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Making your PC fleet green

There's plenty of greenwashing in the IT business. Almost every vendor is offering some sort of green angle in their sales pitch with products boasting lower power consumption, improved manufacturing processes and recyclable materials. But does all of this stack up within the procurement cycle? Can the CIO provide a robust and flexible computing environment that ticks the green boxes?

Here are five things CIOs can look at when greening their computer fleet.

1 - EPEAT accredited hardware

While the technology industry has suffered under a flood of green wash - the constant declarations of environmental friendliness - computer manufacturers have been working to a set of standards. EPEAT (www.epeat.net) sets a number of mandatory and optional criteria. We'd expect that corporate and government clients would look at only Gold Standard systems as these satisfy all of the mandatory criteria and at least 75% of the optional measures. EPEAT looks at the materials used in manufacture, energy consumption, packaging and recyclability of components.

2 - Packaging

Many vendors, such as Dell, no longer ship large orders in separate boxes. If a large batch of systems is ordered a single package, with everything securely stowed so it's protected during shipping, is produced. This reduces the amount of packing material significantly. Furthermore, environmentally packing materials, such as bamboo, are used so that anything that ends up in landfill degrades safely and quickly.

3 - Smart system management

For the Desktop Services Team Leader at the City of Melbourne, Ashe Potter, the challenges of deploying a fleet of environmentally friendly systems was a critical success factor. The City of Melbourne was moving into a new, state of the art, six energy star rated building. That rating, which was important to a council keen on proving its environmental credentials, would have been at risk had the total environmental impact of the computer fleet not been properly assessed and considered.

When Potter joined the City of Melbourne, he had a heterogeneous fleet of systems and no central management. By using an app called NightWatchman, from 1E, the network is scanned for PCs that have been left on overnight. They are powered them down remotely. Potter and his team have developed scripts that check the PC for open files and ensure that any work is saved before the computer is switched off. That simple act alone saves tens of thousands of dollars from the electricity bill each year.

NightWatchman can also be used to turn systems on so systems can be powered off in the evening, powered up later at night and patched with the latest security and antivirus updates and then powered down again.

4 - Disposal

Once a PC has reached the end of its useful life, either from a functional point of view or because the accountants have decided that the asset has no further book value, it's time to take the asset out of service and replace it, thus starting the PC Lifecycle again. There are several different approaches that can be taken with bringing a PC asset to its end of life.

A recent study by Gartner, found that redeploying old PCs as thin clients offers benefits including a reduced security risk as old PCs aren't shipped out but kept within the business. Potentially sensitive data

left on old disks isn't released and the cost of disposal, estimated by Gartner to be around $400, is deferred.

5 - Plan with the end in mind

The system procurement cycle is typically front loaded. A lot of effort goes into ensuring that there's plenty of storage, RAM and processor power. Systems are put in place for getting computers to users with the right software loaded but rarely is the end of the asset's life made part of the plan. Many companies end up worth a room of old systems with no plan of what to do with them.

Potter, from the City of Melbourne, says that his department's philosophy is that "nothing goes to landfill". Every component can either be reused or recycled. For that to happen, you need to make the right decisions at the beginning of the asset's life.

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