WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT?

A paperless office

More businesses are becoming aware of reducing business waste, endeavouring to decrease their environmental footprint and save dollars along the way. **Jessica Goulburn** reports on the best way to cut office waste.

On average, each Australian generates 543kg of waste each year – and it's growing. Multiply this by our population and the numbers run into the billions.

While most people do their part to minimise any impact on the environment, it's a workplace that is often the biggest contributor to waste, and paper products make up the largest share of it.

According to Janet Sparrow from Planet Ark, the best way to cut office waste can be as simple as bringing your recycling habits from home into the office with you.

"More than 95% of Australians have access to a kerbside recycling service of some kind," she says. "But those services are not always duplicated in the workplace."

WHY GO PAPERLESS?

Australian businesses generate about 12.5 million tonnes of commercial and industrial waste, and spend more than $2.2 billion on waste services each year.

While the recycling rate for office paper is sitting at a healthy 64%, businesses are still spending approximately $890 million sending office paper to landfill each year. Go paperless and you'll dramatically reduce your spend.

"If you're printing less or not printing at all, you're obviously saving on paper, you're saving on ink and you're saving on the equipment costs of actually having those printers," Sparrow says.

And when it comes to office paper, it really is a no-brainer. "When you get a lot of paper together, it can be really valuable," Sparrow enthuses. "It can be made into new office paper or other paper products, including cardboard boxes."

The environmental impact equation is simple: less paper means less energy and less waste. And for every tonne of paper or cardboard that you recycle, you're saving 30,000 litres of water.

COST COMPARISONS

When it comes to weighing up the financial benefit, Sparrow says to do your research.

"Any waste you are producing, you're also paying for those disposal costs," she says. "You may also have to pay for recycling costs, but it's definitely worth investigating."

CASE STUDY:
SHAYNE BETREEN, GAIN FINANCIAL

Shayne Betreen launched Gain Financial Aggregation to help brokers implement efficiency strategies into their own businesses.

"At first, I didn't intentionally go paperless. It was not about reducing costs; I was always looking at ways to improve productivity and efficiency within my business.

"In my previous working life I was working long hours, had poor work/life balance and was restricted in having to go to an office each day. I wanted the ability to have flexible work hours and access personal and business information instantly from anywhere to respond to any situation – whether I was in my office, at a function, interstate or overseas.

"By going paperless, I also wanted the ability to expand and grow my business with minimal infrastructure.

"Reducing office waste is environmentally friendly. It reduces your carbon footprint, increases profit and gives you back more time in your business.

"The reason we are all in business is to make money and to be as profitable as possible. There is no point if you generate great sales, but profits are dramatically lower than they could be due to overheads, for example.

"At times we spend a lot of money on advertising and marketing, but forget to take time out of our businesses to look at the everyday running.

"In the majority of cases, getting the right advice and implementing new technologies and software can dramatically improve efficiency, productivity and reduce costs. This in turn gives you more time in your day to grow your business and spend time with friends and family.

"I've spent the past three years trialling and testing different products, services and processes that work for mortgage brokers. The systems and tools that we now use are designed to change and grow with our business, and we have made sure that they are as user friendly as possible.

The set-up can be challenging, but once implemented, you won't know how you did business any other way."

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Sometimes when you reduce what you send to landfill and increase what you recycle, despite the pick-up costs, there may actually be savings.

This is especially true in states that impose taxes on waste that gets sent to landfill. For example, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia have levies all aimed to encourage businesses to seek legitimate alternatives to landfill disposal. These levies are generally added to the disposal costs set by landfills and don't necessarily translate into recycling costs.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

When it comes to implementing a recycling plan in the office, a good place to start is to make note of what you're throwing away. If you find that a couple of key materials are constantly thrown away, a visit to the Business Recycling website is well worth a visit: http://businessrecycling.com.au

The website features a search facility that enables you to find nearby service providers to help dispose of any waste safely and appropriately.

It's also a matter of being proactive and bringing recycling habits from home into the workplace. If you don't already have a recycling system at work, there's no reason why you can't be the person to implement one. •••

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