for you. Some options include TheGreenOffice.com, Waldecks.com, the National Green Pages (www.coopamerica.org/pubs/greenpages) and OfficeDepot.com's Buy Green department (www.OfficeDepot.com/buygreen).

Form your own cooperative. Cooperative contracts do more than just lower prices. They let you specify how you want to do business, says O'Brien. "If you and a dozen other businesses get together you can request in your RFP that the supplier of a specific product has to be responsible for the waste resulting in the purchase, which gives them an incentive to reduce packaging and design products for easy disassembly and reuse," he says. "Demand creates a greener supply."

Avoid overnight delivery. It's a given: there are no green airplanes, at least right now. So every time you ship something overnight and it gets on a plane, you're affecting the environment. Select ground shipping instead, which is six times more energy efficient.⁸

While You're Out of the Office

Make it efficient. If you're like most small businesses, says the Center for Small Business and the Environment's Kennard, you probably do a lot of your own driving—to and from appointments, making deliveries, picking up payments. “Unless you're using a fuel-efficient car or truck, you may be wasting money and hurting the environment more than you need to. If this is the case, consider switching to a hybrid car,” says Kennard. “It's a perfect time, especially since there are still tax rebates available on certain hybrid models.” Check out the IRS's Summary for Qualified Hybrid Vehicles to choose a model that's right for you (<http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=157557,00.html>).

Keep your travel calendar light. Be selective about trips that require travel—especially via airplane. A better bet: Web conferencing or video conferencing, says Swenerton from the Center for Resource Solutions. “You don't always need to meet someone face-to-face to make a business connection,” he says. “Web conferencing can be free, so you save money off the bottom line and save environmental costs, too.”

Install an ENERGY STAR qualified programmable thermostat. (Non-ENERGY STAR thermostats are likely not pre-programmed, and if not programmed properly will not result in savings.) If you're not in the office for more than eight hours, set your thermostat to a temperature that's five to eight degrees lower—or higher in the summer--than your usual office temperature. An even better bet: light-sensing thermostats that automatically change the temperature in an office so if an employee doesn't come in, their office will remain cooler and more energy-efficient.

Notes

¹ CFO Research and Jones Lang LaSalle, “The Role of Finance in Environmental Sustainability Efforts,” 2008. <http://www.prnewswire.com/cgi-bin/stories.pl?ACCT=104&STORY=/www/story/03-26-2008/0004780395&EDATE>

² http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=cfls.pr_cfls

³ http://www.responsiblepurchasing.org/purchasing_guides/office_electronics/facts

⁴ http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=find_a_product.showProductCategory&pcw_code=OEF

⁵ http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=find_a_product.showProductGroup&pgw_code=CO

⁶ Container Recycling Institute, “Bottled Water: Pouring Resources Down the Drain,” 2006. <http://www.container-recycling.org/mediafold/newsarticles/plastic/2006/2-2-EPI-BottledWater.htm>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Larsen, Janet, Earth Policy Update, “Bottled Water Boycotts,” 2007. <http://www.earth-policy.org/Updates/2007/Update68.htm>. (Please follow the copyright treatment described on Earth Policy Institute's website)

⁹ Reprinted with permission from the National Resources Defense Council, <http://www.nrdc.org/globalWarming/gtopten.asp>