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A practical guide to green IT

By Marc Berthiaume

There has been much advancement in the world of green information technology – advancements that will help you lower your carbon footprint and your bills. Here are some ways that show it is, in fact, easy to be green.

Power down: According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Americans and their 180 million-plus computers account for nearly 2 percent of annual electricity consumption in the United States. One of the easiest steps to saving money, energy and the environment begins with turning off your computer and other peripherals when not in use.

Turn off your screen “saver”: The screen saver is more like a screen waster. Screen savers, especially those with moving images, consume just about the same amount of energy as your active computer. Leaving a blank screen saver only reduces your energy consumption by a small percent. Instead, put your computer to sleep or simply turn it off.

Hit snooze and employ “power management”: Allowing your computer to sleep cuts about 60 to 70 percent of energy consumption, according to the EPA. They go even further to project that the “sleep mode” could even “save enough electricity each year to power Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, cut electric bills by \$2 billion, and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by the equivalent of 5 million cars.” By employing a prudent power management strategy, you can contribute to these energy savings.

First, make sure your monitor is Energy Star compliant. Also, check that your computer recognizes your Energy Star compliance. You can check by accessing your display settings within the control panel on your PC, then “Settings” and “Monitor” under “Advanced Properties.” Within this section, ensure that the option for “Monitor is Energy Star Compliant” is checked.

Also, set your computer up to sleep when idle at efficient times. The recommended settings are 20 minutes for the monitor and 30 minutes for the system.

Turn down the heat: Keep your thermostat down to not only reduce your heating bill, but also keep your computers and tech equipment from having to use more energy to cool off. Hearing your computer’s fan coming on too often? Is your lap heating up as you use your portable computer? Try turning down your office temperature.

You also can turn up the temperature at which your fan comes on. This will prevent the fan from starting up until it reaches a couple of degrees higher (which may be even less likely if you lowered the room temperature).

Invest in an LCD monitor: LCD monitors, according to Energy Star, can consume half to two-thirds less electricity than an average cathode ray tube monitor. LCD monitors also are known for emitting less heat, which means your computer won’t need to cool down as often, and the hot summer months in the office will be much more comfortable.

Replace outdated products: Older computers and peripherals require more energy and run much slower, wasting more of your time and more electricity. Upgrading to Energy Star or carbon-neutral equipment will help your business, your wallet and the environment. Even new products without these energy-saving labels are often much more efficient, so research your current consumption and the benefits of updating your equipment.

Upgrade older items that are still usable: Revamping older computers can help your company become more efficient while recycling older equipment. Stretching the life of your computer while keeping it up to date with inexpensive improvements can help you achieve a green computing status. You can revamp your computer by deleting temporary files, defragmenting your hard drive, cleaning up your computer's registry, clearing erroneous files, keeping your computer clean (both internally and externally) and accessorizing your computer with peripherals, software and hardware to speed up you computer and increase its efficiency.

Switch to a laptop: Laptops provide much more versatility in a compact machine. The efficient size of laptops requires less energy and thus they are greener than desktops. The smaller screen uses less energy and can be set to a dimmer setting to use even less. Further, you can employ all of the previously mentioned steps on your laptop to enhance efficiency even more.

Dispose and recycle correctly: Proper disposal of computers and the items associated with them is extremely important. The toxicity of the waste associated with these items is great and needs to be considered when you make the initial purchase of IT equipment. Don't forget, your options for disposal also include recycling, by donating your computers and other items to nonprofits and schools. If your computer is beyond repair and truly dead, it can be dismantled for usable parts.

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