

Running a Green Office

By Jonathon Walsh



How to preserve the environment and boost profits by creating a green office

While former U.S. vice president Al Gore's Oscar winning documentary "Inconvenient Truth" switched on a lot of lights in peoples' minds about the dangers that unchecked climate change could wreck upon the world, ironically, the solution to combating this grave threat lies partly in turning more lights off.

That's where companies that are looking to lock into a 'green business' strategy can play their part. **Here's an 8-step strategy to slash business costs, reduce waste, and make your company more environmentally friendly.**

1/ Think before you print

Paper is an essential part of any office, and overhauling the way it is used is one of the easiest ways to save energy and make your office greener.

A good first step to cutting costs in this area is to switch to using recycled or chlorine-free paper. Another way that businesses can reduce stationery and printing costs is to encourage staff to think before they print –

a/ Do you really need to print?, and

b/ Can you use the Internet or e-mail instead?

Staff can also reduce paper usage by maximizing printing margins and avoiding the use of large amounts of color ink, choosing the right paper for the job, and avoiding laminates and other toxic finishes.

Remember: For every ton of recycled paper we save 17 trees, 42,000kwh of electricity, 26,000 of water and about 27kgs of air pollutants (source Fuji Xerox).

Toner usage – and costs – can be cut by selecting 'draft' printouts when using the 'Print' command on your computer (change this in the Printer Options on the Windows Print Dialog box) and tailoring the size of paper to the length of your message.

2/ Re-think packaging

Slashing packaging costs is another effective way to cut costs and help the planet. **Here's some hot ways to tame your supplies budget:**

- **Purchase office beverage supplies (coffee, tea, sugar, milk, etc.) in bulk.** Try to avoid buying single-serve items such as individually-wrapped teabags, spoons, coffee and sugar sachets.
- **Switch from disposable cups to reusable cups and glasses.**
- **Choose packaging that can be recycled.**
- **Ask suppliers to take unwanted packaging back for reuse.**

3/ Purchasing power

Purchasing office furniture and fittings is usually a high cost exercise, but it's an ideal time to lower your environmental impact by considering the following –

- Can equipment be leased, shared or swapped instead of purchased?
- Does the product have a 'sleep' mode for when it is not being used?
- Is upgrading, reconditioning or extending the useful life of our current model a better option?
- Can this product be recycled, repaired, sold or donated when it is finished with?

4/ Dim the lights on your power bill

It may surprise you that lighting accounts for about one-third of the energy used in commercial buildings, and about half of it – and a lot of money – is wasted either through inefficient bulbs, poor design, or insufficient maintenance. That makes it an area ripe for pruning.

Here's how you can upgrade your lighting to downgrade your power bill:

- **Look for opportunities to maximize natural light** by positioning sitting areas in places that receive the most natural light, usually around the office perimeter.
- **Avoid overheating in summer months** by making better use of trees, blinds, etc.

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- Since about half the light from a fluorescent lighting tube is absorbed by the inside of the fitting, **install reflectors into fittings** to redirect light.
- **Use energy efficient light bulbs** where possible and clean fittings regularly.
- **Install ‘occupancy sensors’** in rooms that are infrequently used, such as toilets, store rooms, etc. Occupancy sensors turn lights off when they have not detected movement for around 15 minutes.
- **Timers that switch lights off** after a preset period are a suitable solution in open plan offices or large conference rooms where it is difficult to make a particular individual responsible for turning off lights.

5/ Encourage energy saving behavior

Cutting energy costs is far easier than many people think. Staff should be reminded to switch off lights in meeting rooms and other rooms that are only used for short periods, and to make sure all computers and other office equipment are turned off when they are not being used.

Other effective techniques to save energy include ensuring energy-saving features are installed on PCs, printers and photocopiers, using blinds to reduce keep out the heat in summer and cut air conditioning costs, and using the stairs instead of the elevator.

6/ Heating, Ventilation and Cooling (HVAC) Systems

There are a number of methods used for heating, ventilating and cooling offices.

If you work in an air-conditioned office, then over half the energy use will be used to heat, ventilate and cool the building.

Minimize energy costs by:

- Maximizing natural ventilation.
- Looking after HVAC systems.
- Zoning for different levels of air conditioning in different areas.
- Opting for Simple Heat Exchange Systems.
- Insulating your office.

7/ Office furniture

When choosing furniture for your office, consider the following:

- Can you purchase it second-hand?
- What are the life cycle issues associated your furniture?
- Is it ergonomically designed thereby reducing the risk of OOS (occupational overuse syndrome) or posture or other health problems?

8/ Office gardens

Gardens provide an area for staff to relax in, encourage bird life, help filter vehicle pollution and provide a filter for rainwater.

Some garden tips:

- **Plant deciduous trees near office windows**, to gain light in the winter and shade in the summer.
- **Plant trees in the office car park area**, providing shade for staff vehicles.
- **Plant native or fruit trees** to encourage native bird life.

By simply establishing a few easy-to-follow guidelines, management can encourage staff to become more environmentally aware, and cut costs and increase profits in the process.



Ten Simple Steps

- Measure how much you use & how much you waste
- Save paper – think before you print
- Save toner
- Save energy usage
- Recycle as much as possible
- Share office stationery
- Re-use office supplies
- Purchase recycled products
- Return unwanted packaging to suppliers
- Share ideas and keep improving

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