



Carbon footprint study for Microsoft, USA

Project Summary:

A comparative carbon footprint study of Microsoft's Office 2007 product suite found that the digital delivery of the product to customers reduced total tonnes of carbon emissions by 88%. This study has significantly informed industry understanding of the business value and environmental benefits of online digital software distribution.

The Client's Challenge:

With increasing demand for the purchase of online products, Microsoft is committed to making it very easy for customers to purchase and download its software.

However, with about 80% of 2007 Microsoft Office sales achieved through a traditional retail distribution, which results in a fully packaged product, Microsoft has sought to identify additional benefits from online sales and digital delivery. They commissioned a comparative carbon footprint study to quantify the carbon emissions savings from this strategy.

Our Work:

Working with Accenture, WSP applied leading standards for product carbon footprinting in accounting for greenhouse gas emissions arising from the complete lifecycle of the software products and supply chain. In addition we defined the lifecycle for the traditional retail in-store distribution channel.

Based on several distribution scenarios, the study assesses carbon emissions associated with raw materials, production, distribution, customer purchase, and end-of-life processes for 10 million off-the-shelf retail software units. This is compared against the online delivery model for 10 million downloads, which accounts for the data centres used for hosting software downloads, transfer of that software through the web and even the energy used by a customer's personal computer to download the product.

The Outcome:

The carbon emissions avoided through online purchasing was equivalent to the electricity consumed by 7,700 US households in one year.

This environmental benefit, coupled with reduced costs and added convenience for both provider and customer, are increasingly driving the rapid transition to online sales and digital delivery.

This model has helped Microsoft and informed the wider ICT sector to improve energy and carbon efficiency in transportation, logistics, supply chain, materials and distribution. It is reducing operational and manufacturing costs and increasing opportunities for leadership on environmental issues.

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