

# The small business guide to a carbon-neutral office

By [Teresa Legg](#)

21 Aug 2012

Although much has been said about carbon disclosure projects and offsetting emissions, it seems as though the responsibility of creating a carbon-neutral economy has been placed squarely on the shoulders of large enterprises and not SMEs.

It seems as if smaller organisations either believe that their businesses are not big enough to make a significant environmental impact, or that they simply cannot afford the tools needed to run their businesses more energy-efficiently. Neither of those statements are true.

Small businesses have the flexibility to operate a lot more efficiently than big enterprises, allowing them to reach a carbon-neutral status easily. This is how we do it.

## 1. Keep energy use to a minimum

We keep energy use to a minimum by using natural light and air to heat and cool. From an office equipment point of view, we standardise on laptops, with the exception of a central server, and use cloud-based solutions, which eliminate the need for a stack of servers. (A good example of easy-to-use cloud-based solutions include programmes such as Google Mail, Google Docs or Dropbox, which can back up files and store them safely online.)

## 2. Employ appropriate power-management solutions

As an IT consultancy, technology is prolific in our business. Therefore, our laptops and server use power-management software called Nightwatchman and are routinely shut down overnight. Throughout the working day, this power-management tooling also puts equipment to sleep when not in use. This means that, if we're locked in a meeting, our PCs will go into standby until we need to use them again, effectively reducing our electricity consumption.

## 3. Recycle

Paper is a rare thing in our office and quite easy to eliminate. We use electronic communications, archiving and document review and only print when it is absolutely necessary. Try reusing unused printouts for memos before recycling them and be sure to send retired ICT equipment (such as old monitors or phones) to registered ewasa providers for responsible reuse and recycling. (We've made a habit of recycling paper, glass, tins and plastics too!)

## 4. Support and encourage remote working

Technology enables us to have daily meetings online - anywhere in the world. We use tooling to remote-in to our clients' servers for any technical work required on site. All this reduces our commuting and business travel emissions. There is a bevy of good-quality software programs that allow videoconferencing - and most companies have Skype conferences. Where possible, make use of conference calls and videoconferencing rather than flying or driving. (Which also cuts the time and cost of commuting dramatically.)

## 5. Identify and offset your biggest source of emission

sustainableIT is primarily based in Cape Town, but having clients and a satellite office in Johannesburg sometimes necessitates air travel. This is by far our biggest emission source, which is why we offset this, together with the rest of our footprint, by purchasing an equivalent CO2 emission-reduction certificate. Reforestation is an issue that is close to our

hearts and, therefore, we purchase our offset from the Sofala Community Carbon Project in Mozambique. This project achieves a CCBA triple Gold status, which effectively means that it demonstrates exceptional benefits in areas of climate, community and biodiversity. Discuss the causes that your staff members are passionate about and structure your offset around that - it makes it so much more rewarding.

Company size affords us the flexibility to operate so efficiently. Not all companies have this luxury, but technology, tooling and top-down commitment can get any business into as good of a space. It starts with a commitment to tackle corporate culture head on. Allow and encourage staff to do things differently and give them the tools to act more efficiently.

The most hardened environmentalist placed in an office with a central air con/lighting switch, no natural lighting and ventilation, no recycling bins and with a key directive to be physically present for a daily sales meeting or keep office equipment on overnight (for IT security and patching) will struggle to work efficiently. At the end of the day, a culture of small changes can make a big difference.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Teresa Legg is a director of sustainableIT.

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