

How To Make Your Company Green

The Business Journals by Jane Paige, Contributing Writer, Triangle Business Journal
Date: Tuesday, January 24, 2012, 6:20pm EST

Helping your company adopt more environmentally-friendly business practices is an ideal way to save some green without even going to the bank.

No matter the scope or size of your company, everyone can have a positive impact by being more sustainable, national experts agree. And, green plans can range from more traditional ones to really out-of-the-box projects with just a little thought and planning. The challenge is developing the right plans that will be supported by your specific company.

"Your company needs to decide exactly what being green means to it and how it can realistically achieve these goals," says [Erik Assadourian](#), Transforming Cultures Project director for Worldwatch Institute, a global environmental research organization based in Washington, D.C. "You want to look at breaking your company's cultural norms in an effort to become more sustainable."



Many business owners are discovering that looking at their operations through a green lens can help them reduce costs, rethink long-held business practices and open doors to new opportunities.

The commitment to make a business greener has to come from top management, experts agree. There are many things that employees can do to start this process, but driving this through the company culture must start at the top, says Assadourian.

At the same time, engaging employees is key to getting everyone on board.

[Kirsten Hausman](#), the director of client relations at the Institute for Sustainable Development/Green Plus, a nonprofit agency based in Durham, N.C., works with businesses to help develop green programs. She advises setting up internal green teams, consisting of volunteers from management and staff on a regular basis. This sustainability group can meet regularly to review strategy, check progress and identify energy-saving actions.

“Setting up a company-wide green team is an ideal way to get a program started in your work place,” she says. “Employees are able to help organize the program, giving it a greater chance of success.”

To begin, analyze the business operation with an eye toward reducing energy consumption and waste. Look at those places where you spend the most money. Some of these areas included are lighting, powering the equipment, heating, air conditioning, transportation and water use. Look also at the waste produced by the business. Disposing of this material often incurs a cost.

At the end of the planning process, establish a baseline of the energy use and costs. Most utility companies will come to your business to perform an energy audit. It is important to have a well-defined starting point that allows your company to track and measure your progress, says Hausman.

It is key for your company to find steps it can accomplish almost immediately and build from there with actions that cost nothing or very little to apply. Some examples include shutting down electronics at night, turning off overhead lights during the day or opening windows to get natural ventilation instead of running the air conditioner all the time. Encouraging carpooling and allowing some employees to work from home can help reduce your company’s footprint on the environment.

Another easy one is reducing paper use. Some companies are storing emails electronically instead of printing them. Putting a separate container next to your trash can or printer makes it easier to recycle bottles, cans and paper. Adjusting the thermostats can save up to 15 percent on heating and cooling bills, according to the [U.S. Department of Energy](#).

Assadourian with Worldwatch Institute recommends several out-of-the box ideas for going green at your company.

“You can actually encourage people to buy less of your product,” he says. “If they don’t really need your product, then don’t buy it. Or if they do, buy products that are used.”

He cites the Common Threads Initiative program by [Patagonia](#), the international clothing and gear outfitter company. The program focuses on reducing excessive consumption by repairing, reusing and recycling the Patagonia products. While this idea goes against traditional retail models, it does encourage corporate responsibility for changing traditional cultural norms, Assadourian says. He also makes several other less traditional green suggestions for companies ranging from pushing for the proper labeling of true organic products to developing foods more oriented to changing cultural times and temperatures.

For any company that develops a green program, it is important to review the results periodically, says Hausman. Showing positive financial gains will keep the process on track. Sharing the results with the staff also keeps everyone motivated.

"Many companies also are re-investing some of the money they might save back into their green efforts," she says. "This shows a real commitment to making their company more environmentally-friendly."