

Green Commerce and Connections

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Conserving Energy With the Click of a Button

An innovative computer gadget is helping people reduce energy consumption and expenses. And they barely have to lift a finger.

The easy-to-use, illuminated ecobutton™ connects to personal computers and laptops via a USB port. Before leaving a computer idle, the user simply presses the ecobutton to put it into a power-saving “ecomode.” Within three to five seconds, energy consumption falls from approximately 80 watts to about 1.8 watts. Tap on the keyboard to resume work.

Downloadable software tracks monetary savings and decreased carbon emissions (an annual average of \$100 in electricity costs and 0.45 carbon units) each time the ecobutton is activated.

Jeff Gunn invented the ecobutton and owns United Kingdom-based Bright Ideas Global. He points out how its deep sleep mode differs from the traditional hibernation function.

“It takes so long for a computer to go to sleep and wake up (during hibernation),” Gunn asserts. “That puts people off to using that mode. The ecobutton uses the most efficient mode available and makes it very easy for you to put your computer to sleep and save as much energy as possible.

“The byproduct of that is motivating additional (green) behavior such as turning off printers and lights.”

Buztronics – a manufacturer of light, sound, toy, novelty and promotional items – exclusively distributes the ecobutton in the United States through its retail division. Headquartered in Indianapolis, the company also has an office in Canada.

President and CEO Edward “Buz” Lewis, who founded the business in 1989, declares, “No one has had the answer (regarding how to minimize power consumption like the ecobutton does) and we’re jumping up and down and waving our hands, saying, ‘We’ve got it!’ It’s taken awhile, but it’s taking off.”

Recycled plastic comprises the body, while the lens contains recyclable material. Plus, the device’s light draws less than 1/110th of the power of a light bulb.

Domestically, it costs roughly \$20. A PRO version, designed for large corporations to consolidate savings across their networks, will soon be available.



INFORMATION LINK

Resource: Buz Lewis, Buztronics, at www.buztronics.com or www.eco-button.com

Cultivating a ‘Green’ Information Exchange

For Lena Lucas, the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine marked the beginning of a lifelong passion for environmental awareness. At 14 years old, she was evacuated from her home in nearby Kiev for several months. Cancer from exposure to radiation claimed her father’s life less than a year later.

Fast forward to 2007 when Lucas was inspired to create Indiana Green Pages, touted as “the first complimentary directory of green for-profit and not-for-profit businesses in the state.” The idea arose while she brainstormed ways to reach customers of her Emerald Healthy Environments, an Indianapolis-based manufacturer of all wood, toxin-free custom furniture and cabinetry.

“We were trying to reach green consumers,” she recalls. “The simplest and cheapest way was to reach them online. There was not a web site to be a hub or meeting place for green consumers in Indiana. We decided to create such a place where people would come to look for green products locally.”

Launched last October, Indiana Green Pages contains business profiles organized by categories

such as building green, alternative medicine, household items, food, education, sports, recycling, and landscape and horticultural services. Consumers can search for companies by geographic location or keyword, assign ratings (one to five stars) and post reviews.

“We have a lot of interest from businesses to be listed,” Lucas remarks. “The traffic grows each week. We not only let people post unlimited text, but also video and pictures, as well as provide blog capabilities and notify businesses when they get comments from customers.”

Additional features include electronic coupons and a complimentary subscription to a weekly newsletter. Moreover, environmentally friendly merchandise (organic cotton clothing, energy-efficient lighting, natural beauty products) is available. For every purchase made, Emerald Healthy Environments will plant a tree in the customer’s name.

Lucas credits the directory for providing consumers “the ability to talk to and connect with business owners and make it a forum for them to express their experiences.”



A print version of Indiana Green Pages is currently in development.

INFORMATION LINK

Resource: Lena Lucas, Indiana Green Pages, at www.myhomegreenpages.com

Got Soy? These Everyday Products Do

A small business in Clay City, nestled approximately 60 miles southwest of Indianapolis, is serving up a smorgasbord of soy-based products.

Established in 2003, family-owned Eel River Marketing (ERM) partners with Hoosier agricultural producers to promote value-added soy byproducts such as candles (smoke-free and long-burning), skin care items (lotions, specialty soaps, bath and shower gels) and clothing (socks, hats and gloves).

In addition to a store in Clay City (where it manufactures baby clothing and animal feeds), the company is a vendor in the city markets in French Lick and Indianapolis.

“We’re trying to build a green network,” states company president Richard Culler. “It’s (about) taking advantage of our commodities we have in the state, and also the technology and ingenuity of the people.”

Among ERM’s most popular items are socks made with 75% soy fiber. They retain less moisture than traditional cotton socks (reducing odor) and enhance comfort.

Culler wants to build on the success of the socks by also marketing them to people “who are on their feet all day,” such as nurses. And for people who work outdoors in cold temperatures, he says, “we’re looking at this for ski boot socks for construction workers and farmers.”

Producing baby clothing is one of the company’s newest ventures.

In addition, animal feeds produced by ERM offer health benefits to horses.

“One of the products has soybean oil in its flavor that we blend into the feed,” Culler explains. “The animals are getting the soy flavoring, which is a high-protein commodity, into their system so we’re seeing a better coat quality in terms of external appearance.”

Craving a java fix? Try ERM’s soy coffee. Made with a blend of Columbian coffee and Indiana-grown, non-genetically modified soybeans, it contains half the caffeine of regular coffee. Flavors include Swiss chocolate almond, vanilla hazelnut and caramel cream.

“It’s a lot healthier for those of us who don’t need as much caffeine, but still want the coffee buzz and the coffee flavor,” Culler concludes.

A sampling of Eel River Marketing products reveals many items, such as soy-based socks promoting breast cancer awareness, that reflect a passion for community engagement.



INFORMATION LINK

Resource: Richard Culler, Eel River Marketing, at (812) 939-2938 or www.eelrivermarketing.com