



A dedicated green team can help establish initiatives from the ground up

ECO CRUSADERS

Cutting waste, saving energy and reducing pollution doesn't just benefit the environment, it boosts the bottom line too. From simple steps to more sophisticated schemes, every workplace can be greener, says **Helen Mayson** – you just need to harness the enthusiasm and initiative of your staff

In the past few years, more and more people have embraced green habits at home. But just one look at the piles of pages littering a typical office printer tray shows that, sadly, this enthusiasm for Mother

Nature often doesn't extend to the workplace. A recent survey by Office Angels revealed that only one third of UK offices even have a green policy in place, suggesting it's high time British businesses brushed up on their three Rs – not reading, writing and 'rithmetic but the holy trinity of reduce, reuse and recycle.

Why aren't more offices catching on to the green trend? It could be that many businesses still labour under the misapprehension that going green can be expensive, inconvenient and take too long, says

Kim Stoddart, managing director of green PR agency Green Rocket. It's often the first step that is the hardest, she says: 'The main thing that can be time-consuming, as well as cost-consuming, is having someone dedicate time to thinking about these things. Where do you start?'

Fortunately, there's a wealth of information out there to help you make changes. Government initiatives like the Energy Saving Trust offer information for small businesses as well as homes, while Business Link and Envirowise provide free, practical advice and support for small to medium-sized enterprises on ways to minimise waste, maximise profit and reduce your environmental impact. 'It shouldn't be as daunting as you think,' says Stoddart.

Aside from committing costly

human resources, isn't implementing eco-friendly practices prohibitively expensive? It doesn't have to be, says John Theaker, managing director of eco-friendly office cleaners Green Your Office. 'The truth is that being green actually saves you money,' he says. Indeed, increasing numbers of companies are citing cost factors as a motivation for embracing green initiatives. 'If you look at the reasons driving a lot of companies to invest, the green agenda is one – everyone wants to be seen as green – but you can deliver cost savings as well,' says Paul Phillips, regional director for the UK and Ireland of IT provider Extreme Networks.

'Going green consists of a series of simple, practical steps,' says Theaker. First, draft out a plan that outlines areas you want to improve, ideas for doing so and solid targets ▶

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◀ you'd like to hit – but without setting anything in stone. 'It's an unending process in some respects,' he says. 'It's not something that you can ever stop refining.'

WASTE NOT WANT NOT

You can make significant changes by simply looking at what you are already doing and applying the three Rs. Where better to start than with the most common of office resources – paper. According to a recent survey by Avery, the average British worker uses 20,000 sheets of paper a year, and although 70% of all office waste produced in the UK is recyclable, only eight per cent makes it into a recycling bin. 'Waste is one of the core issues of not being green,' says Theaker.

As well as the inevitable paper and card, this also encompasses bottles and cans, food and unwanted computer equipment. Envirowise's 'waste hierarchy' encourages a more comprehensive approach than simply sticking it all into the recycling bin. First, eliminate what you can to avoid producing waste in the first place, and if you can't eliminate it, then try to reduce the amount you use.

Then reuse it – as many times as possible. 'Do you print on both sides? Little things like that can make a big difference,' says Stoddart. Employees at marketing agency EHS Brann use the back of unwanted printouts for sketching out ideas, while audio/visual display company Aztec Event Services donates its used felt swatches from trade shows to local schools for craft lessons (see case studies right and overleaf).

Once you've covered these steps, it's time to recycle. Make sure each floor of your office has clearly marked bins for recycling plastic bottles, cans, paper, food and glass, and that all employees know where they are. Getting rid of waste baskets, or limiting them to one per team, can significantly cut down the amount you send to landfill. Your local council should advise you on how to dispose of heftier items such as unwanted computer equipment ▶



The average British worker uses **20,000 sheets of paper a year, and although 70% of all office waste produced in the UK is recyclable, only 8% makes it to a recycling bin** (Source: Avery)

CASE STUDY

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AZTEC EVENT SERVICES ENVIRONMENTAL VISION

The people at Aztec Event Services, which provides audio/visual and technical services for live events, have always had a keen interest in recycling. When they contacted the Go Green service, they were already ensuring that their paper, card, bottles and printer cartridges didn't go to landfill, but felt they could do more. 'We'd gone about as far as we felt we could without getting someone involved professionally, so we got in contact with the local council, who put us in touch with Go Green,' says Mark Parker, the company's commercial director.

Spanning the five outer London boroughs of Kingston, Merton, Sutton, Croydon and Wandsworth, the Go Green project is run by southlondon.biz, the enterprise arm of Merton Chamber of Commerce. It helps educate and support small businesses in all matters environmental and is partly funded by the government, with businesses paying a £10 administration fee to draw on the knowledge and experience of the scheme's 'greening business officers'.

'We're a small business – about 30 people – so we couldn't employ a full-time person to deal with green issues,' says Parker. 'I contacted the Go Green service and it put Bill Water in touch with us. He came round, had a look at what we're doing, liked what we did but agreed that there were things that we could do better.'

Moving goalposts

The first step was to set targets for reductions in energy, waste and water, and draw up an action plan to enable the company to hit

them. Aztec has been constantly revising these targets, having already met its goal for a reduction in energy use of 15% in the past six months.

'Obviously we have to look at cost as well. Something I've been keen to say to Bill is that a company has to look at this on a commercial basis first of all,' says Parker. Fortunately, there are savings to be made in being green. 'If you reduce your energy use by 15%, that's a considerable saving and it encourages people to look further.'

The green journey

As well as reducing energy, Aztec has implemented a green transport policy for staff travel to meetings, and to and from work.

'One of the things that Bill identified was that we didn't have a transport plan – I'd never even heard of one at that time. We got in contact with the Enterprise scheme, which is sponsored by Transport for London, and they wrote a plan for us. They came in and did an online questionnaire to find out the staff's travelling habits and then suggested what we could do to make our travel more sustainable,' he says.

Switching the company's vans to biofuel reduced its carbon footprint by more than 20% for the year, and staff now use public transport wherever possible, as well as car-sharing and cycling to work. 'We had one cyclist in the company when we did this plan in July 2008,' says Parker, 'Now we've got three or four guys who regularly cycle to work.'

Aztec encourages staff to work from home where possible. As well as reducing their carbon footprint, this means they benefit



A company transport plan encourages greener staff travel

from a better quality of life. 'One member of staff saves up to four hours a day because he's not having to travel in,' says Parker. The number of days that Aztec staff work from home has doubled year-on-year since February 2008, and this familiarity with remote working means the business can operate smoothly even when events like February's snowfall stop people from reaching the office, he says.

In the coming year, Aztec is looking to switch all its invoices to email – 'it would be great, very sustainable' – but Parker accepts that the company cannot do everything it might want to. 'You can't reduce everything to zero, unfortunately, so we're also looking at a carbon offset programme,' he says. 'Offsetting is viewed by some people as a cop-out, and I can see where they're coming from, but I don't think it's practical to make everything neutral. If you just said, "I'm a carbon-neutral company because I pay x amount into an offsetting organisation," that wouldn't work for me. But do it on the basis that that amount will reduce over the next year, and it allows you to have an instant impact.'

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COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR

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“ ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AREN'T GOING TO GO AWAY. TO PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE WE NEED TO EMBED THESE VALUES IN ALL WE DO ”

◀ and fluorescent tubing.

With the glut of computers, printers, lights and heating in a typical office, it's no surprise that energy costs figure prominently on most companies' balance sheets. Cutting those costs, and in turn your carbon footprint, is one of the areas where you need staff most engaged, says Lara Conaway, sustainability manager at office designers Morgan Lovell. 'Staff want to understand how they can be more sustainable in their own office space, so there needs to be engagement with them to say, "Yes, this is what you can do and this is what we're doing,"' she says.

Electricity supplier Green Energy UK advises making each member of

staff responsible for the area they work in, switching off lights, shutting down computers at the end of the day and turning off appliances at the plug. 'The way to make a real difference, particularly in the environment we're in, is to reduce energy costs,' says Conaway. Morgan Lovell employs a tracking system, Footprint Tracker, which allows staff to monitor the company's energy savings. 'I can't tell you the money you can save by doing that,' she says.

LET THERE BE LIGHT

Cast a fresh eye over your lighting. Swap out old filament lightbulbs for energy-efficient bulbs and make use of free sunlight wherever possible.

Keeping windows free of obstacles, clean and with blinds open throughout the day might allow you to turn some lights off. In storage areas and seldom-used spaces, switches controlled by motion sensors or timers will minimise power use.

Heating and air-conditioning account for the lion's share of energy bills, yet office heating is often set too high in winter and air-conditioning too cool in summer. The optimum temperature is 18°C in offices, 15°C in corridors and toilets. Use a thermometer to take a reading and adjust it if necessary.

For green initiatives to be a success, you have to get your staff on board. Engagement at all levels is key, says Stoddart. 'It's essential to get engagement, not to tell people what to do but to get them involved. It's important that they feel they can come up with ideas, and individuals who feel particularly passionate about it can lead on that.'

First, use the communication channels you already have in place to get the message out. Staff meetings, a regular newsletter and staff events are great ways to break the ice on new initiatives and will often get a strong response.

'I certainly think in the small to medium-sized area there's a lot of pressure from employees for companies to change: in some respects, it has been a bottom-up approach,' says Theaker. Nigel Clifton, creative director at digital marketing agency EHS Brann, certainly found that was the case after internal communications about the company's new green initiative, Greenius, were sent out early last year. 'There were people who stood up and said, straight away, "I want to help,"' he says.

Stoddart advocates building a team of 'green champions', individuals who have expressed an interest in greening the business and can help you implement initiatives from the ground up. What's more, some of the best ideas come from employees, says Stoddart. 'By getting involved with something

CASE STUDY

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EHS BRANN: A TOUCH OF GREENIUS

EHS Brann's green initiative came into being after staff member Vivian Luxford read an article about Tesco – one of the digital marketing agency's clients – looking for suppliers that used less packaging in their products. She took it to creative director Nigel Clifton, suggesting that they follow in their client's footsteps.

Clifton agreed, and the pair swiftly got board approval to launch 'Greenius' across the company. Enlisting the help of an office management company, they got their office building rated and received a clear list of recommendations which would improve their environmental credentials and save the firm money. Staff brainstorming began to generate ideas for changes, building momentum through a series of Greenius-branded internal communications.

'We set ourselves a policy that would be like a mandate, so people could quickly understand why we were doing this,' says Clifton. 'If you don't have that sort of journey mapped out, or at least a

promise to yourself, then it's very easy to not do it.' The company's policy included pledges to reduce energy use, find greener ways to travel and consider greener suppliers, as well as a promise to share 50% of all savings with staff in a social fund.

All change

The adjustments have ranged from the obvious, like printing less and recycling more, to the novel, such as eliminating bottled water, supplying recyclable bags for staff to use at lunchtimes and the forthcoming installation of a roof garden. Last year, even the company Christmas tree was made out of plastic bottles – recyclable, of course.

Keeping green issues on people's minds is important, says Clifton. 'We've got recyclable mugs with logos on, Greenius emails, 'weemails' on the back of toilet doors – it's very difficult to walk about the building and not see something that is about recycling or energy efficiency.'

Key to the campaign's

success, he says, is the sense of fun in the internal communications and the continued involvement of the staff. 'Everything we've done has been fun, not hard and serious. We even had a video in which the board members got dressed up. And the money that we save goes into a social fund, which certainly helps to motivate staff,' he says.

Dictating rules and regulations to your staff isn't going to get you far, he adds. 'Someone pointing a finger at you and telling you you're not green isn't going to make you feel like making an effort.' Instead, the company incentivises staff to be greener. 'We monitored all the printers in the office, and the person who printed the least paper over the month got a bit of a reward, which was a bottle of English champagne because it didn't have as far to travel as from France,' he says.

Clifton is keen to emphasise that EHS Brann sees Greenius as a journey, not a destination. 'When targets are achieved, we'll set new ones,' he says.

they also feel valued, which has the knock-on benefit of helping with staff retention.'

THE SCIENCE BIT

Crucially, don't forget to monitor the results. 'Unless you measure, how do you know you've made any difference? There's no science behind it otherwise,' says Phillips. Feeding back to staff is also critical, and a little incentive can't hurt: 'The prize doesn't have to be big – a bottle of wine normally works quite well,' says Stoddart.

However you choose to set up your environmental policies, it's important that you put them into practice – and fast. 'Environmental issues aren't going to go away,' says Stoddart. 'Organisations can't make these changes overnight, but if they want to prepare for the future it's a case of making sure that these values are embedded in everything that they do.' Theaker agrees. 'Being green is part of a much bigger mindset. I like to think of it as part of an evolutionary process we're all engaged with.' ■

FURTHER INFORMATION

- **Business Link:** government business advice and support service www.businesslink.gov.uk
- **Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform's energy group** www.berr.gov.uk/energy
- **Energy Saving Trust:** free advice on saving energy www.energysavingtrust.org.uk
- **Energy Star:** US government energy efficiency agency www.energystar.gov
- **Envirowise:** free government-funded advice on sustainability in business www.envirowise.gov.uk
- **GreenBiz:** weekly online newsletter on business and the environment www.greenbiz.com
- **Green Office Week:** an initiative of office supplies company Avery www.greenofficeweek.eu
- **Les-ter:** landlord's energy statement and tenant's energy review, an industry initiative led by the British Property Federation www.les-ter.org

TOP TIPS FOR A GREENER OFFICE

- **Get engagement** – getting staff on board should be your number one priority. Make your green policy interactive, engaging and fun
- **Switch it off** – turn off lights, monitors and equipment when not in use and get employees to take responsibility for their own areas
- **Paper trail** – reduce your paper usage by minimising print outs, reusing scrap for notes and recycling what you no longer need
- **Recruit a green team** – enlist employees as green champions to help spread the message throughout your workforce
- **Shop around** – there are plenty of high quality, low cost sustainable suppliers around. Go out there and look for them
- **Celebrate success** – monitor the results of your green initiatives and don't forget to celebrate when you hit your targets
- **Keep things moving** – green technology and legislation changes at lightning speed. Keep your policy and goals up to date by revising them regularly

