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If winter is normal, your energy costs will likely go up

Take steps to help business become more efficient

By JIM M. ROSENBERG
Special Staff Writer

NEW YORK — Your small business got a reprieve last winter. Mild weather kept heating costs down. Your energy bill probably will be much higher this winter — unless you start chipping away at your heating and electricity expenditures.

Administration, which uses residential costs as its benchmark, said the average household could see heating bills rise by as much as \$330 over last winter's.

"Many people think of energy as a fixed cost," said Mark Hopkins, vice president of the Alliance to Save Energy, a nonprofit group in Washington, D.C. "It's not. It's a variable cost."

If your company owns its building, consider upgrading or replacing the heating and cooling systems. Hopkings said new systems can save 10 percent to 40 percent over 20-year-old systems.

The savings should pay for the new systems, Hopkins said.

Moreover, you'll cut your bills each year as you depreciate the cost of the system. If you can't deduct the cost up-front under an Internal Revenue Code Section 179 election, financing or air conditioning equipment must be depreciated.

Waiting for the old system to break down isn't smart. "If you work on the old system, that's the wrong decision," Hopkins said.

The Internet has plenty of information to help small businesses save on energy. The Environmental Protection Agency Web site (www.epa.gov) has a section called Business Energy Checkup. Many utilities also offer on-line advice.

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on upgrading or replacing heating and cooling systems.

The Department of Energy Web site (www.energy.gov/business) also has sections on large and small businesses. One discussion of financing options for energy-efficient units.

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And, of course, there's common sense. The same things you'd do to make your home more energy efficient should be done at your business, including weatherstripping, insulation and furnace maintenance.

These products generally carry Energy Star stickers. The most famous is Energy Star computers, which are designed to be energy efficient.

If your employees are using electric space heaters in major money drains, locate the drains.

Hopkins and office equipment is the fastest growing component of commercial energy use. Energy Star you plug something into your power any cell phone, PDA, computer speakers, etc.), you're pushing up your bill.

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Some relatives must earn jobs

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"I think that a lot of businesses have done that. A lot of people have said that when they run or don't run the business," he said. "In retrospect, he said, many business owners have found that to be a mistake.

Another approach, Nixon said, is requiring family members to start at the bottom and work their way up. The family members learn the business from the ground up and can be more effective.



Russel Dugas and his father, Russel Dugas Sr., are part of the family tradition that Russel Sr. began when he founded Dugas Paint Co. in 1930. He had eight years of outside work experience before joining the company.

working the full-time job making their preparation more crucial than ever — to be ready to take over the family business," he said.

"The message of the program is to pursue a career outside the family business," he said. "It's not about being able to enter the family business, it's about being able to leave it."

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Still, if they someday want to join the company, Dugas said, they should really prefer they didn't come to work here first.

Consider seeking a bigger partner with similar goals

Let's say you're an investor who has developed some intriguing new software.

You want to deal with a Fortune 2000 corporation in which you handle product development, manufacturing, distribution, how do you find the right partner and structure a deal?

Small Business Development Corp. (SBDC) is a nonprofit organization that provides free consulting services to small businesses. It can help you find the right partner and structure a deal.

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Third time is charm for listing company

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posed for the young company. It began offering MLS-type services to brokers. After being out in the Louisville Association contract, Dwellink's principals took a fresh look at the industry. Intermediated MLS providers were further eroding with Zillow.com and Realtor.com. Local brokers were accessing their local association Web sites to bypass Dwellink.



Paul Spino, 47, left, and Kamil Muhammad help direct Dwellink Technologies Inc. Spino, 26, is president and chief executive, while Muhammad is chief information officer. With their system, Muhammad said, brokers "can basically list their properties."

of him the hallmark of what we do."

After the Koplee Kome deal in April, Dwellink signed up BarMax Properties Ltd.

While the support work is done by third programmers based from the United Kingdom, the company's two other officers — business development officer Steve Ballard, 51, and vice president Steve Ballard, 46 — don't fit the dot-com mold. Both worked in management at a trucking company before joining Dwellink.

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Dress for success in your own business

By RICHARD HARRIS
Special Staff Writer

When you're meeting a business you meet figure out what to wear, whether from your home, an office or where you're meeting clients.

For an entrepreneur, deciding what to wear can be tough. If you're an employee in a government contractor, you'll find your own dress code. If you're a small business owner, you'll find your own dress code.

"The basic rule is always dress at the same level as the client you're meeting. Don't be a level below and don't be a level above. Above describes the three levels: 1. Business formal. For when you meet your most professional, such as when negotiating a big deal, giving a presentation or calling on a business office. For women, this means a suit or a dress with matching jacket or blazer. For men, this means a suit and tie. 2. Business casual. 'You don't wear a suit if your customer is in jeans,' Harris said because both parties will be uncomfortable. Instead, choose an outfit that looks great but is less formal. This can be a quality sweater and nicely pressed slacks for men and blouses or a skirt or dress for women.

3. Informal business casual. For meeting with clients, dress up one level in casual settings, such as restaurants, hotel meetings or air conditioning or corporate parties. Combine this with a short-sleeved shirt or long-sleeved button-down shirt, or a skirt or dress with a short-sleeved jacket. Non-business casual attire includes polo shirts, jeans or khakis. That's all, no button-down.

Rhonda Abrams is the author of "The Successful Business Plan: Secrets and Strategies." To receive free business plans, register at www.BizPlanOnline.com or write her at c/o P.O. Box 21, No. 100, Palo Alto, Calif. 94301. © 2002, Rhonda Abrams