

Case Study - Le Boisé - Environmental

As concerns over the environment continue to gather steam, the mantra "think globally, act locally" has become more important than ever. Citizens and businesses are working to become much more aware of the carbon footprint they're leaving and how they can reduce it. This awareness has led to a different way of thinking.

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For example, at the beginning of the environmental movement a great deal of emphasis was placed on recycling. Today, however, environmental leaders are looking not just to re-use resources, but to avoid their use entirely if they can. Simply put, recycling paper is helpful, but the process of recycling still has an impact on the environment. Avoiding the use of paper eliminates this impact entirely. Purchasing more energy-efficient devices helps lower energy costs and reduce the impact; eliminating the need for those devices, while still being able to conduct business normally, does much more.

One such device is the fax machine. In today's business world, the fax machine lies dormant most of the time; it is generally used only for specific purposes. Yet it must remain in a powered-up state on the chance a customer or business partner needs to send a fax. If it is not on, the fax will not go through, and an opportunity could be lost. This scenario is wasteful in any context. But for those trying to help the environment by using renewable energy sources to power their homes and/or businesses, the cost is measured not just in environmental terms, but also in hard dollars.

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DJ MacIntyre
President
Le Boisé Alternatives

The Customer

Le Boisé Alternatives was founded in 2002 to help homeowners and businesses in Quebec and Ontario, Canada obtain electrical power via renewable energy sources, such as solar panels or wind turbines, rather than tapping into the standard power grid. Its customers choose to install alternative energy for a variety of reasons, although the primary ones are environmental concerns and the difficulty of bringing standard power into remote, off-grid areas.

President and founder DJ MacIntyre started the business after facing the challenge of bringing power to a beautiful, but remote parcel of land he had purchased for the purpose of building a home. After checking into the costs and the environmental impact of using utility power, he decided to go with solar and wind turbine power instead, but struggled to find a licensed contractor to do the work. After completing the installation himself, he recognized the market opportunity, became a licensed electrical and plumbing contractor, and began specializing strictly in renewable energy source installations. Today his customer base ranges from Quebec City to Kingston, Ontario, an area of roughly 366,600 square miles. To his knowledge he is the only licensed contractor providing renewable energy sources in that entire region of Quebec, and one of very few in Eastern Ontario.

The Challenge

The construction business still relies heavily on faxes to request and submit bids and contracts, order supplies, issue changes, and communicate other information. This can be a challenge for any contractor given that most of their time is spent on job sites rather than at the office where the fax machine is located. Given the nature of Le Boisé Alternatives' business, the challenges were multiplied by two factors: 1) a typical job could have MacIntyre staying out of town for days or even weeks until it is completed, and 2) the company has to generate every watt of electricity it uses.

The first challenge is obvious. While it may be inconvenient, most contractors have the ability to stop by the office before or after going to the day's job site to send, read and respond to faxes since they usually work within a 25 mile radius of the office. That was not an option for MacIntyre when he was out of town, which meant faxes would either have to be read to him over the phone or they would have to wait until he returned. Neither choice was acceptable.

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The second challenge was even more of a concern. According to the Energy Star ratings from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a fax machine consumes more electricity than any other office equipment. It is part of a class of equipment the EPA refers to as "power vampires" and renewable energy devotees refer to it as a "phantom load" - units that draw power on a continuous basis whether they are actively engaged or not. Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory estimates that this "standby" power waste accounts for as much as 10 percent of all residential electricity consumption, resulting in millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions each year. Keeping a fax machine running all day and night on the chance a fax might come in would mean a lot of wasted energy - like leaving a window open when the furnace is on. It was something MacIntyre came to resent.

"Keeping a light bulb on for 24 hours is expensive when you generate your own electricity," says MacIntyre. "And a fax machine uses a lot more electricity than a light bulb. In fact, it's the equivalent of leaving three compact light bulbs on all the time."

In addition to being costly, keeping a fax machine on all the time also goes against the very nature of MacIntyre's business, which is about minimizing the environmental impact.

"If you run a fax machine 24/7, you create 80 Kg of greenhouse gas per year in our area," MacIntyre says. "That's a lot considering how infrequently it's actually used."

The environmental impact was further exacerbated by the use of paper to print the faxes - whether MacIntyre wanted them or not - and the energy and effort required to scan the pages to turn them into electronic documents, which is his preferred method of storage.

In short, while he needed the ability to send and receive faxes, the fax machine as a business tool simply was not in keeping with the practical or ethical requirements of his business. Realizing this, MacIntyre began the search for an alternative that would better suit Le Boisé Alternatives.

“MyFax is one of the best decisions I’ve made since I made the decision to go into this business,” he says. “I just love it!”

**DJ MacIntyre
President
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The Solution

As with so many things, it was a business crisis that forced MacIntyre to look seriously for a different way to manage his faxes. "I had a client who really needed to send me a fax, but my fax machine had died," he says, noting another of his pet peeves: "Because they're used infrequently, it might be a year or two before you need to change toner or ink cartridges in your fax machine. Good luck finding cartridges for a two or three year old machine. It's cheaper to just buy a whole new fax machine ... and then you get the guilt from contributing to a non-biodegradable, often non-recyclable landfill! I was finally just going to have the client send it to my mother-in-law's house, which would work. But it wasn't very professional. So I did a quick Internet search and came across the concept of Internet faxing."

MacIntyre signed up for an account with one of the many Internet fax service providers he found. This action solved his immediate problem, but he quickly realized that the performance and service wasn't at the level he wanted. It was then that he began to search for a long-term solution in earnest. After comparing several providers, he made the decision to move to MyFax.

"Sure, I compared features and benefits of several providers and they all sounded good," MacIntyre says. "But what really sold me on MyFax were the reviews on sites such as toptenreviews.com. Everywhere I went, whether the reviewers were users or professional reviewers, MyFax came out on top. And after opening my account I found out why."

MacIntyre says that signing up for MyFax only took "a few minutes," and within a half hour, his new fax number was operational. He likes the fact that he didn't have to download any software or agents onto his devices, and that he receives e-mail notifications on his laptop and BlackBerry whenever a fax comes in. He can preview the fax, open it if he chooses, and send a response - even if he is in a remote corner of an obscure part of the deep woods. Having the fax come in as a PDF rather than in some proprietary format is a big part of that, he adds. The PDF format also makes it easy to store electronically, without the need to scan it first.

So far MacIntyre has only had one occasion to use MyFax's customer service group, but he says he can see why they're rated so highly.

"I was having some trouble sending faxes internationally, so I connected with the MyFax customer service group to find out why," he says. "They were very friendly and helpful, and they took care of the problem quickly. It was fixed the same day. Well, 'fixed' is a big word. Because I found MyFax so intuitive to use, I hadn't actually taken the time to follow what I then found out was an amazingly well designed on-line tutorial. But, that said, they fixed me right up, and that's huge for an independent businessman like myself. MyFax customer service is stellar. It's obvious they really get it."

For MacIntyre, it isn't about high volume. It's about availability. "I don't send or receive a lot of faxes each month," he states. "But every fax that comes in or goes out is very important to my business. Having MyFax assures that those documents reach me right away, wherever I happen to be, without all the waste of a fax machine. It helps me to stay responsible to both my customers and the environment."

The Result

Due to the nature of his work, McIntyre has a very good idea of just how much he is saving by using MyFax rather than a fax machine.

"If I had to build a power system strictly to run a fax machine 24 hours a day, it would cost \$4,000 to \$5,000 in infrastructure costs, without accounting for maintenance," he says. "That electricity is now being re-directed to other appliances and devices in the house."

Couple that savings with the paperless delivery, the reduction of the carbon footprint, and the greater efficiency he has gained and it's easy to see why MacIntyre is such an enthusiastic evangelist.

"MyFax is one of the best decisions I've made since I made the decision to go into this business," he says. "I just love it!"

About MyFax

MyFax is the fastest growing Internet fax service used by individuals, small, medium and large businesses to send and receive faxes using existing email accounts or the web. MyFax offers services in North America and Europe, including the United Kingdom to industries recognized among the fastest growing adopters of internet fax including finance, insurance, real estate, healthcare, transportation and government. More than 15,000 new customers subscribe to MyFax each month. Additional information is available at www.myfax.com and www.myfax.uk.com.

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