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Change Language: Choose

The Energy Opportunity

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There's an urban legend that quality guru W. Edwards Deming is the source of the axiom: "You can't manage what you can't measure."

On the contrary, Dr. Deming asserted that many important factors in management, such as the value of training, are unquantifiable. That's not the case, however, when it comes to reducing wasted energy consumption. It really is true that if you don't know how your energy dollars—which are often thousands of dollars—are spent, and how much is wasted, you cannot truly take advantage of saving opportunities.

Be an Energy Star

Large savings opportunities do exist in restaurants. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ENERGY STAR® program helps restaurants save money by reducing their energy spend on kitchen equipment. Did you know that the same program also helps businesses save money through reducing the energy consumption of building systems and operations? ENERGY STAR for commercial buildings provides such help in two ways:

It gives your organization an online tool, called the Portfolio Manager®, for tracking how much energy is used in your building(s).

"What's Your Score?" For certain types of buildings, the tool calculates an energy performance score (on a 1 to 100 scale) that reflects your building's energy use relative to the national, industry-wide average.

Buildings that obtain a performance score and demonstrate superior performance can earn ENERGY STAR certification. Consumers know and admire the ENERGY STAR brand, and they spend money based on it.

A recent customer survey found:

- 87 percent recognized the ENERGY STAR label when shown to them
- 64 percent associated the ENERGY STAR label with "efficiency or energy savings"
- 41 percent knowingly purchased an ENERGY STAR-labeled product in the past 12 months

There's just one problem: As of now, food service buildings are not one of the 15 types for which ENERGY STAR provides performance scores.

The Industry is Mobilizing

If all goes well, this will change soon. RFMA and the National Restaurant Association (NRA) are developing an ENERGY STAR building energy performance score for restaurants, by hosting a public survey to gather the necessary industry energy data. The survey is open to all food service establishments, and the data collected by RFMA will be made anonymous before being submitted to EPA. The survey can be found at www.rfmaonline.com/survey.

RFMA and NRA are collaborating with the ENERGY STAR program, the Better Buildings Alliance (U.S. Department of Energy) and the PG&E Food Service Technology Center (FSTC). This partnership developed the energy and water usage survey in 2013, aided immensely by a number of food service companies and several other stakeholders.

Don Fisher and David Zabrowski of FSTC have been key supporters and partners in this effort, lending their considerable industry expertise and insight all along the way. What is absolutely critical to this initiative now is completion of the survey by many different food service establishments. Without data from a cross-section of the food service sector, the EPA cannot determine the national average energy usage for the industry and would not be able to develop a performance scoring method for restaurants or other food service facilities.

Where Does Facilities Management Fit In?

Both NRA and RFMA have publicized the ENERGY STAR survey to their membership, but with the busy holiday season—plus the fact that not all organizations are aware of just how big the opportunities can be for cost savings by energy reduction—the industry association announcements may have gone unnoticed. It's also true that it takes a bit of time to gather utility records and facility information for the survey.

Here's what facilities management can do to make a difference:

1. Bring the RFMA-hosted energy survey to the attention of your energy manager (if there is one) or those who make decisions that affect energy expenditures. If those individuals are not available or interested in completing the survey, perhaps you can get their consent to do it yourself.
2. Help gather the required information. This is the most timeconsuming part of the survey, divide the tasks necessary for completing the survey. This will make it easier for others to agree to help you.
3. Stay engaged on issues of energy cost reduction. For example, if your company chooses to benchmark its energy consumption using Portfolio Manager, you can work with those who access the tool to understand trends in energy costs and what can be done to reduce those costs (without affecting the customer experience). If an ENERGY STAR performance score for food service is developed, you can work with others to interpret your company or facility's standing relative to industry peers. For example, why are your energy costs higher than others, and what can you do about it? Why are your energy costs lower, and how far are you from the ENERGY STAR certification level (top 25 percent)? Should you create a campaign to achieve certification and work with marketing to capitalize on it with your customers?

Additional Benefits

The ENERGY STAR performance score takes into account key factors that affect the absolute amount of energy that a restaurant expends.

For example, two quick-service restaurants that use the same amount of energy but are different sizes, or have different operating hours per week, will receive different ENERGY STAR scores. This ensures a meaningful comparison. Not only will a comparison be possible between an individual restaurant and the national average, but food service organizations with multiple locations will be able to compare each restaurant against the others within the enterprise (and against the enterprise's average score).

Once energy use is benchmarked, Portfolio Manager data and performance scores (which can be downloaded) can be used to track energy usage and efficiency, which provides invaluable information:

Progress toward cost and energy reduction goals

The building's energy efficiency given changes in weather and operational factors

Identification of energy-usage outliers within a portfolio of restaurants

For example, the ENERGY STAR score incorporates seasonal weather changes that affect total energy consumption from year to year. If a facility incorporates an LED lighting retrofit in a year with an exceptionally hot summer, higher cooling bills would not obscure the improvement from the lighting efficiency measure. Note that communicating the ENERGY STAR score to management is more straightforward than trying to explain normalization of seasonal energy consumption using heating- or cooling- degree days.

If a restaurant changes operating hours or practices, the new ENERGY STAR score will normalize for hours but reflect the effect of new operating procedures.

Seize the Day

Unlike supermarkets, hotels and general retail, restaurants cannot currently get an ENERGY STAR performance score. The opportunity is here now to rectify that situation, and it's not likely to come again anytime soon.

Restaurants use the most energy per square foot of any commercial sector; that translates to big utility bills. Reducing the avoidable part of those costs will make you more competitive and increase your bottom line—why would anyone not jump on this opportunity by helping ENERGY STAR help their business and the food service industry?

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