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GlaxoSmithKline sheds nearly 6 tons of e-waste

2009 Green 15: Drug firm reaps energy savings by unplugging and recycling unused IT gear

By Ted Samson | InfoWorld

As is often the case at many organizations, employees at pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) had come to simply accept the presence of abandoned IT equipment left powered on in offices and cubicles. That tendency had been going on for years, in fact, until Armin Jahromi, the company's regional service manager for IT user services, had had enough. It was time to orchestrate a top-to-bottom, environmentally responsible cleanup of all of the old IT gear in the company's Franklin Plaza site in Philadelphia.

The inspiration for the project was primarily driven by environmental considerations, Jahromi says. "With the world so technology-driven -- with mobile phones, desktops, laptops, monitors, printers, toner/ink cartridges, cables, CD and DVD media, USB drives, and so on being turned over at such a rapid pace -- landfills are increasing in size with these materials, some of which are toxic and some of which will never biodegrade. I believe we in the IT industry now have a social responsibility to reduce the volume of tech waste and the energy it consumes as much as possible."

Both personal and business objectives played a part, too: "On a personal level, I hate to see waste -- whether at home or in the office," says Jahromi. "In the corporate environment, it is natural to see people come and go. Unfortunately in today's market, there are more people going than coming, and as a result, desktops and laptops that had been allocated are sitting idle -- some still powered on."

That's wasteful for two reasons, he notes: First, those unused devices powered on are wasting energy, which costs GSK money. Second, a number of these devices are technologically current and could be redeployed elsewhere.

So, 35 "e-cycle champions" at GSK volunteered to recruit people on their respective floors to participate and identify unused assets and serve as the liaisons between the user community and IT. "The rule of thumb we stressed to our users was 'If it hasn't been used within a year, get rid of it,'" says Jahromi.

The IT desktop services group had four technicians to collect the identified assets from the 32 floors over the span of one week. Facilities operations took the assets for disposal, loaded the trucks,

and delivered them to **PlanITROI**, an IT asset disposal company.

[Learn more about the rewards of responsibly tackling e-waste. | What should you look for when choosing an IT asset disposal company?]



Educating users about the program in advance and getting them involved helped make the project a success, says Jahromi. "There were a few floors where we were unable to attain a volunteer, and it was those floors that noticeably had fewer assets tagged for removal. For any initiative that requires user participation, volunteers or champions is a must," he said.

The week's worth of work reaped significant rewards: Users collected nearly 1,000 devices weighing 5.8 tons, including 140 desktops, 124 monitors, 68 laptops, and 86 monitors, as well as fax machines, typewriters, keyboards, mice, scanners, and other accessories. Simply unplugging that unused hardware has reduced the company's annual electricity consumption by 190,442 kWh for a savings of \$21,000 per year. As a result, the company reduced its CO2 output by 285,663 pounds per year.

While some of the collected gear had outlived its useful life and ended up being recycled, other devices were suited for resale. "The number of assets that do have value will generate a 60 percent return back to GSK from the resale," says Jahromi. "As GSK 'e-cycles' all its tech-refreshed assets, the revenue generated in 2008 from the U.S. alone was over \$1 million."

The program was very well received by the residents of Franklin Plaza, says Jahromi -- so much so IT decided to have a second week for collection in which 50 percent more assets were collected. Moreover, residents from other GSK sites in the United States as well as the United Kingdom have asked when an e-cycling program will be hitting their sites. GSK IT plans to continue with this initiative at many of its other sites throughout 2009.

Ted Samson is a senior analyst and author of the Sustainable IT blog, tracking trends toward greener, more energy-efficient IT.