

Green Features Bloom In Unexpected Places

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With organizations becoming increasingly keen on green, vendors are injecting green-oriented features into a predictable set of products. We've seen a server management suite, for example, groomed to cap the amount of energy a machine will consume at a given time.

But as the sustainable-tech movement gains momentum, more green-hued features are materializing in product types you might not necessarily expect -- and they're advancing, moving beyond measuring and reducing waste to tracking and reporting organizations' dread carbon footprints. Thus, customers are finding themselves with more options than ever for advancing down the green path and calculating their progress.

For example, PeopleCube, a provider of workplace and resource management technology, is padding its Resource Scheduler product line with some greenery. (Resource Scheduler allows users to reserve rooms, equipment, and services for meetings, training, and the like.) PeopleCube has announced plans to roll out tools in Resource Scheduler through which customers can remotely monitor and control the lighting and HVAC systems of any facility they oversee, down to an individual room -- so long as those systems are Web-services friendly. (Major vendors such as Honeywell do support that type of functionality in their more modern offerings.) Thus, a meeting room, floor, or the entire building's light and HVAC could be turned off remotely if not scheduled for use.

Resource Scheduler also announced some new reporting features that tie in to the green movement. One, for example, helps companies measure the total carbon footprint of a given facility and calculate cost savings relating to reduced energy consumption. There's also a telecommuting analysis report, aimed at helping companies calculate carbon emissions saved when employees telecommute instead of drive to the office. Similarly, a videoconference savings report illustrates cost, productivity, and carbon emissions saved when geographically dispersed participants conduct meetings via video teleconference instead of traveling to meet in person.

"The market is demanding efficient and environmentally sound workplaces," says Rebecca Wettemann, vice president of research at Nucleus Research, in a written statement. "PeopleCube is providing facility managers ... tools they need to achieve what their management and other constituents -- employees, customers, shareholders, or students -- are calling for in terms of eco-friendly, lower-cost operations."

Then there's BigFix, which has been steadily building on the Power Management module it released in late 2006. BigFix, of course, is an intelligent policy enforcement engine that employs agents to enforce policies on hardware throughout an organization. Similar to PC power-management offerings from Veridium and 1E, BigFix's Power Management module lets admins set up and enforce policies to ensure that end-user systems are put into low-power mode when they're not in use, and are roused from sleep automatically, through wake-on-LAN technology, for patching. (Organizations can save upward of \$75 per system annually if they implement PC power management.)

On top of that valuable functionality, BigFix has added graphical displays for calculating electricity, cost, and CO2 reductions from various customer-selected conservation policies.

Dave Robbins, president and CEO of BigFix, said that a power-management tool marks a natural evolution of the company's solution. "Though BigFix started out solving IT problems, our architecture is uniquely applicable to many critical problems – and no problem is more critical than the state of our environment," he said in a written statement.

There's no doubt in my mind that this trend will continue as more tech vendors unveil sparkling green features in their product lines. In some instances, such as those I discussed, the advances will add real value. But this trend also opens the door to plenty of green-washing opportunities. Some vendors might try to pass off what amounts to a simple energy-usage gauge as "evidence" that their eco-unfriendly wares are somehow green.