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Energy Star tax credits, HP printers and work stations in the news

By Art Snyder

With a fresh 2011 taking its bows as taxes come into consideration, this is the perfect time to think about energy efficiency and the federal government's Energy Star program of tax credits. And how about efficiency at your desk? You can turn to a Minnesota company that's making its mark through its collection of space-efficient wall and desk mounts for the spacious LCD screen of your trusty computer. Add to this is printer and workstation news from Hewlett Packard, along with rock-bottom pricing for backup external hard drives. Details, straight ahead.

Energy-efficiency tax credits

In the world of small business — and this includes most rinks — you save money wherever you can. One of these areas is all too often overlooked, despite the potential to add a real boost to your bottom line: tax credits for energy efficiency, via the joint Energy Star program and ongoing alliance of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Energy. This is the ideal time to get your tax ducks in order, so to speak, and review your rink and its daily operation through the lens of IRS guidelines, rulings and incentives. Come April 15th, you and your tax advisor will be mightily thankful, and your tax savings might generate enough unexpected money to be able to make further improvements to your rink's efficiency and customer appeal. From refreshing your food court to expanding your game room and redemption area, tax credits for energy efficiency are too good to overlook. The reason: The federal Energy Star program tax credit for 2010 (2011 is yet to be addressed) is 30 percent of the cost of most improvements that qualify, up to a maximum of \$1,500 (your tax advisor can supply current, evolving and prospective criteria, short- and long-term).

Among the areas considered for energy tax credits are high-efficiency doors and windows; building insulation; metal and/or asphalt roofs; heating, venting and air conditioning (HVAC) enhancements; water heaters; and other settings. Further, tax credits of 30 percent of the cost of materials — and with no upper limit, through 2016 — are in place for geothermal heat pumps; solar panels; solar water heaters; small wind-energy systems; and fuel cells. (Your tax advisor,

CPA and tax attorney can guide you strictly to the letter of the law on energy tax credits, as this article is more for general direction.)

To see IRS details on energy tax credits, get a copy of IRS Form 5695. Also, you have to maintain scrupulous credits and paper trails, as with receipts and other records. Of special importance is the need for manufacturer certification, a signed statement from the manufacturer certifying that the product or material(s) qualifies for the IRS tax credit. Note also that the cost of labor does not qualify for program credits — only the cost of materials.

To find qualified builders and remodelers experienced in the energy-efficiency program, seek out leads from your local building-trades association. You also have the option of getting and utilizing the services of Certified Green Professionals, people who are trained in energy matters and "green-building" tactics. A telephone book Yellow Pages or an Internet search can help with this. Finally, go online to nahb.org/designationsdirectory for more help in finding qualified builders in the non-home, commercial realm. In time, you'll be updating your rink with spiffy new lighting and signage, perhaps of the LED variety, as well as making your overall utility bills and related costs take a nice, big dip.

Iomega 1TB eGo desktop USB 2.0 hard drive

By now, you've no doubt graduated to the "best-practices" level with your



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rink computer workload and installed an external plug-and-play hard drive that serves as your primary file backup tool. Such drives are a cinch to connect, and you use them just as you would when you save documents and photos to your standard C: hard drive. Most of these external backup drives connect to your PC via a simple USB cord, and that's where the good news is showing up.

The standard for saving digital files to USB drives for the past few years has been with such drives designated USB 2.0. Fast and simple. However, the new USB standard is just starting to make headway as version 3.0. It's faster than a familiar 2.0 drive, but with the types of files you generate and use — media announcements, school fliers, payroll records and the like — you really don't need the 3.0 USB standard. It's like saying your new car can hit 150 mph, while your old one peaked at "only" 120 mph. So what? It means almost nothing to rink operators to stay with the USB 2.0 format for some time, especially since typical USB 3.0 drives are backward-compatible.

The great news: Since first-adapters are switching to the new USB 3.0 standard, external hard drives and portable varieties from front-line companies like Iomega, Seagate and Western Digital are seeing prices of 2.0 drives fall hard and fast, literally almost daily. That translates into a huge savings opportunity for you and your rink.

An Iomega 1 TB (that's 1,000 GBs!) external hard drive, for example, is at the almost unheard-of price of \$99. (An ordinary 250 GB external hard drive four years ago listed at about \$1 per GB, or \$250, with this example.) Another factor in tumbling digital storage prices is the slowly emerging standard of the solid-state drive, which has no moving parts and has speed to burn, to complement that drive's very trim size. Some such drives are internal, while others can be had configured as an external hard drive. The price for a 64 GB Imation solid state drive is about \$175. Do the math and count your digital savings.

HP OfficeJet Pro 8000 Wireless Printer

You can do all your expected printing jobs, including making top-notch glossy photos, with the just-introduced OfficeJet Pro 8000 Wireless Printer, from Hewlett Packard. This energy-efficient printer is Energy Star-qualified, and as you'd expect from HP, the printer offers solid, smooth, fast performance, all atop a reputation for great reliability. Of special note with the OfficeJet Pro 8000 Wireless Printer is its use of two print heads and four ink cartridges, for superb color reproduction all day long, with great efficiency and speed. Being wireless, this printer does its part in getting rid of

desktop clutter, too.

A very welcome development with this HP inkjet: The company has lowered cartridge prices, a real sticking point in the past with HP, so a 1,000-page black cartridge is only about \$25, and a 900-page color cartridge is but \$20. Listing at about \$180, the OfficeJet Pro 8000 should be available at a substantially discounted street price close to \$125. The printer is just being rolled out and should be in all markets in the next few weeks. Highly recommended.

HP 8000 point-of-sale workstation

HP has been busy on another front for small businesses like rinks, as they have developed several new point-of-sale (POS) workstations. They're trim and



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energy-efficient, and should offer the reliability that's a hallmark of the company. The HP 8000 point-of-sale workstation is compact and ruggedly made, to provide long service and good return on your capital investment. For a detailed profile of the HP 8000 and several other POS systems, visit the company at HP.com and click on the Small and Medium Business navigation tab to learn more. Make 2011 the year of living "greenfully" at your rink.

Products mentioned in this column are widely available. Check local office suppliers, computer and technology vendors, mass-merchandise and discount retailers, and mail-order and online sources. With broadband Internet access, software programs are a fast, easy and often cheaper download, saving you staff time and improving efficiency in many ways.

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