

## **Top 8 Ways to Go Green on the Cheap**

By Sarah Fister Gale

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Whether you work in a five-person office or 5,000-person factory, there are dozens of initiatives you can implement to reduce waste, use less energy, improve efficiency and get your employees involved in shrinking your company's environmental impacts.

Many of these initiatives don't require a lot of money or time.

Deciding where to begin, however, can be the hardest part. With so many ideas floating around, it can feel overwhelming to decide on the best place to start so we spoke to green business owners and consultants to get their favorite high-impact, low cost and easy-to-implement green initiatives.

### **Get a Baseline**

"You can't reduce what you don't measure first," declares Allison Hannon, Midwestern regional manager for The Climate Group, a non-profit organization that helps companies and governments address global warming issues.

Measuring your carbon footprint may sound too complex to tackle, but there are many easy free tools available that companies can use to get a quick measure of their carbon emissions, says Tommy Linstroth, director of sustainability for Melavar, a sustainable real estate development company based in Savannah, Ga.

He suggests going to Climate Leaders, an EPA program for climate change initiatives that offers greenhouse gas emission tracking tools along with guidance on how to set carbon reduction goals.

"You don't need a dedicated climatologist to do this," Linstroth says. "If you can use an Excel spreadsheet, you can use these tools. All you need is information on your gas, electricity and auto usage and it will convert the data for you."

Once you measure your carbon footprint, you can identify the areas with the greatest impact and biggest potential for change. Electricity use and employee commuting may represent the largest impacts and reduction opportunities in an office building, or landfill waste and freight for a factory operation.

"Then you can look for the quick hits -- those initiatives that take the shortest time and have a quick payback," Hannon says, "so people can see the results and get excited about what they are going to do next."

### **Dumpster Dive**

"If you want people to think about the waste they produce every day, show it to them," advises Jim Hartzfeld, managing director for Interface Raise, the sustainable consulting unit of Interface, the Atlanta, Ga.-based floor covering manufacturer.

When Interface started talking about becoming a more environmentally friendly and sustainability-focused business back in the early '90s, Hartzfeld says everyone thought they were crazy. "But no one could argue with the idea of reducing waste," he says. "We just needed a way to make it visible."

So, Hartzfeld picked a day to pull all of the dumpsters into the parking lot and empty them out. He then had employees wade through the trash to see what they were throwing away and categorize it into piles. They found plastic containers, broken wooden pallets and dozens of other materials that had the potential for reuse.

"It got us talking about how we could keep these materials from becoming waste by using them in some productive way," he said.

### **Build a Garbage Web**

Showcasing waste can be done just as easily inside an office, Hartzfeld says.

After Interface employees left work one night, his team dumped all office trashcans into the reception area. They strung all recyclable materials from the ceiling with fishing line and paper clips, creating a three dimensional web of trash that employees had to walk through to get to their desks.

"It was a way to make their waste visible and cause people to recoil," he says, noting the company followed this activity up with education about recycling and its impact on the amount of waste sent to landfills.

"It had a powerful impact," he says.

## Getting the Most Out of Green Initiatives

- **Measure your baseline greenhouse gas emissions** Once you identify your biggest culprits, you can choose initiatives that will directly affect them and garner the biggest pay-off for your early efforts.
- **Get employees involved, through presentations, education and public events** The more engaged they are in the process, the more likely they are to change their behavior.
- **Look at your waste stream with an eye toward its value to someone else.** Besides recycling, could there be other uses for what you throw away?
- **Offer incentives**, such as free mugs, gift cards and other small giveaways that can go a long way toward drawing attention to your cause.

## Slow Your Flow

We've all heard about -- and hopefully implemented -- high efficiency light bulbs in our offices. This is the first, and arguably easiest, green decision a company can make. It's easy to do, it has a direct impact on energy savings and the return on investment (ROI) is seen in a matter of months.

But did you know you can make the same kind of change to your bathroom faucets and you'll see an even shorter ROI?

"The flow rate on most bathroom faucets is 2.2 gallons per minute," Linstroth says. "That's the same amount of water you use to take a shower. It's a ridiculous and unnecessary overuse."

Melavar replaced all of its bathroom faucet aerators -- which control water flow -- with 0.5 gallon per minute versions, although Linstroth notes that aerators come in a range of flow rates. Aerator cost \$2 to \$3 and are screwed right on to the faucet, making them as easy to change as a light bulb.

"For \$3 per faucet, we curtailed our water use by 50 to 75 percent. If every employee washes their hands three times a day, that's a substantial amount of water savings over a year," he says. "This is a no-brainer."

## Drive Change

When it conducted an audit of its greenhouse gas emissions, Melavar discovered that one of its biggest culprits was gasoline use for its employees to get to and from work. To combat its impact, Linstroth's group launched a series of incentives around commuting.

To encourage carpooling, the company partnered with Atlanta's Clean Air Campaign, which enters carpoolers into monthly drawings for gift cards. It also designated preferential parking closest to the building for carpool and hybrid vehicles. Neither of these programs cost anything to implement.

The company, however, does offer an incentive program of up to \$4,000 to help employees purchase hybrid vehicles.

"There's no direct payback for this program but it demonstrates our commitment to the employees and the environment," Linstroth says. "It's our way of rewarding people for changing their commuting behavior."

## Turn Waste into Profit

When you think about the waste your company produces, look beyond conventional recycling as a means to an end, suggests Bill Hoffman, of the Waste to Profit Network. Waste to Profit is a Chicago-based waste synergy network that matches companies that have or need raw materials to share that would otherwise be thrown away.

"We bring people together from different industries who wouldn't normally talk to each other and we get them talking about how they can work together," he says.

Through community meetings and a network database, companies develop partnerships to share and repurpose their waste. For example, a snowplow manufacturer uses old rubber tires to make parts for its snowplow blades. There's also a countertop manufacturer who uses difficult-to-recycle waste from a specialty coated glass manufacturer for a custom line of countertops.

Shawn Kingzette, a certified arborist at Care for Trees in Chicago, made a similar connection after seeing his customers' reactions after cutting down their trees because of disease or storm damage.

"Trees are important to people and they are often sad to lose them," he says. Instead of tossing the dead trees into a chipper, he sends them to a local miller who either uses them to make furniture, or cuts and returns the wood to the original owner, for a price, so they can hang on to the memories -- and the carbon -- that are locked into the wood.

"The broader lesson in this is to analyze your waste and determine if there is a better use for it," Kingzette says.

When he cuts down trees that don't have sentimental value, he converts them to wood chips that he can sell for landscaping, which retains the carbon in the material for several more years.

"It makes good business sense for me, and as long as the material stays in wood form, that carbon is trapped," he says.

## **Get Everyone Involved**

All the experts agree that employee involvement is critical to making any long-term green initiative a success. The best way to do that is to make it fun, says Christina Page, director of climate and energy at Yahoo.

The company began trying to make green initiatives fun on Earth Day in 2007, when the Yahoo challenged employees to reduce their energy consumption 20 percent within a week. The incentive?

"If they achieved that goal, the co-founders promised to sumo wrestle on the front lawn," Page says.

Yahoo's newly formed green team banded together to offer information and education leading up to the event, and reminded people throughout the week to carpool, turn off lights and shut down computers at the end of the day.

"It was an easy, fun, creative way for people to get involved," says Page, who was hired on Earth Day of 2007 and watched the founders in full sumo suits wrestle on the campus lawn. "That made a lasting impression on me."

Since then, Yahoo's green team, with now more than 300 volunteer members, has launched dozen of creative green initiatives, including a "chuck the cup" program where volunteers handed out mugs to employees to reduce disposable cup use. "On a typical day at the Yahoo campus people threw away 4,000 cups a day," Page notes.

To illustrate this, one Yahoo employee built a series of sculptures that were each made out of 124 discarded cups she'd retrieved from garbage cans and glued together. The resulting exhibit was displayed in front of the main building like a series of giant space mushrooms.

"Each dome represents how many cups are thrown away every 15 minutes on the Yahoo campus," Page says, noting that the statues garnered such an positive response, the green team has reused them several times at locations around the campus. "It's like a guerilla art installment that lets people visualize their waste."

### **Don't Forget Your Customers**

Encouraging and rewarding customers for participating in environmental programs, such as paperless billing or using cloth bags over plastic, can help companies reduce their environmental impacts and foster loyalty among environmentally savvy consumers.

An innovative example of this strategy was recently implemented by London-based retailer Marks & Spencer, which launched a partnership last month with Scottish and Southern Energy. Called M&S Energy to encourage customers to reduce their energy usage, the program rewards customers who sign up to receive advice on ways to reduce energy use. Those who reduce their annual energy usage by 10 percent in the first year will receive a £15 (US\$15) M&S voucher. Customers also receive vouchers for both signing up and opting for paperless billing.

"The energy sector can be quite complex and we want to make it simpler for our customers," says Carl Leaver, director of international, home and M&S Direct. "We also understand that the cost of living has risen for many customers and we hope to encourage them to save money by reducing their energy usage, as well as giving M&S store vouchers as rewards for doing so.

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