

Toolkit² Cutting back energy costs

Spiralling gas and electricity prices are pushing energy-saving measures to the forefront of many restaurant businesses. How much could you save?

Some stats to chew over. More than eight billion meals are served every year across 260,000 foodservice sites in the UK, at an energy cost of £770m a year. By taking a more strategic approach to catering, the Carbon Trust estimates the industry could reduce energy usage by 30%, equating to an annual saving of £250m.

Put like that and it's clear for any restaurant that reducing their energy usage is far more than just a box-ticking exercise. A smaller carbon footprint often also means a bigger profit, as Dominic Burbridge, associate director at the Carbon Trust, points out. "One tonne of carbon equals £100m of electricity, £200 of gas and £450 of diesel. The size of the opportunity to cut costs and save money is huge."

The issue, says Burbridge, isn't that restaurateurs are averse to reducing energy, but that it is far down their list of priorities. "The sector is under a lot of pressures, such as inflation, food waste, staffing, local sourcing, and with all these it's easy to forget energy usage. Restaurant businesses are good at managing controllable costs, but the main thing they look at is reducing staffing costs. It is much better to manage energy costs than make staff cuts that can have a negative impact on how a business is run."

With the Carbon Trust forecasting gas and electricity bills to rise by 20% to 30% over the next two to three years, there's never been a better time to look at energy usage. According to Burbridge, many restaurants could cut their energy bills by as much as 20% just by implementing simple energy efficiency measures, including better control of air

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conditioning and the zoning of heating and lighting. With energy costs typically 5% of turnover, this 20% reduction is the equivalent to increasing turnover by 1%. "If profit is 10% to 15% of turnover you can see an immediate impact on the bottom line," he says.

Restaurant businesses that have done the basics needn't stop there, though; there are more involved steps that can be taken to save even more money.

This includes taking a life-cycle view when buying equipment - the latest models of air-con units are around 30% more efficient - and taking advantage of the Government's Enhanced Capital Allowance energy scheme, which offers a 100% first-year allowance for investments in certain energy-saving kit. Not only does this mean businesses can cut energy costs but they can write off the cost of the kit against that year's taxable profits.

In addition, the Carbon Trust has worked with organisations such as the Catering Equipment Suppliers' Association to launch the Cut Costs & Carbon Calculator. The tool allows restaurants to calculate the energy cost and the amount of carbon used to prepare each dish on the menu, with restaurants able to run different kitchen scenarios to see where savings can be made and how a menu could be altered to cut energy usage. "The calculator helps businesses align their menus so they can cut energy usage," says Burbridge. "It's a tool that you can take to your menu team and show them the impacts of their decisions. If you're adamant you don't want to make changes it at least



Easy energy-efficiency tips

- **Avoid overheating your restaurant.** Check thermostats and controls regularly
- **Switch off kitchen extraction hoods** when not required
- **Avoid excessive cooling;** air conditioning is rarely necessary below 24°C to 26°C
- **Install spray water taps,** which use less hot water and energy
- **Consider energy-efficient lights,** such as LED lamps that use up to 80% less energy than tungsten GLS lamps. Low-energy lighting can also reduce air-conditioning costs
- **Review the condition** of your refrigerator door seals
- **Turn off refrigeration appliances** that store non-perishable goods such as soft drinks when they do not need to be cool
- **Purchase energy-efficient A-rated equipment,** preferably A++ rated. See the Carbon Trust's Accredited Suppliers in its *Green Business Directory*

means you understand where the costs are."

Sol Goodall, managing director at hospitality maintenance company Olive Services, is also an advocate of sensible decision making. If opening a new site, businesses should look to the new wave of hyper-efficient fridges that can run at a 10th of the power of standard ones, he says. But significant changes can also be made at existing sites with some smart thinking. The heat that air-con units generate, for example, can be used to heat water, while heat generated by fridges can be countered by water rather than air cooling.

According to Goodall, a number of kitchens are already using ground water, and even mains water, to reduce the heat that fridges emit and cut the air-con requirements of a kitchen where the costs of water are lower than the associated energy costs. "There are a few simple things that restaurants can do to reduce costs," he says. "People tend to put in a piece of kit, but don't consider the costs of running it."

The trend for energy-sapping Edison-style lightbulbs is a case in point. "They are beautiful, but the energy consumption is astronomical," says Goodall. "They also give off a lot of heat, which requires the air con to work harder."

Goodall predicts that, as energy costs continue to soar, restaurants will become more receptive to reducing their energy usage, even down to the lightbulbs. "The industry is still quite wasteful. It's changing as the costs of supply are rising, but there are many improvements to be made." ■

Burning issue: the Carbon Trust predicts electricity and gas bills will rise by up to 30%

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