



MARKS & SPENCER'S 'PLAN A'

M&S is determined to show that its green claims go deeper than the colour of its logo – and IT is helping the UK retailer put its environmental plans into action

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CASE STUDY

DATA FEED

● In the past year, M&S has reduced net CO₂ emissions by 18%. The company aims to make UK and Irish operations carbon neutral by 2012.

● M&S opened its first eco-factory in China in May 2009. The aim is to reduce energy use by 50% compared to similar-sized facilities.

Further reading:
www.annualreport.marksandspencer.com

When Marks & Spencer's chief executive Stuart Rose launched its sustainability initiative, Plan A, in January 2007, his words were singularly direct: "M&S will change beyond recognition the way it operates. We're calling this Plan A because there is no Plan B."

The retailer's decision to charge customers for food carrier bags is the policy that has generated the most publicity to date, but the strategy covers most of the business – from sourcing as much food as possible from local suppliers to powering stores with green energy. Every department is affected, not least IT. One of the major components of Plan A is M&S's commitment to cut energy use by around 25%, and streamlining IT systems will play a significant part in achieving this goal.

This has already resulted in the consolidation of hundreds of Wintel servers, with many machines redeployed and virtualised (M&S has a rigidly enforced policy of ensuring no decommissioned IT kit ends up in landfill). As Damone Quigley, head of IT infrastructure and application services, highlights: "M&S has adopted virtualisation as the main route to delivering green IT."

Of course, virtualisation provides significant cost and efficiency benefits beyond reduced energy use, but Quigley adds IT is contributing to the sustainability initiative in other ways, too. IT is involved in several green projects – including an automated light-dimming system

currently installed in six trial stores. This uses a motion sensor to dim lights in specific aisles when there are no customers present and brighten them again if someone is detected. "This is a simple yet innovative use of IT in reducing energy consumption," says Quigley.

M&S is also banking on IT to deliver better information on in-store energy efficiency. "We're implementing data monitoring equipment to produce information on the energy outputs from the heating, lighting and cooling systems," says Quigley. Initially implemented in 85 stores, monitoring has proved so successful that it's now being extended to a further 30. And, as the system rolls out, M&S is expecting to identify even more ways to rein in energy use and hit that ambitious 25% reduction target. ●