

## Going green -- from saving the planet to saving cash

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Whether they're drinking coffee and eating lunches out of ceramic mugs and plates, or remembering to print documents in double-sided format, employees at Toronto engineering consulting firm Halsall Associates Ltd. are an excellent example of sustainable business practices in action.

And it's not just the small stuff: the company is so serious about going green, it even provides free transit passes and memberships in the local car-sharing company AutoShare to its employees.

"Six years ago, we went through the process of trying to find ways to decrease waste and reduce our impact on the environment," recalls Doug Webber, sustainability practice leader at Halsall. "We found we got significant results even by doing something simple like double-sided printing -- we cut our paper use by 30 per cent in two to three months."

Halsall is among the growing numbers of Canadian companies that have chosen to "go green" by making environmentally friendly changes to certain aspects of their business. The changes run the gamut: from switching to green office supplies and reducing paper output to opting for furniture and office design that doesn't put too much pressure on Mother Nature.

Scott McDougall, president of TerraChoice Environmental Marketing Inc., an environmental marketing agency in Ottawa, says there's a green solution for practically every aspect of business.

"There are great environmental choices in almost every product category -- paper, photocopiers, fuel, building materials, even electricity," Mr. McDougall says. "If what you're trying to do is green your business, finding resources is not going to be a problem."

So where to begin? For companies seeking to reduce what they send to the landfill, a good first step is to bring in a waste management consultant to assess how much garbage is being produced and where it comes from.

It's important that businesses get all employees involved with the plan, says Carmen Dodaro of environmental consulting firm C.D. Sontel Ltd. "We'll go in and talk to employees about things like the difference between waxed and unwaxed cardboard; a lot of people don't know that waxed cardboard can't be recycled," he says.

C.D. Sonter's waste-auditing services, which include employee training, cost approximately \$3,000, depending on the size of the office, says Mr. Dodaro. But companies can recoup that expense through savings on supplies and waste-hauling charges.

On the paper-waste side, Xerox Canada Inc., for one, helps businesses cut back on printing by encouraging the use of scanners and sharing documents online. The company also has an aggressive toner-cartridge return program.

Businesses are also starting to consider changes for their offices, from building materials and lighting systems to fabrics for furniture.

This is where companies such as Halsall Associates come in. Mr. Webber says Halsall has helped many companies revamp their offices with lighting, heating and cooling systems that use less energy without diminishing performance. For example, showroom designers usually insist on turning up the wattage to highlight displays. But a well-designed lighting system can reduce energy use without dimming the lights, he says.

Advanced flooring technology that stores and distributes air, both hot and cold, can save on heating and air conditioning costs, points out Mr. Webber, while solar walls on parts of a building can harness the power of the sun to heat an office.

Ideally, all these energy-saving technologies should be accompanied by a system to manage energy use. For example, BOSS Online Inc., in Cambridge, Ont., offers a web-based software program (at <http://www.managingenergy.com>) that businesses can use to audit their energy use, develop a plan for saving energy and money, and then track their progress. The program is sold by subscription and can range from "hundreds of dollars to a few thousand per month," says company president Rob Kerr.

Even the walls in an office can turn a business green. Companies such as Teknion Corp. and Haworth Inc. make modular wall systems that can be reconfigured and reused as a business changes. So instead of putting up a new wall or knocking down old ones, companies can just add or move a modular wall. Both companies also make furniture that don't contain or release toxic chemicals into the air.

Shalom Prasow, Teknion's vice-president of business development, says companies are increasingly interested in going green.

"The driver is money," he says. "Companies today are very concerned about the planet but they're also concerned about business profitability and the bottom line is, waste is not profitable."