

Eco life

Ideas • Innovation • Debate



Looks good on paper

Setting an agenda for sustainable living in your workplace is a sound business decision, writes **Karin Derkley**.

It's not that hard to turn off your computer monitor every time you get up to get a coffee — is it? Or to save all your big print and photocopy jobs for one afternoon of the week, instead of having a big print machine on standby all day on the off-chance it might be called into service?

It's something architect David Saunders of S2 Design has been doing for years. "It's just a matter of making it a habit," he says. "What's so hard about reaching over and pushing the power button on your monitor? It's just a swing of the arm." And printing in batches is just like doing one big shop a week instead of dashing out every day or two to the convenience store for supplies, he says — it just takes a little preparation and planning.

Workplaces are among the biggest consumers of energy and resources in Australia. While households around the country are finally learning the lessons of turning off lights, taking shorter showers, throwing paper waste in the recycle bin and composting green waste, those running Australia's offices, factories and shopping centres seem to believe they have carte blanche to use as much power, water and other resources as they like. Lights are left blazing in offices all through the night, reams of paper are used to print out memos and

presentations, and copy machines and computers hum away on standby 24-7. It's as if all the good habits we're finally learning at home don't apply when it comes to running a business.

But that's not the case for Peter Orel, who runs printing company Finsbury Green. Back in 1998 he and his family looked at the contradiction between what they were doing at home and how they ran their business, and wondered if things could be different.

"We realised our business (set up by father Ernie 34 years ago) was probably not one of the more glamorous to be

in, environmentally speaking," he says. "But it was the business we were in, so we thought about how we might do it differently and do it better."

Among the first steps were the simplest ones, Orel says — reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill, turning off lights when they weren't needed, recycling plastics and other reusable materials. It worked so well that five years ago the company decided to become more strategic in its efforts to be more sustainable.

The company set up a sub-division branded Finsbury Green to improve

the way printing jobs were processed, transforming what had traditionally been a toxic process. The plan was to eliminate volatile chemicals, produce almost no waste, and to reuse or recycle any that was created. Paper was sourced from strictly controlled plantation forests, dyes made from vegetable oils, and film eliminated in the printing process. The new process was so successful it was adopted for the entire company's products. "In the end we decided to rename the whole business Finsbury Green, because there was no difference in the way we processed any of our products. There just wasn't need to use the old ways any more," Orel says.

The key to achieving the changes was to make it easy and to make it meaningful to staff, he says. "It was a matter of incorporating the changes into the process, and educating staff as to what we were achieving with the changes."

The company's efforts were recognised last year when it won a business enterprise award for environmental best practice in the United Nations World Environment Day Awards. Just as importantly, the business is just as successful, if not more so, than it was before it started the journey to being green and clean. "Sometimes clients ask us if our sustainable process is costing them more and we explain to them that

From page 23

in fact we are saving money because of the way we do things now," Orel says.

To David Saunders, whose architectural design business S2 Design is all about creating environmentally sustainable buildings, running an energy-efficient office is about practising what he preaches. "I've always been aware of not wasting resources and energy," he says.

In a business that is traditionally run on paperwork, Saunders has managed to eliminate paper almost entirely from the process. He recently installed computer monitors with screens that display A3 documents full-size. "We just finished a major project without ever needing to print anything out," he says. When plans need to be printed for builders and engineers during the construction phase, Saunders has them laminated. "That way they will last the length of the project and are easy to file for archival purposes as well."

Saunders is also something of a stickler for reducing energy use in the business. Desks in the office are oriented to take best advantage of natural light. Where extra light is needed he uses compact fluorescents. Light and motion-sensitive sensors turn on low wattage incandescent lights in the kitchen only when there is someone around to use them. Every appliance is turned off when not in use — even those monitors when someone gets up to make a cup of tea. "It all adds up," he says, of the tiny amounts of power these kinds of actions save each time.

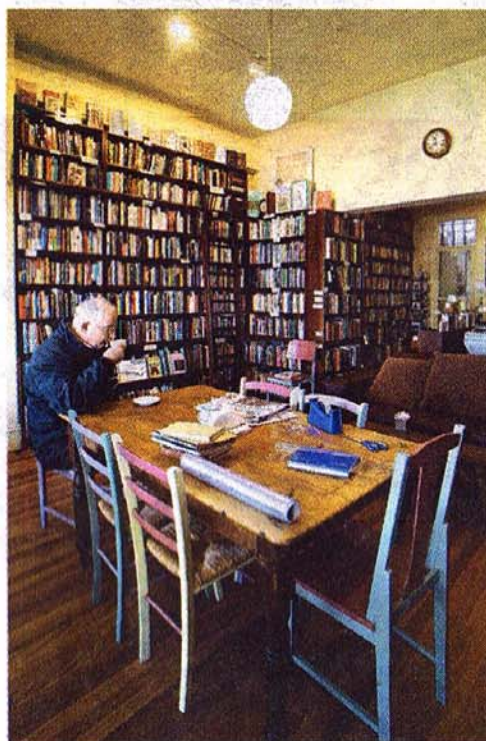
In winter he and his staff shiver, he jokes, until someone turns on the Rinnai Energy Saver heater on the bottom floor, and the heat quickly permeates up through the office's three levels. Doors are opened for fresh air in summer, except for in the hot north-facing office, which has a small reverse cycle air-conditioning unit.

Another business owner who is naturally inclined to avoid waste is Gillian Hardy, owner of The Stray Dog bookstore and cafe in Bay Street, Port Melbourne. "I've always had a sense of wanting things to last," she says. "Which is probably one reason I've gone into second-hand books." Apart from the "stray dogs", the books themselves, the bookstore is furnished with second-hand tables, chairs and bookshelves.

With all those books lining the walls of the tiny shop, there's never any

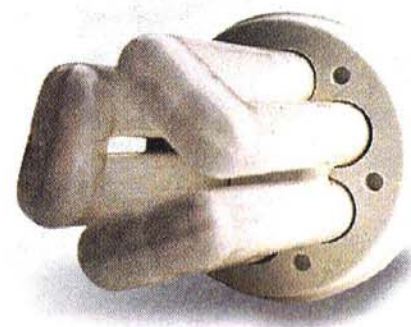


Energy-efficient workplaces: recycling practices at Finsbury Green Printing, above; S2 Design, right, with David Saunders, Sophie Saunders (left) and Kylie Freeman; and The Stray Dog bookstore, below.



need for heating in winter, Hardy says. Especially not with the coffee machine churning out heat. "Yes, we're aware that coffee machines use a lot of energy, but people come here for the good coffee. And there's that side benefit of heating up the shop."

ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY AT WORK



■ **Reduce lighting** Lighting is one of the biggest energy wasters in workplaces. Use natural light where possible and turn lights off at night, except where needed for security. Use compact fluorescents, rather than power-guzzling halogen downlights, and incandescents.

■ **Heating and cooling** Insulate walls and ceilings and use double glazing to cut the use of power for heating and cooling. Use gas heating where possible rather than electric.

■ **Use less paper and plastic** Only print (double-sided) when absolutely necessary. Reuse single-sided printed paper, and recycle everything else. Get staff to bring in their own cups. Buy supplies in bulk to reduce the amount of packaging.

■ **Transport** Encourage staff to walk, ride or take public transport to work. Provide secure storage for bikes. Offset vehicle travel with tree planting through the Greenfleet program.

■ **Greenpower** Where you use power, source it from renewable energy by paying a little extra for Greenpower from your electricity company.

It's a downside in summer, which is when Hardy relents and uses an air-conditioner. "We don't want to drive our customers away; we have to make a business decision."

But there are easy things to do, she adds. Like installing a timer to turn off the drinks fridge at night. "We realised that bottled and canned drinks don't need to stay cold all the time. So the timer switches the fridge on at 9am (the shop opens at 10.30am) and turns off again at 6pm." People are learning to bring their own bags again when they go shopping, after years of expecting to be supplied with plastic, and those that forget are offered recycled bags, Hardy says.

Hardy says she knows that her business mightn't be making a huge impact on the energy use of the nation's workplaces, but it's a start. "I'm a tiny business and I know we don't make an awful lot of difference in ourselves, but if others look at us and think if that business can do it so can we — then we've achieved something."



PICTURE: EDDIE JIM

PICTURE: REBECCA HALLAS