

Managing Your Interior Eco-Footprint

Go green with refurbished furniture and artwork

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When the financial markets began spiraling downward, the emphasis in the corporate world shifted to cutting costs and riding out the turmoil. What has been lost on many companies, however, is the fact that going green is one of the easiest, most effective ways to save money and realize profits on the bottom line, especially when you're talking furniture and interiors.

Low-Hanging Fruit

Starting with an efficient floorplan is one of the most inexpensive ways that companies can ensure a smaller eco-footprint in the workplace. For instance, when interior offices and rooms are positioned closer to the core of the building, it allows natural daylight to penetrate deeper into the space, which decreases the need for costly artificial lighting. Offices that house open workstations can also benefit from lowering panel partitions, allowing for better exterior views. Providing dual-purpose areas, like breakrooms that double as training or meeting rooms, is also a smart way to diminish negative impact on the environment.

The obvious choice in furnishing an eco-friendly office is to choose pieces made from recycled or sustainably harvested, nontoxic materials; however, repurposing existing furniture or purchasing refurbished furniture can also be a smart way to conserve energy and reduce waste and pollution – after all, it requires less energy to recycle than it does to manufacture a product from scratch. With so many corporations liquidating office spaces as a result of the economic downturn, there are plenty of opportunities to purchase nearly new office furniture, ancillary pieces, and artwork at a fraction of original cost.

Leading international environmental consultant ENVIRON, for example, acquired used furniture and artwork from a previous mortgage industry office tenant to create a vibrant, eco-friendly workspace that reflected its commitment to the environment. While the Irvine, CA-based firm couldn't attain the 26 to 32 points it needed to become a LEED-certified facility, it developed its own green scorecard and implemented smaller, lower-cost strategies like these that helped it reach its sustainability goals.



Five Strategies to Green Your Office

For companies looking to do the right thing without having to spend lots of green, consider these low- and no-cost strategies:

1. Reorganize workspaces around natural light sources to curb usage of costly fluorescent and incandescent lighting.
2. Find new uses for existing office resources (e.g. furniture, artwork, etc.) in a workspace redesign.
3. Opt for ENERGY STAR® appliances (e.g. computers, printers, monitors, etc.).
4. Install dimmers and sensors on lights that turn off automatically when an office is unoccupied.
5. Install timers to shut off air-conditioning and heaters when offices are unoccupied.

Building from Scratch

When working with a design consultant in building out a new space, it's important to specify furniture and other materials that contribute to an eco-friendly environment. For example, businesses can identify low-VOC-emitting materials, paints, and adhesives; choose renewable flooring products, such as cork or bamboo; request an energy-efficient lighting scheme; and install occupancy/daylight sensors to curb energy use. Businesses may also reduce environmental impact by working with designers to find ways to repurpose existing structural elements in the office (e.g. existing walls, doors, ceilings, etc.) and incorporate them into the new design.

Taking advantage of these “low-hanging fruit” strategies can make a huge difference in your company's financial bottom line and long-term environmental impact. Landlords and facility managers may wish to take the same initiative with their buildings to realize energy savings, attract new tenants, and safeguard the environment.

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