

Tricks of the Trade
 By Gus Ezcurra

5 Tips for Buying a Better Energy Management System

One area that you should be looking at to cut costs is affordable lightweight energy management systems that can be controlled on-site or remotely—particularly those designed for underserved small- to medium-sized restaurant facilities.

Today's touch panel-controlled energy management systems enable you to easily view and reduce resource consumption with the mere touch of a button. The result is utility bill savings upwards of 20% or more per month. Best of all, affordable models are now available for underserved small- to medium-sized restaurants that offer a return on investment in just 6 to 12 months.

Here are five key considerations to help you make informed decisions when considering an energy management system:

1. Ensure the solution focuses on the HVAC system

Most energy management products are too complex to achieve the desired goal. To maximize your energy savings, minimize related costs and realize a fast payback, seek a product that specifically focuses on the HVAC system—the largest controllable source of energy drain in a restaurant and, thus, the quickest and easiest way to produce material savings. Additional sensors to monitor and control other sources of energy use—such as lighting, security, and office equipment—can always be integrated into today's flexible, scalable products.

2. Seek a product with remote control

An energy management system should be controllable on-site and remotely by you or the manufacturer. By connecting the system to the Internet, you and/or the manufacturer can monitor real-time energy consumption and ensure that temperatures do not go beyond pre-set parameters. Such continuous monitoring also enables the immediate flagging of consumption swings and other anomalies, which can indicate larger mechanical malfunctions early on.

3. Opt for a system with a ROI of 12 months or less.

The best commercial heating systems can be delivered and installed in a restaurant for \$2,000 or less with a monthly service contract of \$50 or less. When one considers a monthly utility bill of \$3,000, even a 15 percent



monthly energy savings would provide a return-on-investment in less than six months. Some companies also offer flexible payment terms, such as a higher monthly fee and lower upfront payments—particularly for multiple-unit operators. Make sure the system is installed rapidly to mitigate up front fees.

4. Buy a product that is user-friendly

In addition to graphical viewing real-time and historical resource consumption, today's best-of-breed systems allow you to establish thermostat heating and cooling limits and set points for different times of the day. They also offer an automated option designed to reduce consumption during peak demand periods. Such advanced systems can also readily block unauthorized access and changes to the settings, and allow enabled users to view and alter the settings via the Web, smart phones or on-site.

5. Ensure the solution is proven with an established track record of success

When evaluating a product, it's imperative that the manufacturer can point to real-world restaurant installations and allow you to speak with customers. When evaluating competing products, be sure to check references about the quality and user-friendliness of the product, and also the ease of installation, the savings realized (and how quickly) and the level of post-deployment support they receive from the manufacturer.

By using these five tips as a guideline, you can secure a cost-effective energy management system that will reduce your carbon footprint and energy consumption, while delivering notable monetary gains.

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