

Getting the Most Bang for Your Green Buck

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Recent Posts



April 16, 2012 With the recent spike in [gas prices](#), a lot of people are taking a harder look at how they can save on their fuel costs. Similarly, many small business owners may be exploring different ways to cut down on their energy costs, such as through solar panels, more efficient heating/cooling systems or even how and what they recycle. The problem with some options, like solar panels, is that it might take you years of incremental savings to recoup your initial investment. Are there other green investments, then, that can yield positive returns more quickly than others?

What follows are tips for some of the best ways you can get the most bang for your green

buck.

Decrease energy consumption

A few years ago, [Fireclay Tile](#), A San Jose-based company which makes ceramic tile out of a variety of materials, was ready for a lighting upgrade. Even as a small business, they were paying \$7,000 a month to their local utility for their energy bill. By working with local incentive programs, Fireclay was able to retrofit the lights on their San Jose location—they replaced incandescent lighting with Energy Star compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs), for example—at a total cost of \$1,325. But, by making that investment, the company began saving about \$2,000 a year from its utility bills—which resulted in a positive ROI in little more than seven months. For context, the change in lighting amounted to an annual savings of almost 10,000-kilowatt hours, the equivalent of electricity for two normal homes, as well as an 8,500-pound CO2 reduction.

Other green investments you could make in your building or home office that can yield relatively quick results, according to Elena Chrimat of [Ideal Energy](#), an energy-auditing firm, include:

- Duct Sealing: Cost = \$500-\$1000; Annual Savings = \$100-\$200. ROI = Two to five years.
- Insulation and Air Sealing: Cost = \$500-\$1500; Annual Savings = \$150-\$200. ROI = Two to eight years.
- Programmable Thermostat: Cost = \$50-\$200; Annual Savings = \$50. ROI = One to four years.
- HVAC: Cost = \$4,000-\$6,000; Annual Savings = \$175-\$350. ROI = More than ten years.

Beyond just the monetary savings, Chrimat says that duct sealing, insulation and air sealing can make a significant difference in the comfort levels in a building, something that could also speed the return on making that investment.

Go paperless

It seems like companies have been trying to go “paperless” for years (the term was [first coined in 1975](#) after all). With recent advances in technology and the development of cloud computing, going paperless and saving countless trees might not only be economically feasible—it could also save your company a lot of money by doing it. The further good news is that there are companies out there like [iDatix](#), a document management company in Clearwater, Fl., which can help make the transition even easier.

Case in point: An accounting department in a hospital with 20 employees recently invested \$60,000 in iDatix software and services. But, due to savings on paper, energy and storage costs, the client netted a positive ROI just nine months after going live the software.

Rethink your travel habits

As a whole, Fibrenew, a national franchise that restores and refurbishes leather and plastics, can be considered “green” in that its operators have kept tons of furniture and other furnishings from filling landfills. The rub, as Jeff Hecker, a [Fibrenew franchise owner in Pittsburgh](#), is that to service his customers, he logs almost 3,000 miles per month with a cost of about \$600 in fuel alone. That’s why Hecker not only outfitted his truck so that he could provide on-site service (as opposed to trucking items back and forth to a shop), he’s also rethought how he could manage his territory. For example, Hecker localizes and groups his appointments, scheduling service calls according to their proximity to each other to cut down on multiple trips—something he expects to shave at least \$100 from his monthly fuel costs. Hecker is also making greater use of the Internet to make repair estimates by asking customers to email photos of work that needs to be done to further reduce the miles he needed to put on the road.

If you can't avoid traveling by car for your job or business, you may then want to consider investing in an electric or hybrid car. The website BeFrugal.com offers tools to help you determine how you could [net a positive ROI by using less fuel](#) and other reduced expenses, as well as compare the [dollar costs and carbon emission differences involved in flying versus driving](#) on your next business trip.

Learn more in OPEN Forum's [Going Green 2012](#) series.

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