

## How to green your business: Distributors and wholesalers

Want to Go Green but not sure where to start? Here are some tips to reduce the environmental impacts of your distribution and wholesale business.

### Energy

#### Heating and cooling

- When heating, reduce the temperature of a room by one degree; it is unlikely that anyone will notice and you could cut the heating bill by as much as 10%. Most staff are comfortable at 19°C. Similarly, set air conditioning not to come on below 24°C.
- Make sure fans, pumps and central plant such as cooling towers, boilers and chillers do not operate outside the periods when buildings are occupied, except where they are needed for pre-heating or pre-cooling.
- Make sure windows and doors are closed when heating or air conditioning is on.

#### Lighting

- Replace tungsten bulbs with energy efficient, compact fluorescent lamps and slimline tubes.

### Waste

Transit packaging should be designed/chosen as part of an optimised packaging system, including primary packaging (e.g. point-of-sale packaging for food and household goods) to minimise packaging where appropriate:

- Returnable systems offer the best economic and environmental solution where a closed-loop distribution system exists and/or where transportation distances are relatively short. Back-haulage (bringing back packaging on the return journey after delivery of goods) allows reusable packaging to be returned efficiently for reuse.
- Avoid extra layers. At least one layer is often redundant.
- Improve cleanliness, both in the workplace and throughout the distribution chain to reduce the risk of product contamination and hence the need for product packaging.

They typically make immediate savings of 50% and last up to ten times longer.

- Use natural light wherever possible. Keep windows clean and encourage the staff to open the blinds rather than turn on the lights. Make sure lights can be switched off manually (particularly near windows) or install daylight sensors.

#### Equipment

- Ask your suppliers or manufacturers of new equipment to supply data on the average power consumed under typical operating conditions and the stand-by and low energy consumption.

- Improved product handling (e.g. through staff training and improved equipment) reduces the risk of product damage and hence the need for packaging.
- Just-in-time (JIT) delivery can mean that the product spends less time in the warehouse and therefore is not subjected to the same level of risk in terms of contamination and physical damage. In addition, a JIT system may mean that packaging does not need to be stacked, thus reducing the need for compression strength.
- In many cases, materials can be delivered in bulk, thereby avoiding the need for packaging. This is particularly the case with liquids and powders where bulk delivery can eliminate the need for drums, intermediate bulk containers etc.
- Use alternatives to pallets. Quite heavy loads can be handled using slip sheets and push-pull units or by hand, where the load is within manual handling limits.

- Minimise empty space between boxed items. If the headspace is greater than 5 or 6 cm, you should probably be using a smaller box. Software is available that allows you to calculate which items fit best in which order, so as to maximise utilisation.
- Can larger denominations or different formats be used? Putting more items into a box, for example, can save a lot of packaging material.
- Can you eliminate/reduce the need for fill material by altering box design? If vertical loads and jolts are not a problem, you may be able to use filler material just in the lateral spaces and thus eliminate headspace filler. Some companies have eliminated filler materials (e.g. expanded polystyrene) by using corrugated boxes and paper ruffle or lattice. In some cases, you may be able to use corrugated board partitions and folds to provide the separation cushioning required. Even the most delicate of objects (e.g. glasses and electric light bulbs) can be protected in this way.
- Are corrugated separators being used in the optimum way? The side walls of a corrugated box provide vertical compression or stacking strength. Any separator flutes should run horizontally to provide lateral strength. Partitions should protrude a little (a few mm) above the inside depth of the box to ensure that they are held firmly in place when the box lid is closed.
- Is the best filler material being used? Paper and used corrugated board may offer an adequate and cheaper alternative to EPS blocks, foam etc. Machines are available that will ruffle paper rolls or make a lattice from old cardboard boxes.

## Water

- Check your pipes for leaks, which can be expensive and can cause damage to the building. Check your meter readings regularly and carefully - if you are paying for water that you cannot account for you may have a leak.
- Fit push-button taps to save up to half the water used through conventional taps.

## Travel

- Use fuel-efficient vehicles.
- Regular maintenance of vehicles ensures they run at optimum efficiency.
- Transport minimum load necessary without the need to make additional trips, e.g. unload items that do not need to be transported.
- Route planning – Train staff to plan route before setting out to travel the most direct and least congested routes.
- Don't make empty return trips. Where possible utilise returning vehicles to carry loads back, so that instead of sending a separate van for collections, use the same van that does the deliveries.
- Use a renewable fuel source, such as biofuel, preferably sourced locally. Used cooking oil is ideal.

## Purchasing

- Use 100% recycled paper (with maximum post-consumer waste content) and maximise the use of other recycled and recyclable materials.
- Ensure appliances such as fridges have a European Union Energy Rating of A or B.
- Discourage excessive use of stationery by implementing an ordering system. This allows you to monitor departments and target high use areas for reductions.