

What Exactly Is Green IT, Anyway?

You may not think that 2009 is the most opportune year to bring a new initiative to your executive team or board. But even the skeptics agree that Green IT is not only good for the environment...it's good for your company. Green Information Technology – “Green IT” – has many definitions, but it is best thought of as reducing IT's impact on the environment. Gartner calls Green IT “one of the top 10 technologies and trends to rule the world in 2009.”

Many companies have made great strides in encouraging green practices by implementing “Green Teams.” These task forces of employees have made sure there are recycling bins next to every trash pail and that the office lights are turned off at night. Now they are ready to move to the next level by taking a hard look at one of the largest capital and energy expenditures in the company – Information Technology – and finding a great opportunity for cost savings with Green IT. According to Forrester's predictions, “worldwide implementation of green initiatives in enterprise IT organizations...will accelerate in 2009, notwithstanding the gloomy economic environment.” In fact, many of these initiatives are driven by the financial pressures facing companies today. We believe that a good Green IT program examines four areas in your company: data center, local technology, business enablement, and governance.

Why should you consider evaluating a Green IT initiative today?

It saves your company money. The surprising discovery that many companies make when delving even a bit into Green IT is that it's full of practices that simply make good business sense. Who will argue with a server virtualization project that will quickly pay for itself in energy savings? And what if that same virtualization initiative saves so much space that it eliminates the need to build out that multimillion dollar data center you have planned for 2010? How about analyzing usage to reduce the amount of equipment that the company buys, an upfront savings, as well as reducing the amount of that same hardware it needs to pay to dispose of at the end of its life cycle? These savings quickly add up to significant operating cost discounts and reduced capital costs.

Further, many companies think that their opportunities for Green IT savings end at the data center, but there are many more areas to explore potential benefits, including network hardware, PCs, and even peripherals like printers and fax machines.

It's great for your company's (and IT's) reputation. Whether you're in the public or private sector, sooner or later every organization is going to be asked what they're doing to address sustainability or environmental impact. No one is a bigger culprit in terms of energy usage and waste production than IT – it's an unfortunate reality that businesses have to face, and a cost of doing business today. But Green IT gives the IT department occasion to “put on the white hat” and take a proactive approach to making a difference for the company and the environment – all while reducing costs. The chance to have this kind of positive influence, by putting their technology talent to use for the greater good, is an opportunity that few IT folks would miss out on, and most will be excited about.

It doesn't have to be expensive. Forget about the notion that you have to “spend money to save money” with Green IT. There are plenty of options that can be explored with your existing infrastructure and team to get started and fuel future investment in Green IT projects.

The key to successful greening of IT lies in ensuring you carefully do three things: *research, rethink, and report*. Let's take a look at the importance of each of these.

Research. There is an overabundance of so-called best practices out there. Not all of them are right for your business and some will have little or no immediate economic impact. Take the time to do an assessment of which options are right for your company and which activities will get you the “quick hit” results you want. If you don't have the time or resources to do this yourself, engage the services of a reputable consulting firm to help get you started.

Rethink. Be creative. Some Green IT initiatives may force you to take a hard look at some of your company's practices. Here's a simple and often overlooked example: Personal printers still abound at many mid-size companies, tucked away in offices. Think about the outlay when you multiply the costs associated with ink, power, and maintenance of each of these printers, not to mention the additional waste brought about by empty ink cartridges and increased propensity to print when a printer is sitting right next to your desk. Local technology (company technology outside the data center) is full of these kinds of opportunities.

Report. Implementing Green IT goes a long way towards being a good corporate citizen, but be sure to trumpet your company's efforts both internally and externally to get the maximum effect. Not only will this publicize your company's awareness and approach (and who couldn't use some free PR?), but internally, it will give your employees the talking points to carry your

efforts to every corner of the organization. Going one step further to set up goals and metrics that report out on the great work you've done in Green IT will strengthen the message even more. This kind of governance is the only way to facilitate a true and indelible shift toward environmental responsibility and to ensure strong staff involvement in your Green IT program.

So don't hesitate to move toward Green IT in these interesting economic times. You may find more than a little green in your bottom line as a result.

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Cynthia Charney's expertise is in Internet application development, B2B and B2C e-commerce platforms, and combining best practices, strategic use of technology, and project leadership in mission-critical technology environments to achieve optimal business results. Prior to joining Arrow, Cynthia was CIO for NetQuote, Inc, a leading online insurance lead aggregator, where she instituted the company's technology growth strategy and transitioned the IT department from start-up to established, positioning the company for successful acquisition. Before moving to Colorado, Cynthia was Vice President in the Internet Architecture Group at Prudential Financial in New York, where she created the company's first in-house market data delivery system, in addition to delivering application messaging systems, broker applications, and a consolidated content management portal. Cynthia holds a Masters degree in Management of Technology with a concentration in e-business from Polytechnic University. In addition to industry roles, she has taught undergraduate and graduate computer and information science courses for the City University of New York.