

Top 5 Energy Management System Considerations

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The economy has forced most if not all U.S. companies to seek ways to reduce non-essential and otherwise variable costs. A new opportunity has emerged in recent years with the advent of affordable lightweight energy management systems that can be controlled on-site or remotely—particularly those designed specifically for previously underserved small- to medium-sized commercial facilities like restaurants, convenience stores, retail shops and bank branch offices.

Today's dashboard touch panel-controlled "smart" energy management systems enable business users to easily view and reduce their resource consumption in real time with the mere touch of a button, resulting in utility bill savings upwards of 20 percent or more per month. Although extraordinarily feature rich, modern energy management and control systems are now far more cost effective to deploy, with low starting price points, nominal monthly fees and rapid return-on-investment in just six to 12 months.

Such advancements have generated enormous marketplace demand among small- and medium-sized businesses seeking proven, cost-effective ways to "go green" and, in doing so, boost their bottom lines. Here are five key considerations to help businesses make informed decisions when considering an energy management system:

- Ensure the solution specifically focuses on the HVAC system

Most energy management

products on the market today are too complex to appropriately leverage or too simple 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 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.

- Seek a product that offers both on-site and remote measurement and control

Not only should an energy management system be controllable on-site, but also remotely by either company personnel or even the manufacturer's operations center professionals. By connecting to the installed system via the Internet, manufacturers offering remote capabilities, and dedicated administration thereof, can monitor a company's real time energy consumption and ensure that temperatures do not go beyond the businesses' 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. Ultimately, remote monitoring better assures that the installed product is being used to the best of its capabilities and is facilitating the expected energy and cost savings.

- Opt for a quick-install system with low initial fees and ROI in

less than 12 months

The best commercial energy management systems on the market today can be delivered and installed for \$2,000 or even less and with a monthly service contract below \$50. When one considers a monthly business utility bill of \$3,000, even a 15 percent monthly energy savings would provide a return-on-investment in well under six months. Some companies also offer flexible payment terms, such as a higher monthly fee and lower upfront payments—particularly for multiple unit operators. It's also important to ensure the system can be installed rapidly to further mitigate up front fees.

- Obtain a product with a robust yet user-friendly core feature set

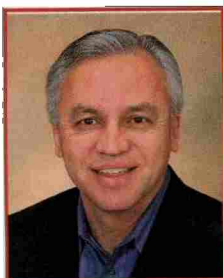
In addition to graphical viewing of real-time and historical resource consumption, today's best-of-breed energy control products provide a robust feature set that, among other capabilities, allows users to establish thermostat heating and cooling limits and set points for different times of the day, and offer an automated "peak shaving" 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 and presentation information via the Web, smart phones, or the on-site display.

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



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When evaluating a product, it is imperative that the manufacturer can point to a critical mass of real-world, not trial, installations in the field, and will allow you to speak with actual customers. When evaluating competing products, be sure to check references not only about the quality and user-friendliness of the product, but also the ease of installation, the hard cost 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, businesses can best assure they'll secure a well-rounded and cost-effective energy management system that will reduce their carbon footprint and energy consumption while delivering notable monetary gains.

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