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A green way to cut costs

Businesses can qualify for energy rebates, consultant says

By MARTHA WILSON
Mon, Oct 11 - 4:53 AM



Dale Robertson, president of Enerscan Consultants Ltd., works with companies in various industries to help them reduce their energy costs. (Darren Calabrese)

DALE ROBERTSON, founder of Halifax-based Enerscan Consultants Ltd., has been passionate for decades about helping companies reduce their energy use.

"In tough times, like now, it can mean the difference between survival and failure," he observes.

Most homeowners are now familiar with the idea of home energy assessments and upgrades that qualify for rebates. Fewer business owners know that they may qualify for the same types of programs.

Robertson's company, Enerscan Consultants, works with firms in fields like mining, forestry, fishing and pulp and paper to lower their energy costs. Three primary costs that manufacturers contend with, he points out, are labour, materials and energy.

"Energy is a small component, but one where you can make a huge difference relatively easily and painlessly," he says.

"The first 10 to 15 per cent might even be free," accomplished by measures like better vigilance in turning off equipment.

Canadian manufacturers, he notes, need to be aggressive in seeking such simple ways to cut their costs, especially since the exchange rate has caused so many of them pain.

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"Consider it an opportunity to save money," says Robertson. "And those are savings that can contribute directly to the bottom line. The benefits from energy management are many and the drawbacks are few."

Enerscan offers services like energy audits and energy-use monitoring, feasibility studies and retrofit design, along with project planning and implementation.

Robertson sees it as a growing field.

"People will continue to recognize the benefits of this topic at an accelerating pace; we're not even close to full potential," he says.

Making the idea even more attractive to business owners are the grant programs available for commercial and industrial enterprises.

"We have absolutely spectacular programs — the best I've seen in 30 years," Robertson says. "It's all about saving energy. It really is good, what our country's done."

For information on qualifying for grants and rebates from the federal government, visit the Natural Resources Canada website and go to the Office of Energy Efficiency pages. They have a section for commercial and institutional applicants.

Another website that Robertson suggests checking out is Nova Scotia Power's. Look for the Business Energy Rebates page. Different sections cover eligibility for rebates, the application process, FAQs and more. Upgrades that business owners may find are eligible for rebates can include lighting, motors and variable-speed drives, HVAC and refrigeration equipment, and compressed air equipment.

It makes sense to take advantage of these programs, Robertson says. They serve the greater good, by reducing fossil fuel consumption and the effects of greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, the programs are a boost for the wallet. As Robertson puts it, "Everybody wants the free money."

For entrepreneurs who want to put an energy-reduction program in place, it's useful to lay out some goals and guidelines. Great intentions coupled with vague plans tend to get swept aside in the rush of day-to-day preoccupations.

Bruce Kelley, a senior consultant with the Saint Mary's University business development centre, advises, "Create a reasonable plan to make changes. Know who will do what. Identify gates or milestones for each stage, along with the timelines that will get you there. This approach will help you guard against letting an important project get lost or forgotten."

So while you're making plans to increase sales or win new customers this winter, add "Save money while cutting greenhouse gas emissions" to your list.

Thriving in Tough Times is a series developed by the Saint Mary's University business development centre, which has been helping Nova Scotia entrepreneurs for 20 years. Visit smubdc.ca.

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