

Five Simple Ways to Save Money and the Environment

GOING GREEN : OFFICE AND EQUIPMENT

Pulling ahead of the competition in today's economy requires a lean, focused organization that makes customers feel good about doing business with you. With an uncertain stock market and leading economists debating whether the worst is over, now is a great time to cut some of the wasted expenses from your business. And now that consumers are clamoring for more environmentally sound products and giving preference to businesses that consider their impact on the planet, cutting waste may not only save you money, it could give you the edge that makes customers choose you over the competition.

Don't worry; we're not suggesting anything drastic. Below are five simple and inexpensive ways you can save money while lowering your carbon footprint.

1. Turn off your computers every night and on weekends

The money you'll save:

When a single computer is left in sleep mode every night and weekend for a year, it costs your business \$41 per year to power that unused computer, according to Mark Pierce, a Cornell Cooperative Extension associate in the Department of Design and Environmental Analysis in Cornell's College of Human Ecology. Compare that with the \$57 per year it costs to run the computer on weekdays. If you shut down that same computer, but leave it plugged in, you'll spend \$3 per year powering the monitor's standby mode when it's not in use.

If saving \$38 per year is not a compelling reason to shut down your computer, multiply that by the number of computers owned by your business, then multiply that number by the number of years you'll be in business. You'll find the long-term cost savings justifies the small effort it takes to shut down your computer.

The environmental impact:

Most of the electricity in the US is generated from coal-fueled power plants. The more electricity we use, the more coal needs to be mined. That can strip landscapes of their natural beauty and kill off species that once lived in the mined area. Reducing electricity usage can decrease the amount of coal mined for power and preserve landscapes and ecosystems.

2. Turn off your lights when not in use.

The money you'll save:

The cost of a kilowatt hour of energy varies by region, so you'll need to take a look at your electric bill to determine how much money this tip will save you. But here is an example based on averages.

Let's use the example of a 60 watt bulb that is typically left on overnight at the office (5pm-8am).

One kilowatt hour is the energy it takes to power 1,000 watts for an hour. Find out how many hours it takes for that light bulb to use one kilowatt hour of electricity by dividing 1,000 by 60. It takes about 17 hours.

Let's say the electric company charges 10¢ per kilowatt hour, and there are 15 hours of the day when the office is unoccupied. Leaving the light on overnight is using about one kilowatt hour of unnecessary power per day.

Here's how much you can save per light bulb by turning off the lights overnight Monday through Friday:

1 week: 50¢

1 month: \$2

1 year: \$24

Count how many light bulbs are in your office, then multiply that number by each of the numbers above to figure out your individual savings. Also consider that your light bulbs will last longer, so you can cut the cost of buying replacements as well.

The environmental impact:

Earlier, we mentioned the toll mining coal to fuel electrical power plants takes on the environment. By using less electricity, you are lowering the demand for coal and decreasing the amount of environmental destruction caused by mining.

Also consider that some light bulbs contain mercury, which is toxic and can damage the environment. By turning off your lights at night, you'll use fewer light bulbs, and that's less mercury to going into the landfill.

3. Print on both sides of the paper

The money you'll save:

If you're not currently printing documents on both sides of the paper, you can cut your paper consumption in half by changing your default printer settings to print two-sided documents. Using less paper means less of your budget is devoted to office supplies, and you can use that money to grow your business in other ways.

The environmental impact:

Almost 50 percent of the trees cut down in North America are used to produce paper, according to the Green Guide Web site. In addition to the destruction of wildlife habitat caused by deforestation, the paper making process involves nearly 1,000 different chemicals and uses thousands of kilowatt hours of energy. Cutting your paper consumption (and encouraging others to do so) can eliminate some of the demand that drives environmental damage.

4. Think Before You Print

The money you'll save:

Combine tip number three with this one, and you can cut your paper consumption by more than half! Years ago, the digital revolution promised a “paperless office.” But paper consumption actually increased after the advent of email by most estimates. Consider storing your documents digitally rather than keeping paper files, and only print email messages if absolutely necessary.

By printing fewer documents and email messages, you not only save money on paper, you buy fewer ink cartridges or toner and consume less power. The savings can really add up over the course of a year.

The environmental impact:

We discussed the environmental impact of power and paper consumption already, so let’s take a look at ink cartridges. Made of plastic and heavily packaged in cardboard, these cartridges create a lot of waste that can be recycled. Many manufacturers will take their old ink cartridges back and reuse them to make new ink cartridges. If your local office supply store or ink brand accepts used cartridges, never throw them away. Plastic takes a long time to biodegrade in a landfill.

Another common way to help the environment is to add a notice to your email signature asking the recipient not to print your message. By spreading the word, you’re helping the environment even more.

5. Digital Faxing

The money you’ll save:

The financial breakdown on how much money you can save through digital faxing is almost identical to printing less. However digital faxing also saves you the cost of buying and maintaining and repairing a fax machine. Faxing documents over email lets you use the equipment you already own (a computer with an Internet connection) to send and receive faxes.

The environmental impact:

Using your email rather than a fax machine is another way to cut your paper consumption. Most digital faxing plans allow you to archive your incoming and outgoing documents, so you never need to print them, and they’re always accessible to you.

Now that you’ve read our list, try to think of some other ways you can save yourself money while helping the environment. The possibilities are nearly endless!

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