

COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

“All editorial content and graphics (intellectual and creative concepts, words, graphics, illustrations, photos) in this article are protected by U.S. Copyright and international treaties and may not be copied without the express written permission of Warm Thoughts Communications, Inc. (“Warm Thoughts”), which reserves all rights. Reuse of any of Warm Thoughts editorial content and graphics for any promotional purpose is strictly prohibited.”

Scroll down to the next page for Article.

8 Tips for Small-Business Owners to Ease the Pain of Rising Oil Prices

Warm Thoughts Communications, the country's largest marketing firm focusing exclusively on the home comfort industry.

Warm Thoughts Comm.
200 Meadowlands Pkwy.
Secaucus, NJ 07094

201-330-9276
201-223-1555 (fax)

email:
info@warmthoughts.com
www.warmthoughts.com

© 2008 Warm Thoughts Communications, Inc.

Small business operators who make up the bulk of U.S. business owners feel the pain of rising oil prices right on their bottom line.

“Many small business owners feel trapped by rising energy costs, as oil prices climb, followed by increased gas prices,” says Blaine W. Fox, vice president of business development for Warm Thoughts Communications. And with small businesses comprising 99.7 percent of all businesses (fewer than 500 employees), according to the SBA’s Office of Advocacy, that’s a lot of pain going around.

A poll by the National Federation of Independent Business shows that 75 percent of small employers who feel hit by increased energy costs during the last six months, absorbed the charge through lowering earnings or profits.

Small businesses can immediately ease the pain of rising energy costs by conducting an energy audit, says Fox, who has spent more than 25 years in the heating and cooling industry.

“We tend to think that immediate savings require expensive or heroic measures to reduce energy usage or costs, but it’s often a simple matter of common sense,” Fox says. “The first step in implementing a successful energy program is to change the behavior of your associates and employees,” says Fox.

“You must make everyone understand that changes in energy practices can have a direct effect on the company’s bottom line. Because it’s so much easier to use energy and you’re not paying for it at the moment of use, it’s easy not to think about the real costs. Employees are stakeholders in this because a decreased bottom line will affect their raises and benefits.”

Fox, who consults with his client about how to create, maintain or transform buildings into a more green energy-efficient environment, offers these tips that small businesses can implement almost immediately.

Lighten Up. A simple, inexpensive and often forgotten way to keep warmer during cold months is to “Open your curtains to allow light in the office during the day,” says Fox. “It doesn’t cost a penny.” You can

also reduce the amount of time you have lights on by using a timer thus saving energy by replacing incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent lights.

Re-examine your outdoor lighting and janitorial services. Switch your janitorial services to daylight hours if possible. Why heat and light the building just for cleaners? Also, re-examine your need for outdoor lighting. Can you reduce the use without sacrificing safety?

Turn your heat down. It’s the easiest thing in the world, yet many business

“The first step in implementing a successful energy program is to change the behavior of your associates and employees.”

owners don't. A 1 degree lower temperature can reduce your heating bill by 10 percent. Also, consider a programmable thermostat that automatically lowers the temperature when no one is at your business. For example, according to the Department of Energy, the largest portion of your utility bill (44 percent) represents heating and cooling usage.

Walk to lunch. You'll burn calories, save on fuel and give yourself an energy boost. If you must leave the office or plant, car pool to that health-food joint.

Consider a maintenance agreement. If your lease requires that you maintain the heat or cooling equipment, consider a maintenance agreement. It could help protect you from taking a big hit if your equipment needs repairing or replacement. (Equipment operates more efficiently when cleaned and maintained.) It also places you at the top of the list if the contractor is swamped with service calls.

Maintenance agreement customers usually are first to receive service. It also allows you to budget your HVAC cost in a manageable and predictable way.

Get a Pro. Some utility companies will come to your office and conduct a free energy audit. (Some refer to it as an energy analysis.) There is no better or cheaper way to get an expert's opinion and tips. If your local utility doesn't offer free audits, consider hiring a professional. The audit can run from \$250 to more than \$1,000. You can get a list from www.energystar.gov, and be sure to check with the Better Business Bureau before hiring anyone. You can earn back the money in lower energy

bills often within one heating or cooling season.

Unplug some electronic devices when not in use. We call them vampires (for example, cell phone chargers), and while you might think they're "off," actually they continue to suck electricity while in a sleep mode. Efforts are under way to mandate manufacturing changes that would drastically reduce the vampire effect in consumer products that you also use in your business.

Plug It Up. Holes and cracks are pesky culprits that affect your energy use. Check for air leakage by examining your walls, ceilings, windows, doors, light and plumbing fixtures, switches and electrical outlets that can allow air to leak in or out of your office. (For example, is that cable connection airtight where it enters your office?)

For more energy saving tips, visit: www.energy.gov/contact.