

Frequently Asked Energy Management, Benchmarking and Energy Star Questions

Answered by industry professionals with successful energy results

By Priscilla Koeckeritz

Over several years of working with building owners, managers and solution providers, EnergyPrint has gained some great insights about the energy monitoring and benchmarking arena. This month I want to share some of the questions we've been asked and the answers industry professionals have shared with us, and our customers. The answers come from EnergyPrint's experience and interaction with property professionals, building engineers, consultants, contractors and others working in the energy management arena.

What is a realistic savings goal for property managers to communicate to building owners?

To answer that question, you have to understand the cost and consumption of a property and know whether it is a good, average or poor performer. You cannot manage what you do not measure. And setting and communicating goals needs to be based on data and insights.

Whenever possible, try to benchmark buildings by comparing consumption per square foot with others. You can use cost metrics in a similar manner. When both metrics are known, establish individual goals per building based on where they rate versus others in your portfolio. Flat is always good (especially when the price of the commodity is rising); being able to reduce the consumption is even better and can result in lower expenses.

How do you justify energy improvement projects for net lease properties?

Whether it's a net lease or a gross lease, for the tenant it's a total out of pocket. And if you have a net lease property and you're not competitive with another office building, you're probably going to lose your tenant if your operating costs are running higher than comparable properties. Managing tenant energy expense is a competitive advantage.

How do we convince building owners to spend money on benchmarking? What's the return?

It starts with the old action of what gets measured gets done – nothing will really happen until people actually measure, and measure it accurately. The returns for benchmarking energy are very positive – up to 15% if the information is used to take action and improve the building. But beyond the immediate returns on energy-related improvements, there are other factors that enter into consideration like employee issues, perceptions in the market place, competition, and the coming of the energy reporting mandates and CO2 tracking – people really want to take a

look at energy benchmarking in order to be more proactive across the board. Additionally, managing energy is good for maintaining occupancy and for increasing overall property value.

What is the basis for the ENERGY STAR benchmark?

The benchmark is set on a 100 point scale using a survey called the Commercial Building Energy Consumption Survey – the higher the score the better the building's energy performance. The EPA did the first energy rating survey in 1999, and the current rating is based on a survey completed in 2003. Information is normalized to your climate and adjusted for all the activities and primary energy uses (such as people, computers, etc.).

How much time does it take to enter and set up a building into Energy Star?

Just entering the information into the portfolio manager can be very simple and it may only take a couple of hours. However, the real time invested is collecting the data. For large buildings it can take several months if they're busy and they have to collect information from each individual tenant. If you have a single tenant building it can be a lot easier.

If you own a large portfolio of buildings, you have to multiply the time and effort, plus you may be working with many different utilities and billing statements – which can be confusing. If ENERGY STAR is something you want to pursue, dedicating resources to manage it internally or selecting an energy management partner to do the heavy lifting is important.

How do you use label like ENERGY STAR to market property to tenants?

When we see a label like Energy Star, we perceive the following:

- The building is efficiently run
- Costs for utilities are generally less compared to other buildings in the market
- Buildings owner's take into consideration comfort of their tenants
- It shows a conservation commitment from the owners and management company

Are there any best practices that increase ENERGY STAR ratings?

A common best practice is to ensure all of your building HVAC equipment is running at a high efficiency level. One way to do this is by a re-commissioning of the major building systems; the re-commissioning validates that the equipment is running as designed.

There are also low cost and no cost opportunities in most buildings. Some of the biggest effects we've seen are cultural changes organizationally. Training people to turn off the lights and turn off computers. Reducing the building operation hours – such as getting the cleaning people in at 7pm instead of 10pm. Reducing the number of hours the lights are on and operating systems are running – these are easy, low hanging fruit items.

What are the benefits of working with an Energy Star Benchmarking partner versus just working directly with Energy Star?

The Energy Star resources online are good, but nothing beats having somebody who has been through the process numerous times to help you to establish meaningful energy goals and achieve them as cost effectively as possible. Using a partner can also provide a more effective and less costly way to accomplish your consistent benchmarking goals. The Energy Star partners are tried and true partners for developing and implementing and refining your energy management goals. There are categories of Energy Star partners for them and a really easy to use online directory located at www.energystar.gov . On the right hand side there is a quick finder with a service provider's directory to locate Energy Star partners.

Priscilla Koeckeritz, President & CEO of Twin Cities-based EnergyPrint, Inc (www.EnergyPrint.com), invites comments and questions about this column. She can be reached via phone at 651-357-9100, or via email: Priscilla.Koeckeritz@EnergyPrint.com.