

Selling Green



Why it's a must for the distributor, the end user and the environment

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Ever since the concept of sustainability made the leap from obscurity to mainstream, industry after industry has been catching the environmentally-conscious bug and churning out more certifications, not to mention acronyms, than an optimist can count. For the foodservice sector, the green awakening occurred roughly two years ago, prompting manufacturers, big and small, to heed the call and produce with Energy Star® in mind. And heed the call they did. In a seemingly overnight fashion, equipment promising to help operators save water, cut utility costs and deliver longevity made their

debut on trade-show floors in mass quantities, signaling that they were up for the challenge to meet the demand.

Of course, that was two years ago before lending slowed to a trickle. Though the government's executive mandate to buy environmentally-responsible equipment still stands, and the National Restaurant Association is still pushing for restaurateurs to tame the energy-guzzlers grazing in their kitchens, it appears that the enthusiasm for "green" has been put on hold. At least, that's most DSR's take as they encounter customer after customer in survival mode. But Don Fisher, the head of consulting firm Fisher-Nickel, Inc., has a different take. Through his work with the San Ramon, Calif.-based, PG&E Food Service Technology Center (managed by Fisher-Nickel), he's been involved in developing test methods and standards for foodservice equipment for more than two decades, so he knows a bit about the subject.

"If there was ever a time when distributors needed to sell energy efficiency, it's now," he says. "There's no question that the recession will end and green will still be here; the foodservice sector will still be here. Even though things have changed, the chains are not forgetting about the sustainable restaurant or the green restaurant or the LEED® restaurant."

Take for example, Pizza Fusion. Started in 2006 by Vaughan Lazar and Michael Gordon, the organic pizza franchise touts its practically zero carbon footprint (its impact on the environment) with the same batch of zeal it pours into its vegetarian creations. Its restaurants are insulated with recycled blue jeans, its countertops are made out of recycled glass soda bottles and it uses hybrids to make deliveries. Granted, it's just one example—an extreme example—but Fisher is firm in his insistence that green has the potential to transcend mar-

kets—if manufacturers, distributors and consultants can peel away the hype and show independents how using energy and water efficiently can have a significant impact on their bottom line.

Some estimate that if a restaurant cuts its energy costs by just 20 percent, profits could increase by 30 percent or more, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. That's the Food Service Technology Center's (FSTC) idea of implementing green in the kitchen. Case in point: the low-flow pre-rinse spray valve. It's one of the apparent go-to-guys veterans like Fisher routinely throw out there to redirect a preoccupation with price. By switching from a high-flow pre-rinse spray valve to a low-flow unit (defined as 1.6 gpm or less), end users can save anywhere from \$100 to 400 a month on a typical three- to five-hour per usage day, says the FSTC. The payback is almost immediate, considering the unit costs about \$60, yet several operators have not made the switch.

There's also major savings in neutering leaky faucets and implementing a startup/shutdown plan to limit the time a piece of equipment sits idle. Cutting only one hour of broiler idle time every day, for example, could save an operator \$450 annually, says the FSTC. It's been effectively pushing the practicality of embracing energy savings for years by

providing end users with a mix of low-cost/no-cost best practices via its free webinars and website, fishnick.com. (Click on the "save energy" link for more details.)

"The energy costs associated with running a restaurant are enormous and it's important that distributors are cognizant of that," says Fisher. "The more they can do to help the end user squeeze savings the better. One way to do that is by promoting the energy-efficiency best practices associated with the equipment they're selling."

Of course to do so, requires distributors like Saratoga Restaurant Equipment Sales to make a significant investment in educating their people—about the market, the prospects, the products and the incentives, which can range from \$40 for a pre-rinse spray valve up to \$500 for a piece of heavy equipment.

One Dealer's Success in the Market

"Like everyone else, I'm faced with the challenge of reading through the marketing hype to decipher what's really energy efficient," says Dave Hummel, the president of Saratoga Restaurant Equipment Sales, Gansevoort, N.Y. "I have to know how to define energy savings, in terms of individual pieces of equipment, and in what format. Is it mechanical, in labor savings, water conservation or electrical usage?"

"The best thing that a dealer can do is to contact any agency in their area that's promoting energy efficiency and water conservation and educate themselves on what's available. There are groups of people working toward this 24/7 and if you do not have the information, you're not going to capture the customer base."

It also helps to have someone like Hummel leading

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Did You Know?

- Restaurants use five times more energy per square foot than other commercial buildings and five times more energy in the kitchen than in the rest of the building.
- Nearly three in 10 quickservice-restaurant operators and about four in 10 fullservice-restaurant operators installed water-saving ware-washers and toilet fixtures in the last two years.
- Energy costs represent 30 percent of a typical building's annual budget.
- Buildings carrying the ENERGY STAR® label consume about 40 percent less energy than typical buildings.

Source: National Restaurant Association

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the charge. When the longtime service technician left the refrigeration industry to open Saratoga, he brought his 25 years of mechanical expertise with him. One of the first things he tells new customers is that he's not a salesperson; he's a service guy who started a dealership. Then he gives them his pledge to pair them with the piece of equipment that *best* suits their needs, and he has a great track record of delivering. So, there's a trust factor there. When the local school district comes in to look for convection ovens, the purchasing agent trusts Hummel's recommendation. As was the case a few months ago, when Saratoga secured an order to place

combi ovens in a number of BOCES schools—after demonstrating combi-oven technology, energy savings, labor savings and a new technique in food prep.

"Most of our customers come in knowing they have a need, and have sought out information to the point where they have identified that need," says Hummel. "We take them from that point and enhance their knowledge base on the latest available technology.

"These days, you have such a smart group of people walking through the front door that you better be on top of your game when it comes to talking about technology and energy efficiency. If you're not, they're going to know it 10
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Green Glossary

Carbon Footprint – The total amount of greenhouse gases emitted directly or indirectly through any human activity, typically expressed in equivalent tons of either carbon or carbon dioxide.

Eco-Efficiency – The ability to produce and deliver desirable, competitively-priced goods and services while progressively reducing the ecological impacts of them. Being "less bad;" reducing emissions, recycling, product reuse, emissions regulations and other "end of pipe solutions" that reduce environmental degradation but don't stop it completely.

Green – The immediate impact of our products and practices, and the residual impact of our products and practices.

Greenwashing – The process by which a company publicly and misleadingly declares itself to be environmentally friendly but internally participates in environmentally or socially unfriendly practices.

LEED® – Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. A rating system and certification by the U.S. Green Building Council used to recognize environmental quality and efficiency in buildings. Standards are in place for New Constructions, Existing Buildings (Operations and Maintenance), and Commercial Interiors.

Nonrenewable Energy – An energy source such as oil, coal, or natural gas, or a natural resource such as metallic ore, that cannot be replenished or replaced in a timely manner after it has been used. (Also referred to as "Brown Power.")

Sustainability – (1) Meeting the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. (Our Common Future, World Commission on Environment & Development, 1987.) (2) A society's rate of use of renewable resources should not exceed their rates of regeneration; its rate of use of non-renewable resources should not exceed the rate at which sustainable renewable substitutes are developed; and its rates of pollution emissions should not exceed the assimilative capacity of the environment. (Elkington, John. *Cannibals with Forks*, 1998.)

Source: mtsseating.com

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Selling Green continued

minutes into the conversation.”

That’s why participating in the Small Commercial Kitchen Pilot program was a no-brainer. Two years ago, the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority—NYSERDA for short—approached Hummel with the specifics. Keeping in line with its broader mission to enhance the State’s energy, economic and environmental wellbeing, NYSERDA’s goal was to promote the use of energy-efficient equipment in the foodservice and hospitality sectors by partnering with distributors, manufacturers and reps to get the word out about its various services and incentives for qualifying products. (Guidelines set by Energy Star and the Consortium for Energy Efficiency were used to identify energy- and water-saving equipment.)

Once committed, Saratoga worked with NYSERDA to determine the pieces of equipment that were eligible for the program and stepped up its efforts to equip sales reps with the additional training necessary to *convincingly distinguish* energy-efficient models from their counterparts. Then, through a series of site visits, they reached out to key accounts to learn more about their energy usage and water conservation needs. For a refundable fee, NYSERDA also performed energy audits to pinpoint ways Saratoga’s customers could save energy by changing out a piece of equipment, updating their lighting or improving their ventilation system. Customers who decided to act on any of the agency’s recommendations received a refund for the initial fee. And though there were no guarantees, Saratoga was free to pursue potential sales based on those recommendations.

To summarize, it’s what Hummel likes to characterize as a painless and worthwhile process—if you’re willing to put in the work.

“Saratoga was a very enthusiastic participant,” says Ed Smyth, the Kitchens Pilot contractor for NYSERDA. “They ran several marketing promotions featuring the incentives for the lines they carried and integrated all of the NYSERDA materials into their sales efforts, which enabled the staff to quickly identify eligible equipment and provide the application material directly to the customer.”

As a value-add to current customers, Saratoga handles all of the paperwork associated with the incentive process; the customer just has to sign the application and send it in. There’s also a dedicated person on staff responsible for keeping track of the increasing number of eligible products and incentives—daily. It’s all about making it easy for the customer, says Hummel, who still continues to work with NYSERDA two years after the rollout of the pilot program, though he admits the sluggish economy has, somewhat, muzzled enthusiasm.

“Right now, a lot of people are struggling to keep their doors open, so the program is falling on deaf ears,” he says. “But you do have some operators that are still running successful businesses and have the cash flow to invest. These are the people you want to approach because if you can

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Serving the Government

On the other hand, there's TriMark Gill Marketing Co. in Phoenix, Ariz. Its customer, the Federal Government, is calling and demanding green—thanks to an Executive Order issued by President Bush in 2007 urging government agencies to "lead by example in advancing the nation's energy security and environmental performance." Which, of course, is good news for TriMark Gill and anyone else with a stake in the market.

"The government is going green in a number of ways, not just in sustainable structures or energy-efficient equipment," says Sue Schneider, the manager of TriMark Gill's Government Contracts and Marketing division. "Each facility has created a goal for 'greening' a percentage of their products and activities within a certain period of time to comply with the Executive Order.

"I just got an e-mail from one of our manufacturers who produces portable kitchens for the government to use when their primary facility is being remodeled. Their customer requested energy-efficient equipment for the trailer."

Anyone who doubts the staying power of green should visit GSA Advantage, one of many procurement sites TriMark Gill uses to keep its name and its products in front of government agencies. On the website's symbols page, there are icons devoted to products that contain recycled materials, a listing for items with environmentally-friendly attributes (e.g. water-conserving, lead-free, etc.), a category for non-toxic products and a handful for those adhering to a number of voluntary compliances and standards. At last count, TriMark Gill had 260 products listed on the site.

Soon, customers will be able to access those same products on a page dedicated to green at gillmarketing.com.

"They'll be able to click a green button and pull up energy-efficient and green products," says President Kimberley Gill Rimsza, who aggressively pursues suppliers that manufacture environmentally-friendly products to enhance the company's offerings. "One of the manufacturers we work with a lot, MTS, has actually helped customers with the LEED standards through their furniture production," she says. "They're very serious, when it comes to their commitment to the environment, and that's something we weave into our sales efforts."

A Manufacturer's Perspective

Sustainability Coordinator Jennifer White can't say with certainty that MTS Seating's decision to market its dedication to green principles has led to more sales but she does know their customers value their green efforts. Since packaging its green program and topping it with the SynerGreen® label, more customers are apparently phoning in to inquire about what the one-liner entails. Although, White points out the company has always operated with the environment in mind, even before it became a trend.

"It wasn't until a two or three years ago, when our actions began to have implications in the green marketplace, that we

decided to start talking about some of the things we were already doing as part of our regular operation," she says. "Most of our ads now have the SynerGreen® label in it and we believe we're garnering more interest from other parts of the market because of our green program."

More importantly for customers like TriMark Gill Marketing, MTS now has its processes documented, so distributors can assure their customers they're in compliance with the many standards required for government projects. Last year, MTS became the first hospitality seating manufacturer to earn the GREENGUARD Indoor Air Quality Certification® on its line of stacking, banquet and restaurant seating. The designation specifies that MTS' products do not emit any harmful chemicals or gases in the air.

"There are so many options out there and the demand for environmentally-friendly products is growing," says White. "Green is growing at an exponential rate."

That's why MTS created her position a year ago. It's a perfect match for a closet-environmentalist. Part of White's job is to research the various certifications and standards that seemingly appear to be popping up on the green landscape. And it's paid off, too, she says.

"We earned our GREENGUARD certification this fall, and it's helped separate us from the competition. That's the basis of my role—to see where we fit in the marketplace, to see what we can do to set ourselves apart from everybody else." □



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