

How can businesses drive decarbonisation in their IT functions?

The impending climate crisis – combined with a healthy dose of investor, customer, and regulatory pressure – has catapulted sustainability to the top of the agenda for many decision-makers. As businesses seek to decarbonise operations, the IT function is an obvious place to start. After all, for many businesses that don't manufacture or transport physical goods, IT is one of the biggest emitters of carbon.

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Many businesses have sought to minimise their environmental impact by migrating applications and workloads to the cloud. Though there's evidence that this is a positive step, we know that not all clouds are created equal. Even if cloud infrastructure is efficient and minimises energy use, there's much more businesses can do to reduce carbon emissions.

In short, moving to the cloud to decarbonise is the first step of a much longer journey. Businesses need a long-term sustainability strategy, and to create this, they need full visibility into their IT infrastructure. Accurately mapping your IT and operational functions and evaluating their environmental impact will help you understand where to make the most impactful, cost-efficient improvements. At a minimum, investigate employee habits, energy use, waste, water use, and resource consumption. It's also worth looking into the ESG credentials of your suppliers.

Once you've established the current picture, you can take a myriad of routes to reduce the carbon emissions of your IT function. These include, but aren't limited to:

- Moving from private hosting to the public cloud - this can have a huge impact, as the former has a power usage effectiveness of 1.9, compared to 1.1 for public cloud providers
- Ensuring cloud infrastructure is configured as efficiently as possible
- Procuring electricity from renewable sources
- Renewable energy self-generation
- Implementing energy efficient technologies
- Recycling or repairing equipment
- Incentives to change employee behaviour

Let's take a closer look at some of these.

Reuse IT equipment

'Reduce, reuse, recycle' is a slogan we hear often to promote sustainable living. But it applies just as readily to IT functions!

Reusing IT equipment has several advantages - ensuring valuable raw materials aren't thrown away and decommissioned electronics don't end up in landfill. Not to mention a welcome reduction in IT expenditure! An easy place to start is making sure all options for repairing equipment are exhausted before it's discarded. Linked to this, consider revisiting your tech purchasing policies. For example, do employees really need a brand-new laptop every two to three years? Does that defunct photocopier need to be replaced, given that your business is transitioning to a paperless policy?

If equipment does need to be discarded, make sure you do so responsibly. There are a few options here. Firstly, you can sell unwanted equipment to

an e-waste recycling company, which will disassemble it and recycle the valuable raw materials. Secondly, consider donating working equipment to educational institutions or non-profit organisations – either to use themselves or to resell. Just be sure to wipe all sensitive data first!

Look into your suppliers

To minimise carbon emissions, look to your vendors and suppliers. Make sure they share your sustainability values and ambitions. Take the example of cloud – you can make serious sustainability gains by working with a cloud provider that solely uses renewable energy. It's also worth noting that the technology used by cloud service providers is often more modern – therefore more efficient and less carbon intensive. Many also have strategies for working towards 100% renewable energy. But don't just stop at suppliers. Seek out tech partners with innovative solutions to help you drive sustainable change. A *recent Atos and AWS study* found that digitalising and automating sustainability initiatives has a clear positive effect on decarbonisation success. According to the study, cloud-enabled technologies, including artificial intelligence, machine learning, IoT and data analytics form the foundation of more efficient, decarbonised operations. For instance, predictive analysis can prevent machine malfunction, thereby increasing uptime and productivity while reducing energy consumption.

The bottom line

By shaking up the IT function, businesses can make significant sustainability gains. The key is to combine large, flagship initiatives – like cloud migrations – with smaller, incremental changes. Working in partnership with suppliers and vendors is also crucial.

Long-term success hinges on being strategic, not merely opportunistic! Smart businesses will follow the data, mapping any gains to tangible KPIs

that form part of a wider sustainability strategy.

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