

Government must set the example by embracing green IT

With its growing focus on policies and laws aimed at ensuring environmental sustainability, the South African government should set an example for the private sector by embracing green IT as a way of saving costs and cutting carbon emissions.

That's according to Itec managing director, Simbo Ntshinka, who says green IT offers government a perfect opportunity to achieve quick-win cost savings while demonstrating its serious commitment to environmental sustainability to the public. "IT solutions that are green and sustainable are increasingly also the ones that deliver cost-savings through energy efficiency and reduction of wastage. This is especially apparent in the printing environment, where deployment of resource-efficient technologies can also deliver massive cost-savings."

Ntshinka says that many public sector organisations and government departments imagine that a green printing strategy will be complex to implement and manage. But this is far from the case since there are many simple, quick and low-risk tactics they can use to cut both costs and carbon emissions.

Audit of carbon footprint

The process should start off with an audit of an organisation's carbon footprint and print costs, which will provide insight into the steps it can take to reduce its emissions. There may be an opportunity to reduce carbon emissions and to achieve savings simply by reducing unnecessary printing and preventing waste and abuse of print resources by employees, says Ntshinka.

For example, functionality such as follow-me printing will stop users sending prints they never collect, while management tools can be used to enforce rules such as duplex printing and limit printing for private use. Introducing greener, more energy-efficient printing equipment can also make an enormous difference.

Government should also dispose of older equipment in an environmentally friendly manner. It could work together with suppliers who are willing to refurbish old printers and copiers in order to donate them to charities and schools, preventing equipment from ending up in a landfill prematurely.

Offset programme

"Once all steps have been taken to reduce carbon emissions in its print environment, it should then look to offset them," Ntshinka says. "Today, it is easy for organisations to measure carbon emissions generated per single sheet of paper in their printing environments for the purposes of offsetting it."

Itec, for example, has established an exclusive partnership with impactChoice for a carbon offset programme that is based

on micro-certificates that are fully auditable. Measuring and offsetting the relatively small amount of carbon emissions produced by office automation equipment was too costly and complex to be worth the effort in the past. But now the impactChoice/Itec solution solves these problems by offering clients guaranteed carbon offset credits backed up by micro-certificates which are linked to certificates traded on the global voluntary and formal carbon exchanges.

Customers pay a monthly fee based on their carbon footprint and the cash is invested into initiatives such as the Sofala Community Carbon Project in Mozambique, which rehabilitates degraded forests.

"Print costs are a significant chunk of any government department's operating costs," Ntshinka says. "But these costs can be cut by adopting green practices that translate directly into lower carbon emissions. That means better environmental sustainability and more resources for service delivery - a win for the environment, citizens and government itself."

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