

Green IT: saving the planet or just saving costs?

IT has a key role to play in helping organisations to reduce energy use as well as other sources of carbon emissions. Why should you be prepared to look seriously at the potential in your business?

What is it?

Green IT describes a set of technology services and IT management practices which combine to reduce an organisation's energy consumption and other sources of CO2 emissions i.e. your "carbon footprint".

Why is it important?

In a typical office environment, IT can account for up to 15% of electricity usage. IT-related energy consumption is rarely measured separately and to date, there has been little incentive for improvement.

Government energy strategy now calls for UK emission cuts of 34% by 2020 and 80% by 2050, with the Carbon Reduction Commitment taking effect from April 2011. Such reductions are regulatory for energy utilities and large manufacturers, implemented through the Carbon Trading Schemes.

In this context, smaller businesses and public sector organisations will increasingly be required to demonstrate their contribution in response to legislation, market pressures and rising energy costs.

What do you need to think about?

IT equipment use is the largest contributor to energy consumption - and emissions - followed by equipment manufacture. PCs and monitors are the biggest contributors, followed by servers, server room environments, printers and copiers.

Technology solutions can turn off PCs and monitors when not in use and centralise printing services. A radical approach – with major cost reduction potential - is to reduce the number of desktops in use, through a remote working strategy.

Teleconferencing reduces travel-related emissions, whilst saving costs and improving staff productivity.

Server virtualisation can reduce energy consumption in the server room by as much as 80%. Going further, the "cloud computing" model leverages the energy efficiency of large scale data centres.

Procure equipment manufactured to sustainable standards. A better question is "How long can I avoid replacement?"

Its vital to avoid "displacement"; change in one part of an organisation merely shifts emissions to another e.g. a remote working strategy which results in more staff car journeys. A corporate approach with change management across the organisation is essential.

The Bottom Line

Sustainability and cost reduction are two sides of the same coin. Developing a Green IT strategy is good business practice and provides an effective hedge against rising energy costs.



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