

# GREEN IT – IS IT A FAD, OR JUST GOOD BUSINESS SENSE?

This month, Anglia Business Solutions takes a look at how green initiatives could make a difference to the running of your business, as well as making effective savings on your bottom line

**MUCH HAS** been written during the past few years on green initiatives. As a result, few people can be left in any doubt that it is now pretty high on the public's radar. So how does this apply to IT and can IT help a business to establish its green credentials? Here, we look at just a few areas where information technology can make an environmental difference.

The first area to look at is IT infrastructure, where a proliferation of servers consumes an increasing amount of energy. With the upsurge in the amount of information stored digitally, many companies will experience increasing energy costs as the number of servers and storage devices grow to accommodate the volume. The reality, however, is that many such devices only use a fraction of their capacity.

The first step in resolving this is to understand the available capacity, what it is costing and what value it contributes to the business. A number of tools are available to enable a business to carry out this exercise. Once a clear picture emerges of the available capacity, simple steps can be taken to make more efficient use of the equipment.

For example, many server farms contain units that have not been used for some time. However, they are still switched on and consuming energy. Moreover, many are older servers that are far less energy-efficient. Once these devices are eliminated, the work load should be consolidated on to a smaller number of servers. This simple exercise alone will reduce energy consumption, while increasing resource utilisation by taking advantage of surplus capacity.

While undertaking this exercise, it is also worthwhile exploring the concept of virtualisation. The virtualisation process works by using software to emulate a physical computer. This creates a separate operating system that is logically isolated from the host server. By providing multiple virtual machines at once, it allows several operating systems to run simultaneously on a single physical machine. The net effect is to reduce the number of servers even further. It also means reduced hardware and software costs, as the optimised servers can handle the anticipated increase in



IT can assist in reducing unnecessary road trips

data volume.

Moving outside the infrastructure arena, a well-implemented business management application can make a significant difference across the rest of the business. For example, wasting food is a major problem for the industry as a whole. Between suppliers and consumers, almost half of what is produced is thrown away. This is a major ecological cause for concern and is unsustainable in the longer term. An accurate forecasting system, together with access to live stock information, can make a significant difference, by reducing waste in the supply chain.

Paperwork has had to ramp up in recent years to facilitate compliance with regularity and traceability requirements. The mountain of paperwork needed is hardly good for the environment, as well as being a heavy administrative cost to the fresh produce industry. Using widely available devices such as touch screens and mobiles to move, trace and cost produce as it travels through the supply chain can eliminate most of this paper. It can also remove costs, which is good for the business.

A further aid to paperwork reduction is the use of email to distribute items such as invoices, statements, purchase orders and letters. Modern business management systems have the facility to distribute such documents electronically. Apart from the labour involved in the production, envelope stuffing and posting of such documents, there is the sheer volume of paper generated to consider. From the business angle, the postage and handling costs ramp up the

overheads of the organisation.

Most goods are moved by road transport. This is an increasing threat to the environment due to the pollution and road congestion generated. It is also costly, as fuel and labour costs increase. IT can assist by optimising loads carried and journey planning. Removing unnecessary trips by more efficient use of transport resources can help protect the environment, while improving customer service.

These are just a few areas where IT can make a significant difference in reducing a company's carbon footprint. Moreover, these differences have already been experienced by companies in the industry.

William Burgess, ceo of Produce World, said: "One of the major issues in fresh produce is the cost of waste. Getting it correct by having accurate and timely information has a huge bottom line impact."

Ian Parrot, operations director of Valley Grown Salads (VGS), said: "We wanted to make our operation as environment-friendly as possible. Every time one of our vehicles takes to the road, its load is optimised. This allows VGS to reduce our impact on the environment, with fewer journeys."

As can be seen from the above, well-implemented IT can be a major facilitator in enabling a company to embrace green initiatives. Moreover, reducing hardware and software costs while minimising waste and paperwork has got to be good for business. Add reduced transport costs into the mix and what emerges is a win-win situation for both the industry and the environment. ○