

BIN LESS, RECYCLE MORE: A BUSINESS OWNER'S GUIDE TO BOOSTING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH SMART WASTE REDUCTION



In today's world, "sustainability" is more than a buzzword—it's a necessity, especially for businesses. As South African companies strive for sustainability, many are discovering that adopting waste reduction and recycling practices isn't merely the right thing to do—it's also good for business. By reducing waste, businesses can cut costs, improve efficiency, and bolster their reputation.

This article provides practical guidance and strategies for companies to implement effective recycling and waste reduction programs, with a focus on actionable steps and real-world examples.

1. Crafting your Recycling Strategy

Imagine walking into your business and seeing bins filled with unsorted waste. Where do you even begin? The answer: a waste audit. Conducting an audit is like stepping back and taking stock of what you're dealing with. What types of waste are piling up? Plastic, paper, metal? Once you know, you can start setting goals. Maybe your goal is to reduce paper waste by 50% over the next year, or to divert 80% of your waste away from landfills. Keep these objectives clear, and track progress regularly.

- **Waste audit:** Identify the types and quantities of waste your business generates.
- **Set goals:** Define clear objectives, whether it's reducing plastic waste or increasing overall recycling.
- **Engage employees:** Make waste reduction a team effort by educating staff and creating incentives (e.g. small rewards for departments that excel in recycling).

Example: A mid-sized office in Johannesburg that conducted a waste audit discovered that half of their waste was paper. They switched to digital documentation and saved not only money but also tons of paper.

2. Partner with the Right Recycling Companies

Teaming up with local recycling companies is like finding a co-pilot for your sustainability journey. These companies can provide more than just bins and collection services. Some will train your staff, ensuring that waste is sorted properly. In addition, they'll give you detailed reports on how much waste you're actually diverting from the landfill.

- **Find a local partner:** Work with companies that meet local recycling regulations and have a good reputation.
- **Negotiate contracts:** Include regular pick-ups and detailed reports to measure your impact.

Example: A Cape Town-based restaurant partnered with a local recycling firm to tackle its food waste problem. The recycling company provided bins and pick-ups and turned food waste into compost, helping the restaurant to significantly reduce landfill contribution.

3. Separate Waste at the Source

One of the most straightforward ways to improve recycling rates is to separate waste at the source. Instead of having a single bin where everything gets mixed up, ensure that you have separate bins for paper, plastics, glass, and other waste types. Proper sorting prevents contamination, ensuring that recyclables remain usable.

- **Provide clearly labelled bins:** Use bins with clear labels for different waste types.
- **Train your staff:** Educate employees about how to sort waste properly and the importance of keeping hazardous and non-hazardous waste separate.

Example: An office in Durban placed colour-coded bins in their breakroom and saw their recycling rates increase by 30% within six months by simply making it easier for employees to dispose of materials correctly.

4. Promote Recycled Products

Your commitment to sustainability doesn't end at waste separation. Use your purchasing power to support recycling.

Start by buying products made from recycled materials, whether it's paper, packaging, or office supplies. This helps to build the circular economy where materials are continuously repurposed.

- **Buy recycled products:** Prioritise supplies made from recycled materials.
- **Reduce single-use plastics:** Switch to reusable or biodegradable alternatives.

Example: A local packaging company switched to using recycled paper and eliminated single-use plastic wraps. They not only reduced waste but also found that their clients appreciated their eco-friendly approach, thus boosting business.

5. Get involved in Community Recycling Initiatives

Supporting or organising community recycling initiatives can enhance your company's sustainability efforts while boosting your public image.

Whether it's sponsoring a local clean-up event or raising awareness through educational workshops, participating in community recycling can make a big difference.

- **Community clean-ups:** Organise or sponsor events to collect recyclables or clean up your local area.
- **Educational campaigns:** Raise awareness about recycling through workshops or partnerships with schools and community organisations.

Example: A small IT company in Pretoria hosted a weekend electronic waste collection event. By collecting old computers and phones from the community, they not only diverted tons of e-waste from landfills but also gained new clients who were impressed by their efforts.

6. Embrace Technology to Boost Recycling Efficiency

Technology can help you streamline and monitor your recycling programme. From recycling Apps that guide your team on proper disposal methods to smart bins that automatically sort waste, technology can provide valuable data on your waste management performance.

- **Use recycling Apps:** Implement Apps that help track progress and provide education on correct recycling practices.
- **Invest in smart bins:** Consider bins that automatically sort waste or monitor waste-generation patterns.

Example: A large corporate office in Johannesburg installed smart bins that tracked how much waste was being thrown away. This data helped them optimise waste management, reducing landfill waste by 40% in one year.

7. Stay Compliant with Regulations

It's crucial to stay up to date with South Africa's recycling regulations. For example, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations require companies to manage the lifecycle of their products, ensuring that they're recycled or disposed of responsibly.

- **Know the regulations:** Understand national and local recycling laws.
- **Stay compliant:** Ensure that your recycling programme adheres to these standards to avoid penalties and to contribute towards national recycling goals.

Example: A Durban-based manufacturing company saved money and stayed compliant by working closely with their local government to ensure that their waste disposal met the necessary standards.

Conclusion

For South African businesses, embracing recycling is more than just a feel-good move—it's a smart business decision. By implementing these strategies, you'll not only reduce your environmental footprint but also potentially save money on waste disposal and boost your reputation as a leader in sustainability. In doing so, your business will contribute to a greener future for South Africa, helping to foster a culture of responsibility and innovation.

Now, imagine looking back after a year and seeing the tangible changes: lower waste bills, happier customers, and a greener footprint. Start today—bin less, recycle more!

SERR Synergy offers businesses a comprehensive Occupational Health and Safety Management Program that integrates both workplace and environmental safety. By partnering with us, companies can enhance their sustainability efforts through the implementation of an effective recycling and waste management plan. Our program not only ensures compliance with health and safety regulations but also promotes responsible environmental practices, helping businesses reduce waste, lower costs, and contribute to a greener future. ***SERR Synergy*** provides the expertise and support needed to create a safer, more sustainable workplace.

About the Author: Lilanie van Wyk joined the OHS team in October 2023 as an OHS Compliance Advisor. She has 17 years' experience in Health, Safety, Environmental, Quality, Risk Management and Food Safety within various industries, i.e. Chemical, Steel, Feed Milling, Food, Mining, Automotive, Retail (Distribution) and Security (Cash in Transit), specialising in implementation and auditing of management systems (ISO 45001, ISO 14001, ISO 9001, ISO 22000/FSSC 22000, ISO 31000 and ISO 5001) and corporate legal compliance.

Resources and references:

<https://www.wwf.org.za/?34682/How-we-can-recycle-more-effectively-in-South-Africa/>
<https://sst.org.za/news/recycling-how-south-africa-leads-by-example/>

National Environmental Laws to comply with:

- National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), 1998 (Act No. 107 of 1998).
- National Environmental Management Waste Act, 2008 (Act No. 59 of 2008).
- National Water Act, 1998 (Act No. 36 of 1998).

Metropolitan Municipal Bylaws:

- Waste Management Bylaw (2020) _ City of Ekurhuleni (Gauteng)
- Waste Management and Disposal Bylaw _ City of eThekweni
- Solid Waste Bylaw (2016) _ City of Tshwane
- Western Cape Integrated Waste Management Plan (IWMP) _ City of Cape Town

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