

# Strict control

Arby's franchisee is sold on technology to regulate thermostats

By Ryan Randazzo

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

An Arby's restaurant franchisee tried everything from reminding employees to shut off air-conditioning at night to covering programmable thermostats with lockboxes to reduce monthly electric bills that were as much as \$4,000 per restaurant.

But someone always forgot to shut off the air or would poke a straw or toothpick through the lockbox on the programmable controls to lower the temperature.

So the restaurants got stricter about controlling the air-conditioning, which is the biggest energy drain in the Valley.

The restaurants now use Web-based controls accessible only to top managers, ensuring the air is on only during business hours and never gets cranked too high. Those moves saved \$800 in a month at one location.

FX4 owns 55 Arby's in the state, and the company first tested the Web-based EcoView Commercial system last year on two stores before recently adding it to four more.

"We are looking forward to putting them into all our restaurants as money allows," said Jay Johnson, vice president of operations for FX4.

During the two-store test, all but one month showed an improvement in the amount of electricity used. One store's monthly bill dropped to \$3,200 from \$4,000 in the same month the prior year.

"We were doing cartwheels," Johnson said.

Part of the savings can be attributed to slower business and slightly cooler weather, but Johnson said the test was convincing.

The stores have been able to save energy whether they are in

Salt River Project or Arizona Public Service Co. territory, and whether they are old and energy-inefficient or new with better insulation, he said.

The EcoView systems cost about \$1,000 for the hardware and installation and possibly a little more depending on how many appliances are connected to the controls. The software costs \$40 a month to use.

Johnson expects the systems to pay for themselves in energy savings within three to six months.

The EcoView system, made by San Diego-based Advanced

Telemetry, uses a touch-panel thermostat that connects wirelessly to the air-conditioning, lights, walk-in coolers and any other appliance a business owner wants to control remotely.

At FX4, only supervisors with the password can change the settings, and those managers are responsible for their stores' energy bill, so they are unlikely to be sloppy.

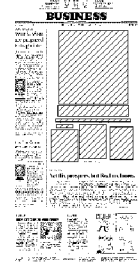
The employees in the store still can move the thermostat a couple of degrees to accommodate hot or cold customers, but the system will return to the manager's setting after an hour.

That's key, because with 10 or more employees at a business, oftentimes one worker will turn down the thermostat and it will remain that way overnight, needlessly cooling the closed building, Johnson said. "With EcoView, that doesn't happen," he said. "If the restaurant closes at 11:15, it shuts down."

Advanced Telemetry has sold the EcoView systems to a Burger King franchisee group in Portland and a group that owns multiple Taco Bells in Seattle, as well as Kentucky Fried Chicken, Church's, Chili's and Applebee's franchisees in various locations, CEO Gus Ezcurra said.

"It's a niche for us because these small businesses sometimes can't take advantage of the bigger utility programs out there," he said "Those guys feel the pinch."

Ezcurra said Arizona's heavy air-conditioning demand offers some of the greatest potential for his 2-year-old company.



“By regulating a couple of degrees each day, the savings can be huge, and that’s what we do,” he said.

Local utilities also are trying to encourage conservation through systems like EcoView, although officials from APS and SRP were unfamiliar with the company.

“Being able to control energy usage through a programmable system and control how you use energy has become a popular concept,” said Jim Wontor, manager of APS efficiency programs.

The effectiveness of programmable thermostats and similar technology, however, is based on how savvy and vigilant the users are, he said.

Advanced Telemetry offers residential control systems similar to those being used by Arby’s,

although the company says the payback period is longer.

“I’m considering putting one in my house,” Johnson said. “I have teenage boys who don’t always follow my advice about the thermostat.”

## **Advanced Telemetry**

**Headquarters:** San Diego.

**Products:** Its EcoView system allows businesses and homeowners to control their thermostats, lights and other electrical appliances remotely via the Web.

**Cost:** \$1,000-\$1,500 depending on installation required, plus \$40 a month for the software.

**Savings:** EcoView estimates small restaurants can recover their investment within six months, depending on their energy use.

**More information:** [www.advancedtelemetry.com](http://www.advancedtelemetry.com).



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Jay Johnson says Web-based temperature controls accessible only to top managers are helping his company's restaurants reduce energy costs. The company, FX4, owns 55 Arby's in Arizona.



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Jay Johnson, vice president of operations for FX4, which owns 55 Arby's in Arizona, checks the EcoView system at a Valley Arby's.