It Pays to Be Green

Comprehensive energy-management program helps Staples save millions of dollars

Underneath its bright red logo, Staples is green at heart. The office-products superstore retailer has set ambitious goals for itself, continually raising its standards for energy efficiency.

"Everything we build today is an energy-efficient package. All our new stores have a 100% goodwill from customers and employees, which encouraged us to undertake additional retrofits. Today, all Staples stores utilize T8s. We have reduced the impact on our environment by conserving 2,882,800 barrels of oil while eliminating the power plant emissions of the pollutants that would have resulted from the burning of those barrels," Valent says.

The lighting upgrades have paid off in other ways. Along with garnering considerable goodwill from customers and employees, the chain estimates it is saving $1.7 million annually on lighting.

In recognition of its efforts, Staples was selected by EPA as the 1999 "Green Lights Retail Partner of the Year." Valent says.

"EA (Energy Solutions) new distribution centers in Killington, Conn., and Raleigh, NC, are models of energy conservation. Among the energy-saving technologies featured:

- T8 electronic lighting, skylights with daylight controls; state-of-the-art energy-management systems; off-peak, battery-powered emergency lighting systems; heat-recovery systems; concrete with fly ash and electric-powered security vehicles.

The retailer has realized significant savings from its energy-management program, with the various technologies credited for a 12% annual reduction on Staples' $34 million utility bill.

Future efforts: Staples hopes to realize even greater energy savings in the future through the "Staples 28 Project." During the next 28 months, the company will work with key suppliers and utility partners to reduce its energy use, operating costs and construction time—all by 28%.

"We are going back to our major suppliers to look for the next generation of energy-efficient technologies," Valent explains. "We think this program will establish a new standard for building energy efficiency."

In implementing its ambitious new energy initiative, Staples will focus first on immediate energy-efficiency improvements for existing stores and buildings and the benchmarking of energy usage and practices. This will be followed by a complete green design of its new store design with a goal of improved efficiency.

"The completion of the Staples 28 initiative will be the development of an all-new, 21st-century, ultra-efficient prototype store," Valent says.

Valent emphasizes that Staples would not be where it is today energy-wise without the Energy Star program. Among the services it offers to its customers (all at no cost) are technical support and energy-management consulting.

"Energy Star has helped us every step of the way," he adds. "The program has been a win-win for everyone."