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Brave New Workshop goes green

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Brave New Workshop has converted its stage lights to LEDs, which has helped to cut its electric bill by 73%.

[Brave New Workshop Comedy Theatre](#) might not seem like the most likely company to actively embrace environmentalism - its shows tend to mock earnest, do-gooders (along with everyone else). But the theater's last production "Brave New Workshop Saves the Planet!" appears to have left its mark on the staff.

BNW's Vice President of Client Services Elena Imaretska is the force behind a lot of recent changes at the theater that are part of an ongoing effort to reduce its carbon footprint. These changes range from simple ones- improving signage on recycling bins - to some significant accomplishments. Imaretska says it's the natural outgrowth of BNW's own corporate approach to

"sustainability."

I think everybody should be green, I don't think we have a choice anymore. We need to be responsible as an organization or we'll disengage our audiences.

Just last month BNW converted its stage lights to LEDs. LEDs can change colors, so the company was able to cut back on the number of stage lights hanging in the theater. That, combined with converting all other lights in the building to either LEDs or compact fluorescent bulbs has cut its electricity use by 73%.



How much money did BNW have to put down for its new, high-tech stage lights? Not a penny. They were paid for in part through a grant from the [Minnesota Center for Energy and Environment](#), and through a loan offered jointly by the MCEE and Excel Energy. BNW will pay back the loan over the next two years by continuing to pay its electric bills at their previous, higher rate. So the installation of the lights cost nothing in the short-term, and will save money in the longterm.

Other changes include converting to 100% post consumer recycled paper, reducing the amount of paper used in mailings, programs, and in the office, and eliminating paper and plastic cups at the theater bar.

On opening nights BNW offers pizza to its patrons. Now, for \$20, [the city of Minneapolis provides a compost bin](#) to the theater at the beginning of the evening, and picks it up at the end. All the waste generated in the course of the evening - pizza boxes, paper plates, napkins - is thrown into the bin and composted.



In addition to changing its own behavior, BNW is encouraging its patrons to make changes, too. The company has installed bike racks in front of the building, and ticketholders who present a bus pass or a bike helmet at the bar are treated to a free drink.

Imaretska says the company hasn't been able to do everything it would like to reduce its carbon footprint (such as install a more efficient heating/cooling system), in part because it doesn't own the building in which it lives. But it has been able to do quite a bit for much less money than it anticipated. Brave New Workshop offered its improv training and exercises to the University of Minnesota's Design school, and in return, the design school's [Greenlight initiative](#) looked at the theater's space and offered some short-, mid-, and long-term solutions. Such a consultation would have normally cost thousands of dollars.

Brave New Workshop is now working to share what it's learned with other theater companies. Along with a few other interested parties, it's created the Twin Cities Sustainable Theaters (it's still in the very nascent stages, and so at the moment is just a [LinkedIn group](#)). The group meets next in December.

Lest you might think BNW is now going to preach environmentalism from the stage, not to worry. Its latest production "Brett Favre's Christmas Spectacular: the Immaculate Interception" is far more concerned with 'purple' than 'green.'

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