

The green gap for IT service providers

Although South African businesses seem to consider green IT a low priority, there nevertheless is a strong demand for assistance in moving towards implementing dedicated green IT budgets, strategies and solutions.



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This has created a huge gap in the market for IT service providers, says Hendrik Mansvelt, the University of Stellenbosch Business School's (USB) 2013 top MBA student in his thesis on how the adoption of green IT in South African can be advanced.

Mansvelt found that green IT strategies were rare in South Africa with only 7.9% of the 77 companies involved in his research stating that they have a comprehensive green IT strategy in place, while 17.1% claimed they had a partial strategy in place and only 12.3% indicating a dedicated green IT budget. With 40.8% aiming to have a full green IT strategy in place within the next five years, the time is right for IT service providers to take the lead.

Mansvelt's research focused specifically on "Green IT initiatives that reduce the footprint of the traditional IT function and where opportunities exist to increase its level of adoption".

He defines green IT as the efforts to "green" the production, use and disposal of IT equipment across the organisation in terms of energy consumption, emissions and lowering carbon footprint. The technologies included in his research were server consolidation and virtualisation, cloud computing, storage virtualisation, print consolidation, PC power management, new server rooms, IT equipment recycling, virtual desktops and advanced server energy monitoring tools, amongst others.

Comparing his findings with those of related studies conducted internationally by Info-Tech and CompTia, Mansvelt found that although green IT is seen as a low priority by most local businesses there is a strong desire for assistance in moving towards implementing dedicated green IT budgets, strategies and solutions.

A substantial opportunity

"This creates a substantial opportunity for IT service providers to influence, educate and guide clients on IT strategies to establish and grow a profitable market for green IT." And with climate change being a global challenge that requires urgent action, green IT can contribute in this regard. Yet service providers are doing little to market the "green" features of their solutions and provide limited assistance to their clients on green IT even though businesses are open to engage in adopting new strategies.

"The green behaviours of South African companies are very encouraging with just over 70% reducing paper usage and recycling of paper products. However, it is noticeable that green behaviour relating to the use of technology, such as turning PCs off, using energy-saving modes on PCs, recycling of electronics and telecommuting to limit travelling, South Africa lags substantially compared to the rest of the world. IT service providers could play a leading role here to guide their clients in encouraging such behaviour within their organisations."

Mansvelt says although South African business' level of awareness of green IT and its benefits is low, companies are set to play an increasing role in lowering their carbon footprint with dedicated green IT budgets and strategies. Fewer than 11% of respondents indicated an excellent understanding of green IT and its benefits, matching the low level of adoption in the country. Companies need guidance and solutions on how green IT initiatives can minimise the impact their IT infrastructures have not only on the environment, but also on the bottom line.

Demand that green IT pays for itself

In line with many first world countries, South African businesses demand that green IT pays for itself and, therefore, cost reduction is the primary driver when such programmes are implemented. Two of the biggest obstacles in adopting green IT programmes are their perceived cost of implementation and the difficulty in measuring the benefits.

It is expected that the adoption of green IT initiatives will increase as the cost-saving potential is better understood and this in itself is an important implication for service providers on how they engage with their clients.

Mansvelt found that larger corporations (those with 100 or more employees) were increasing their adoption rate of green IT as the organisation grows. This he sees as a natural shift as the IT footprint of such companies increases and the cost benefits of green IT strategies become more apparent.

To this end Mansvelt has proposed a three-phased approach whereby technology service providers should firstly understand the client's green IT landscape, secondly develop custom client engagement approaches, thereby laying the foundation for future adoption, and, ultimately, the active marketing of green IT solutions supported with tangible, practical assistance in order for organisations to adopt green IT.

"Service providers should assist their clients in the formulation of their green IT strategies and dedicated budgets as this would translate into the adoption of green IT technologies over time. By doing so, service providers would position themselves as the green IT provider of choice in the mind of the client, increasing the likelihood of securing any future green IT-related business."