

Save your energy

Energy efficiency audits can be a valuable tool in reducing expenses

INTERVIEWED BY MARK SCOTT

Business owners who continuously evaluate the energy it takes to power their company and then search for ways to do it more efficiently can significantly reduce their expenses, says Christopher J. Allwein, Of Counsel at Kegler, Brown, Hill + Ritter.

“It’s easy to remember to turn out the lights when you leave a conference room,” Allwein says. “That’s conservation. Energy efficiency is finding ways to do what you need to do to power your business, but do it with less energy. With the rapid pace of technological innovation, it’s important to go back every so often and look at what’s out there to make your business more energy efficient.”

Smart Business spoke with Allwein about developing good energy efficiency practices.

What are some easy steps a company can take to be more energy efficient?

You can begin your pursuit of greater energy efficiency by hiring an energy services professional to come in and conduct an audit of your power usage. If your company is within the territory of an investor-owned utility, contact that utility and review what programs are available for businesses.

Start by identifying obvious areas where efficiencies can be gained cost-effectively (lighting, motors, etc). Next, reexamine processes that may be energy intensive and see if there is a way to accomplish the same result with less energy. Maybe there is a strategic opportunity to cut a couple steps out of a process or new technologies that could enable you to complete that process more efficiently.

What is cogeneration?

Cogeneration, more commonly known as combined heat and power, or CHP,

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integrates the production of usable heat and power in a single, high-efficiency process. It is not a single technology, but an integrated energy system that can be modified depending upon the energy needs of the process or end-user. Most CHP facilities employ a natural gas generator, but the process is fuel neutral, meaning you could also employ waste heat, fuel oil, etc.

CHP generates electricity and captures the heat byproduct, which can be utilized for space conditioning or as part of a manufacturing process. It reduces the amount of electricity that a business has to pull through utility wires. It’s more efficient because you have excess heat capture that you can now use to power another part of your business. CHP facilities are typically between 70 and 80 percent efficient.

What programs are available to help fund such energy efficiency initiatives?

There are several available from Ohio utilities. Dayton Power & Light just announced a program that provides a fairly significant incentive not only for the project itself, but it also provides funding to offset the cost of an audit. American Electric Power (AEP) Ohio and Duke Energy have also proposed or provided incentives for customers participating in their programs.

If you receive service from an investor-owned utility and think your company might

have potential for a CHP facility, you should contact that utility to see what is available. A good approach is to identify the opportunity and then look for rebates or incentives that are available either through the utility or through the state and federal government to offset the cost of the facility and decrease payback time.

What else can companies do to promote energy efficiency?

The best eyes and ears to discover that potential are your employees. Talk to your employees and department managers about the processes they follow to complete their work. Find out if they have ideas to streamline a process. Energy efficiency helps the utility companies deal with forecasted increases in future demand. It’s a way to control future demand increases by making any increase more steady and predictable.

How does the process become easier with a new facility?

The idea of starting something from the ground up when expanding a facility or building a new location is something that is being emphasized in architecture and pre-construction engineering. By investing a little more upfront to make the structure more efficient, you’re going to save quite a bit once you’re in operation or once the new space is occupied. It’s a huge opportunity. ●