



Strategies for going green in the office: Now being used as a selling point for building owners

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With green issues moving up the corporate agenda, more businesses are implementing policies to reduce the environmental impact of their operations. And it's not just big businesses. Small and medium-sized companies are recognizing the benefits of turning their offices into a "green" place, many taking the next step by applying for LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Certification.

"It makes economic, environmental and social sense. This is what's known as the Triple Bottom Line," said Scott Chrisner of the Chrisner Group, a company that offers products and services to help clients design high performance green buildings, and measure that performance against accepted standards such as LEED and Energy Star.

According to Chrisner, many companies seek LEED certification because they want to keep being listed on the DJSI (Dow Jones Sustainability Index). Other companies who obtain LEED are getting very quick Return on Investment (ROI). Still others, who may not be realizing such a quick ROI, are nevertheless gaining momentum toward their corporate goal of being carbon neutral.

A company's corporate sustainability strategy depends of course on such variables as its size and industry, and it is not always possible or economically feasible for all companies to obtain LEED certification. But there are some low-cost practices to going green that can easily be implemented. Jacob Gordon of TreeHugger.com, a leading media Web site dedicated to sustainability, offered the following suggestions in computing and air quality:

Computing:

* Optimize energy. Set computers to energy-saving settings and make sure to shut them down when you leave for the day ("standby" settings will continue to draw power even when not in use). By plugging computers and peripherals into a power strip with an on/off switch (or a smart power strip like the Wattstopper) the whole desktop setup can be turned off at once. (Make sure to power down ink jet printers before killing the power — they need to seal their cartridges.) Printers, scanners, and other peripherals that are only used occasionally can be unplugged until they're needed. Look for the EPEAT certification for energy efficient electronics. <http://www.epeat.net/>

* Digitize. The greenest paper is no paper at all, so keep things digital and dematerialized whenever possible. Keep files on computers instead of in file cabinets. Review documents on screen rather than printing them out. Send emails instead of paper letters. New software like Greenprint helps eliminate blank pages from documents before printing and can also convert to PDF for paperless document sharing.

* E-waste and computer recycling. When your office is done with computers or other office electronics, donate ones in good working order to schools, prisons, or other programs that will make good use of them. If they're broken they need to be either repaired or recycled.

Air Quality:

* Sick building syndrome. The EPA estimates that interior air quality is often much worse than the air outside. This is because carpet, furniture, cabinets, electronics, paint, ventilation systems and other interior components can be "offgassing" potentially harmful substances. When buying carpet and paint, make sure that they are of the low-VOC variety.

* Ventilation. Always make sure that ventilation is good and the HVAC systems are serviced regularly. If your area has significant levels of radon, all the more reason to have a healthy airflow.

Other low-cost measures to reduce your company's environmental imprint include:

* Lighting. Install light sensors in conference rooms, in addition to regularly turning off lights in offices when they are not in use. The practice of daylighting (using indirect sunlight to reduce the need for electrical lighting in buildings) is also gaining in popularity as an alternative energy source.

* Water. Install water-saving devices on faucets. Plant drought resistant plants around your property, and use drip irrigation systems for watering landscape.

* Transportation. Dedicate parking in your lot for carpoolers. Provide shuttle service to and from public transportation, and offer lockers for bicycles.

Let's not forget our most valuable resources -- the human ones. By training employees on sustainability you'll increase efficiency, productivity, and loyalty in the workplace. Write a company green policy. Create a "green" team of employees who can enforce this mission by educating, touting environmental purchasing efforts and tracking the initiative's success.

Beyond saving money and environmental resources, going green is also being used as a selling point for building owners. If you are re-selling or leasing property, sustainable buildings can attract new audiences and a new market. This could mean both swifter sales and higher rents.

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