

10 Business Practices that Reduce Your Footprint

Thinking of implementing green practices, but don't know where to start?

We know how daunting the task can be. Take these small steps that will help you move towards sustainability rather than not doing anything at all. Best of all, many green business practices are not only eco-friendly but also budget friendly! You may not see change in the planet immediately, but you will definitely see the benefits to your bottom line.

1. Recycle, Recycle, Recycle

Recycling requires no effort because you were going to throw that piece of paper away anyways. This time, why not in a separate bin? Place paper recycling bins in convenient locations, like right next to copiers and mail boxes. Keep clearly labeled bins in several central locations such as break rooms. Basically, anywhere and everywhere there is a trash can, there should be a recycling bin.

2. Minimize Waste, Print Less (= Use Less)

Although paper is one of the easiest materials to re-use and recycle, it makes up about 35% of our waste stream. You and your employees can help reduce this waste by using less paper whenever possible and being smart about the paper you do use. Let us start with work emails. You don't need to print every e-mail, instead just organize your inbox to make e-mails easier to find. You can encourage others not to print your e-mails as well by adding the message: *"Please consider the environment before printing this email."* at the end by your signature. Next, encourage everyone to make back-up copies of important files and e-mails instead of storing boxes of paper files. When there is a need to print important documents, make sure you use a sustainable paper, and set the printer or copier to print on both sides of the page.

3. Eliminate Junk Mail

It takes 17 trees to make a ton of paper. That means nearly 100 million trees get used for junk mail every year in the U.S. Reducing junk mail gets clutter out of your mailbox, frees up your time, and helps protect the environment. To keep the trees in the forest and the junk mail out of your office, there is something you can do about it. There are free services out there that will remove you from mailing lists, such as Green Dimes (www.greendimes.com), ProQuo (www.proquo.com), and Earth Class Mail (www.earthclassmail.com), which are featured on [Ecoprenuerist's article: How To Make Junk Mail Go Away – Free](#). You can also remove your name from the [Direct Marketing Association's \(www.dmachoice.org\)](http://www.dmachoice.org) member prospect list.

4. Digitalize Documents

Reduce your company's environmental impact by using digital documents rather than printouts. You can also reduce paper use by signing your contracts and documents with electronic signatures. Adobe Acrobat Professional (www.adobe.com) allows you to sign PDF files digitally, as well as create PDF documents with signature fields for clients to sign. You could also use software such as [DocuSign](http://www.docuSign.com) (www.docuSign.com) or [e-signature](http://www.e-signature.com) (www.e-signature.com) to securely sign documents and get signatures from clients and vendors. You can send proposals, contracts, and invoices entirely through e-mail as PDF attachments. Clients can then e-sign the documents and send them back, and both parties have a signed copy without having to print anything.

5. Freecycle.com

It's all about reuse and keeping good stuff out of the landfills. Need some shelves for your office and don't have a budget for new furnishings? You never know what you might find on [freecycle](http://www.freecycle.org) (www.freecycle.org). Your hotel can even organize and host an office-wide or public barter party, where everyone brings items they don't use any more to swap for things they might need from others. Also, keep in mind, if you have useful furnishings or equipment from renovations or upgrades, list it on freecycle or donate it to a charity that may need it.

6. Turn it Off (= Savings On)

You don't have to be a tree-hugging socialist to see that it makes sense to turn off unnecessary lights and electrical appliances. Take simple steps like hooking up equipment (computer, desk lamps, printer, and external hard drive) to one power strip that can be turned off easily at the end of the day. Set all office computers to turn off automatically at a certain time each night, just in case anyone forgot. Consider investing in a keycard-based energy management system. You can potentially reduce guest room energy usage by 25% to 45% with a payback on investment from 1 to 2 years. See what these vendors have to offer: [Energex](#), [Energy Eye](#), [Entergize](#), [INNCOM Int'l](#), [Lodging Technology](#), [Onity](#), [Smart System Int'l](#). One last note on this topic, make sure you purchase energy-saving (Energy Star) appliances and compact florescent light bulbs. You'll notice the impact on your bottom line.

7. Recycle Electronics

Will your hotel's discarded TV sets end up in a ditch in Ghana? Computer and electronics recycling has moved to the forefront of recycling program discussions across the U.S. EPA has even initiated a number of program and promotions, therefore in addition to recycling the usual paper, cans, and bottles in the office, don't forget about the e-waste that is toxic to our environment. Make it company policy to recycle everything you can. You can donate your technology to a number of [organizations](#) (<http://pages.ebay.com/rethink/donate.html>), including [Recycling for Charities](#) (www.recyclingforcharities.com) makes recycling e-waste easy. Check manufacturers' policy for take-back programs. [EPA Plug-IN to eCycling](#) (www.epa.gov). Check this article on MSMBC: [The 'green' way to dump electronic junk](#).

8. Network with Green-Minded Companies

There are probably other businesses in your area that are also going green, so why not network and use their services. Part of being a green business is making sure that you do your best to ensure that your supply chain is green, too. Seek out approved green vendors on [National Green Pages](http://www.coopamerica.org/pubs/greenpages/) (www.coopamerica.org/pubs/greenpages/) for your business needs. [Business Alliance for Local Living Economies](http://www.livingeconomies.org) (www.livingeconomies.org).

9. Building Green: Interior

If you're lucky enough to be able to afford an office remodel, go green from the floor to the skylights. Use eco-friendly flooring options made from renewable or recycled materials. Use sustainable fabrics made from hemp or bamboo for window coverings. Lengths of bamboo make great curtain rods, too. Check [American Society of Interior Designers](http://www.asid.org) for information on sustainable design.

10. Educate Yourself

Being educated with the right facts is the best way to get everyone united in the right direction. You can learn more to make your business more sustainable and how it can impact your operation's bottom line. And the only way to make progress is to know where you're headed. Keep up with environmental news and green business trends to identify areas you can improve on. Check [EcoGreenHotel](http://www.ecogreenhotel.com) (www.ecogreenhotel.com) for ways to improve each hotel department to checklists of green business practices to implement and set deadlines. Share green news and tips with your co-workers, employees, and clients.