

Support for “green” initiatives

Singer employees show their support for energy-efficiency

By Kevin Kevany

For Singer – 54 years in the electrical business and still getting stronger – “green” and “sustainable” mean energy-efficiency and cost savings for their long-established customers and new enquiries coming through the door at a brisk trot.

“We probably did hang back a little when the concept of green and sustainable moved out of the environmental category and into heavy politics, and left it to our customers to set the pace on how much and how far they wanted to go,” says Jeff McLaren, managing director of the Singer Group.

“You could say that we were simply going along with what our customers needed. That has changed dramatically in the last while, as we have experienced first-hand the phenomenal efficiencies being achieved with new technologies and products – substantial savings around the 22-40 percent range.

“With a couple of our bigger customers, that puts it into the million dollars a year mark. That’s significant, however big you are. No one can afford to ignore that sort of wastage, especially in tight times,” says McLaren.

Having been at the helm for some five years now, he is also taken with the positive impact this change in customers’ attitude has had on employee morale and workplace values generally.

“I don’t think Miro Erceg, the now legendary, long-service designer, who started with the predecessor company to Singer, will mind if I tell you that he took delivery of a Toyota Prius over Christmas, with all that says about the positive changes we see abroad in our industry.

“And I see that greater awareness and commitment throughout the company, right down to our daily recycling procedures and practices being enthusiastically supported.”

Rob Stirling, Singer’s “Green Man” takes up the theme.

“We have a large crew working on the refurbishing and upgrading of a major local authority building, right now in the Auckland CBD. Because of the essential nature of the service our customer in this case is providing, we are only able to access the building over a weekend.

“Normally that would entail overtime payments, but because of the personal commitment of the team and their passion for what the customer is doing (by installing new technology), they have been prepared to simply swap the weekend time for two days off during the week.

“I cannot think of a better example of Singer people standing behind energy-efficiency and sustainability than that,” says Stirling. “It also demonstrates the flexibility we are able to offer to customers who want to achieve energy-efficiency and cost savings, without disrupting their normal operations.”

Seemingly Auckland has “seen the light”, particularly when it comes to ... lighting.

Stirling points to large car parks, warehouses, dockyards and airports as the first to cotton-on to the benefits energy efficiency and was full of praise for the recent street lighting initiative undertaken by Michelle Dawson, Waitakere City Council’s corporate sustainability manager.

“It’s hardly surprising to find that Waitakere’s efforts across the sustainability board have recently been recognised with the award of EcoCity status by the United Nations. They have created a ‘living display case’ of first rate lighting from Philips, with their CosmoPolis street lighting and a very interesting LED offering, via China, from ImpactLed.

According to Singer’s “Green Man”, a significant chunk of the technology now starting to appear has been around for quite a while – but it is only now that the

local market is starting to want it.

“We think that is related to people finally having looked past the ‘political’ debate on global climate change and taken a look at what more energy-efficient technologies can offer in terms of bottom-line savings, and saying: Yes, please. I’ll help myself to that.”

He also believes we have only seen the beginning of the energy-efficiency/cost-saving benefit – sustainable – technological breakthroughs.

“Take Sainsbury’s supermarket chain in the UK: they already have a store with LED lighting right down to the refrigeration cabinet level. And we have the first hotel in the world without an incandescent bulb in it, and it’s nothing like an overlit TV studio at all,” says Stirling who prides himself in being right up to date with the latest developments.

He says Accor Hotels, Nederland has an ambitious worldwide sustainability programme called “Earth Guest”, which aims to achieve substantial savings in energy consumption, water usage and recycling.

“Obviously, lighting plays a fundamental role in creating the ambience of a hotel. At the same time, one of the major downsides of standard energy-saving lamps is that the light is too white, eliminating textures in fabrics and grains in wood, for example. And that is the essence of the challenge: cut the amount of electricity used without flattening the light to a point that it kills the desired atmosphere.

“This is particularly important for boutique and upmarket hotels,” says Stirling.

The Sofitel Cocagne, Eindhoven, with approximately 4,000 lights on its premises, opted to use halogens where the ambience was important, like the restaurant and other public areas, they give off a warm light, and can be dimmed. Waiting areas



(left) Jeff McLaren, Singer Group CEO, Rob Stirling, Auckland Contracts Manager and Jeff Reid, Auckland Interiors Supervisor.

at lifts, formerly lit by 35 W spotlights were replaced with 7 W LEDs which produce more light and use 80 percent less energy.

“With some new LED solutions the Sofitel Cocagne is using in the lobby, they are able to transform the ambience to match any occasion with a wide variety of colour combinations, too. And when you add the fact that LEDs last up to 15 times longer than incandescent lamps, with all the attendant lower maintenance and replacement costs, it becomes a no-brainer, really.”

By using a combination of halogen, (compact) fluorescent and LED lighting, the Accor group of hotels in the Netherlands – which uses about €4 million worth of electricity a year, with about 25 percent consumed by lighting – is realising average savings of around a third, by eliminating incandescent lamps, which translates into €300,000 annually.

Stirling says another exciting development he sees coming follows on the decision by UK supermarket giant, Sainsbury’s, to light the interior of its freezer cabinets across 350 stores using LEDs. For close on a decade, the company has prided itself as being “the world’s most environmentally-friendly supermarket chain” after creating the landmark outlet on the London

Greenwich peninsular, at Latitude 0 – slashing energy usage in a traditional store by half. That supermarket uses natural light, increased ventilation, heat capture and insulation, all of which save energy and lessen the impact on the surrounding environment.

“This latest LED breakthrough by Sainsbury’s is almost the ultimate commercial lighting challenge, since good quality light has always been a priority in a retail environment, to ensure merchandise is displayed to optimum effect. LEDs have evolved to the point where one of the most image-conscious companies in the world is saying they are happy to adopt that technology,” Stirling adds.

McLaren believes the company is uniquely positioned to acquire, install and maintain the new energy-efficient and sustainable technology.

“Our origins were on the maintenance side of the business and that has given us the insight and knowledge to intuitively detect inefficiencies and energy waste over some five decades. What we are finding very exciting is having customers suddenly interested in ‘light harvesting’, building management systems, looking at options for retro-fitting more efficient gear – and all of the time wanting to drive their energy-usage and costs way down.”

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