

Simple Steps to a Paper-Light Office

By Melinda Stoker

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Years ago, going green was seen as a trendy thing for companies to do, with less attention paid to the true business impact it might bring. However, times have changed, and companies today are finding real value in reducing their carbon footprint, including significant cost savings and increased worker productivity.

Several business practices can be improved to minimize impact on the environment. Most of these can be identified simply by looking around your office and evaluating how workers use paper documents. For example:

- The average worker prints 10,000 pages per year and wastes 1,410 pages.
- The average cost of a wasted page is six cents.
- A company with 500 employees spends \$42,000 on wasted prints a year.
- Only 49 percent of office workers say they recycle at work.
- Every ton of recycled paper saves 3.3 cubic yards of landfill space.

While going completely paperless isn't a realistic goal for most companies, decreasing paper use or going "paper-light" is a strategy that reaps several positive results. In fact, if the U.S. cut its office paper use by roughly 10 percent, or 540,000 tons, greenhouse gas emissions would fall by 1.6 million tons -- equivalent to taking 280,000 cars off the road for a year.



Moving to a Paper-Light ECM

Deploying a paper-light document management strategy is not just about encouraging employees to print responsibly or to recycle more. The key to going paper-light is through transitioning paper documents into digital form and then archiving them so that information can be found quickly and referenced, shared or updated without the need for hard copies. An enterprise content management system can help companies easily transition from working in a primarily paper environment to a predominantly digital one. Enterprise Content Management (ECM) systems also enable automated business processes that not only dramatically reduce consumption of paper, energy and materials, but also significantly decrease the amount of time it takes to get work done.

Implementing an ECM system as part of a company-wide sustainability effort results in many benefits:

ECM reduces storage, energy and emissions. Gas emissions and transportation costs affiliated with the shipment of hard-copy documents from multiple locations or to

offsite storage spaces can be greatly reduced when using an ECM solution. Also, offsite document storage spaces require additional energy to light, heat and cool the facility, as well as for general upkeep.

In cases such as the Wilkes Barre school district in Pennsylvania, an ECM solution was used to digitize student registration and therefore eliminated the need to build additional document storage space. Another organization that has seen green benefits from ECM firsthand is the Nevada County Citizen's Integrated Information Portal in California. A strategic ECM solution helped achieve sustainability goals, reducing emissions by 7.5 tons and eliminating nearly 3 million miles of wear and tear on local roads and highways.

ECM supports telecommuting/virtual offices. Many companies are moving toward telecommuting policies that allow employees to have more flexibility or work entirely from home to lower the impact that commuting has on both the workers and the environment. An ECM system with an easy-to-use, secure Web-based interface gives employees instant access to the information they need to complete their daily tasks from any location.

Accessing documents outside of the office via the Web can also eliminate the need to print large amounts of information -- reducing a substantial amount of waste. Opting for a digital information portal also makes virtual teaming significantly easier. Colleagues across the hallway or across the globe are able to share business critical information internally, as well as with partners or clients without mailing or faxing. In some cases, using an ECM system eliminates the need for a physical office in certain locations, saving on energy and rent.

ECM increases productivity and customer satisfaction while decreasing costs. Many companies have seen significant ROI by using an ECM system as part of their green strategy. A robust ECM system can archive millions of documents in digital form.

This paper-light strategy can lower business overhead costs by decreasing the use of consumables. For example, OwnerGUARD insurance has achieved their sustainability goals by storing and sharing information electronically, which saves them more than \$8,000 per month on printing and toner costs. The company projects a savings of more than \$12,000 in file storage over the next three years by reducing its paper consumption through its ECM solution. In addition, OwnerGUARD reduced its turnaround times by 47 percent through scanning legacy documents into their system for fast and easy retrieval online -- in turn providing quicker customer services and increased customer satisfaction rates.

Don't Stop At Going Paper-Light

Office basics really do make a difference. By incorporating procedures to reduce, reuse and recycle, offices of any size can help improve the health of the environment. Keep in mind these quick tips to maintain a green office:

Never throw a used print or toner cartridge away. Manufacturers provide customers with prepaid postage labels to return cartridges for recycling or list recycling instructions on their Web site. Remanufactured cartridges containing reused or recycled parts can be built and tested to the same performance specifications as brand new cartridges. Also, solid ink printing technology results in 90 percent less waste than at typical color laser printer.

Always recycle paper. Collect used paper so the fiber can be used again. Recycling the fiber saves trees, reduces energy and water use, requires fewer chemicals, and keeps paper out of landfills. Even colored paper, newspaper, magazines, manila folders and sticky notes can be recycled.

Check the label. All office equipment should be Energy Star certified. Make sure that Energy Star features such as automatic sleep mode for PCs aren't disabled on devices already in the office. They have the potential to cut energy costs by a third.

Remember to print double sided. It's called duplex printing and is the single best way to reduce paper use. Make double-sided printing the default position on the copier to save paper consumption. Use the scan to email feature rather than printing and mailing a document.

Consolidate standalone office products. Purchase equipment with the most capabilities possible. Buying a multifunctional printer instead of a fax machine, printer and copier could translate into a 50 percent reduction in energy usage.

Businesses today are faced with many challenges, but going green doesn't have to be one of them. A comprehensive ECM strategy can help your organization lower its impact on the environment and aid in building a more productive team and profitable future.



Melinda Stoker

Melinda Stoker serves as the director of marketing communications for the Xerox DocuShare business unit. She has worked in the enterprise software industry for more than 20 years with companies including Oracle, PeopleSoft, SupportSoft, and Citrix Systems. Stoker holds degrees in journalism and telecommunications from the Robert D. Clark Honors College at the University of Oregon.

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