

Thinking Eco-Logically

SMEs Must Turn Green Thoughts Into Green Actions

According to a study released by the Business Performance Management Forum, 82% of Internet and e-commerce companies are thinking about green-based, ecological initiatives, but some companies have yet to act on their thoughts. The study, titled “Think Eco-Logical,” looks at the forces driving IT departments to make changes regarding their energy usage and other green initiatives; the study also shows that 97% of IT professionals say reducing carbon footprint is important but that little real action is underway.

■ Eco-Awareness

Derek Kober, program director of BPM Forum, says little action is underway because of education and leadership. “It’s a combination of a need for more education as to the tangible business benefits that can be achieved through more ecological practices in the data center and the requirement for more leadership both within companies and in the community at large,” Kober says. “This is precisely why the Think Eco-Logical initiative is providing resources and information to educate companies and engaging with advisory board members on best practices and leadership techniques.”

Jessica Vreeswijk, principal of TerraBytes Consulting (Green IT Tools), says little action is underway due to misperceptions about what is in the realm of possibility. Vreeswijk elaborates, “There is a perception that IT is a very small, insignificant contributor to the overall footprint of a business. In fact, in many office-based businesses, IT energy consumption is between 10 and 30% of total energy consumption. Green IT practices, such as network power management and rationalizing hardware assets, can yield as much as 75% reduction in IT energy consumption. This means that overall, an organization can reduce its total energy consumption anywhere from 7 to 22%.”

Key Points

- When it comes to reducing the carbon footprint in the data center, little action is underway due to a lack of education and leadership. Companies need more education and leadership concerning the tangible business benefits that can be achieved through more ecological practices.
- The top reasons that Internet and e-commerce companies are more sensitized to ecological considerations are recent press on the subject, consumer demands for green practices, and the rising costs of inefficient data centers.
- SMEs should define corporate sustainability policies and guidelines that start with simple things, including duplex printing, better office recycling, turning off computers at night, having timed and low-energy lighting, and using alternative means and incentives for commuting to work.

Why are organizations becoming more sensitive to ecological considerations? Richard Hodges, principal of GreenIT, says there are a number of reasons. “The key reasons include media

coverage, new political leadership, growing evidence of climate change and environmental degradation, and financial pressure,” he says. Being green in IT is about being efficient in using resources, which, Hodges says, almost always means reducing costs.

Kober says BPM Forum’s study shows that the top reasons that Internet and e-commerce companies are more sensitized to ecological considerations are recent press on the subject, consumer demands for green practices, and the rising costs of inefficient data centers. He notes, “These factors are in line with the premise of Think Eco-Logical itself—namely that both the environmental (eco) considerations and the business (logical) benefits are driving sustainability concerns.”

Vreeswijk adds, “Beginning with the ‘Inconvenient Truth’ movie, many people began to wake up to environmental concerns at home, and now they are waking up at work.”

■ An Eco-Thought Process

So how can SMEs begin to think more ecologically? Kober says to keep it simple. “Just as within large companies, SMEs should look at defining corporate sustainability policies and guidelines that start with the simple things,” he says. “For instance, consider duplex (two-sided) printing, better office recycling, turning off computers at night or during long periods of downtime, having timed and low-energy lighting, and using alternative means and incentives for commuting to work.”

The next level, Kober says, is to look at the technology infrastructure that supports the enterprise. “For example, are your servers and facilities being fully utilized, can you implement simple virtualization techniques, and are you using up-to-date, efficient processors and servers that are now available?” He says it starts at a grassroots employee awareness and participation level and then builds to more systemic environmental improvements.

Vreeswijk says the easiest way to get started is to find a local company that can do an eco-audit or green IT audit that will give you a full picture of what is possible and what you have to gain. She comments, “Many companies that offer audits have case studies that can show the benefits and expected gains from both a financial and an environmental perspective. In some regions, these audits are subsidized or provided for free by nonprofit organizations or government agencies.”

In Vreeswijk’s opinion, the next best thing is to think about the areas where impact occurs—the stuff you buy, the stuff you use, and the stuff you get rid of. “Buy recycled paper and paper products, recyclable PCs, Energy Star electronics, and eco-certified cleaning products; invest in laptops instead of desktops; and don’t buy things you don’t need,” she says. In addition, Vreeswijk advises to “turn things off when you don’t need them, use power bars to make it easy, only use what you need, use stuff for as long as possible, turn lights off, and provide employees with opportunities to work from home. Don’t forget to recycle your PCs and your paper.”

■ Baseline Assessment

Hodges says SMEs should start with a baseline assessment of what IT gear you have, what it does, and what it costs, including power, space, paper use, and consumables. He adds, “Then calculate your eco-footprint and make a plan for reducing it over time. There are plenty of online resources that offer simple tips for what to do first. However, beware of solutions that

are too simple. Just because a laptop uses less power doesn't mean it is necessarily a more environmentally friendly solution."

Hodges says green IT and green computing are not just about reducing power consumption, although they're an environmentally and financially responsible thing to do. He says it's about rethinking how we do things and developing new, sustainable approaches to IT that consider the full lifecycle impact of systems. He concludes, "Research shows that 65 to 80% of the carbon footprint of a PC is created in manufacturing. Cutting down the 20 to 35% that results from power use in active life can save money and reduce environmental impacts, but extending the useful life of gear is the greenest thing to do in most cases." ■

by Chris A. MacKinnon

Reduce Your Carbon Footprint

According to Jessica Vreeswijk, principal of Terrabytes Consulting, SMEs can use the following practices to reduce the carbon footprint in the data center.

- Develop purchase policies to ensure that what enters the door has been manufactured in an environmentally respectful way and can be recycled at the end of its life.
- Follow asset management practices that ensure you get the longest life out of your equipment and use equipment as efficiently as possible to provide your employees with the functions they need.
- Encourage staff to shut off equipment at night—including printers, monitors, desktops, laptops, and all electronic devices.
- Provide technology that will help reduce the overall footprint by increasing virtual collaboration and enforcing responsible printing habits.

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