

Facility Manager Project Profile

Wayne Brayton

Seeing the Light

SONIC Drive-In takes on an illuminating lighting upgrade

Welcome to FM Project Profile, an interview-style series in which a restaurateur spotlights a major facilities project. By discussing one of their most memorable facilities jobs, our members hope to share insight and inspiration. This month's profile comes from Wayne Brayton, Vice President of Facilities with SONIC.

How did you educate yourself on the advantages of LED lighting? While attending a RFMA continuing-education class three years ago, I learned about recent developments and the progress made on LED lighting, pricing and warranties. One of the RFMA vendor members provided me with LED samples to test, and I was impressed with the results.

What was the overall scope of work for the LED lighting conversions at the SONIC drive-ins? We converted most of the metal-halide fixtures to LED during a facility refresh program two years ago in our company-owned drive-ins. We now have extended that program to our franchise partners.

How did you test the different LED lights to arrive at your final decision? We tested LED lighting at a company-owned SONIC Drive-In located in Oklahoma City. We were able to install different fixtures side by side to get a clear visual of the difference in lighting quality. Due to the striking results, we continue to test new LED products at this location.

What types and wattage bulbs were replaced, and what is the wattage of the new LED lights? SONIC company-owned drive-ins have converted our 400-watt metal-halide lot light fixtures to 100-watt LED lighting and our 1,000-watt metal-halide fixtures to 240-watt LED. We also converted our building wall packs from 175-watt metal halide to 35-watt LED fixtures. We continue to convert to LED in our signage, interior and exterior canopy lights, and more, with great results.

What are the estimated or actual energy savings per restaurant? Depending on the scope of work, we have seen approximately \$500 to \$1,000 energy savings at each location per year, along with substantial rebates and reduced repair and maintenance (R&M) costs.

In general, what was the average bulb life of the replaced bulb versus the new LED light? The average life of the metal halide and fluorescent bulbs and fixtures is approximately 10,000 hours, or one year, compared to 50,000 hours, or five years for the new LED fixtures and bulbs. An advantage is the fact that LED bulbs do not fade over time like the metal halide bulbs.

What is the overall return on investment of this program? In most cases, we experience return on investment in less than two years, as well as a substantial reduction in R&M costs since we do not have to change out bulbs as often. We have received more than \$100,000 in rebates over the last two years at company-owned drive-ins.

What is the warranty provided on the new lights? The warranty on the new LED lights typically covers five years for parts and one year for labor costs.

How many company SONIC locations were involved? Nearly all of the 380 company-owned SONIC Drive-Ins have converted their building and on-lot fixtures to LED lighting.

What percentage of the overall franchisees have completed the change? Approximately 30 percent of the franchise-owned SONIC Drive-Ins have converted to LED lighting.

What were your main takeaways? This LED lighting program has been one of the best facility upgrades I have ever been involved in during my entire 25+ years in restaurant construction facilities.

Wayne Brayton is Vice President of Facilities with SONIC. He has worked in restaurant construction and facilities since 1988 and started with SONIC in 2001. For the past two years, Brayton has handled the brand's energy-savings initiatives. He has been a member of RFMA since 2007.