

Smart and simple energy solutions for retailers

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Image supplied. Steven Heilbron, CEO Capital Connect: "Making smart and sustainable energy choices, doesn't have to be complicated"

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Experts expect electricity prices to double in South Africa over the next five years, while Eskom's medium risk scenario forecasts 203 days of load shedding in the next 12 months.

Steven Heilbron, CEO of Capital Connect, says that higher electricity costs and frequent power outages are significant operational risks for retailers.

"While many larger stores run generators to keep operating through blackouts, retailers should also look at sustainable alternatives against load shedding and rising prices, says Heilbron.

"Having vision and making smart and sustainable choices, doesn't have to be complicated," he adds.

Steps to be more energy efficient

Although implementing solutions such as solar can be expensive, the return on investment over three to five years can be

significant.

“Solar power, paired with battery storage, can enable a retailer to keep running through loadshedding without expensive, noisy generators,” says Heilbron.

“Plus, it has the advantage of allowing a store to save money by reducing its use of municipal or Eskom power. It’s also a sustainable, environmentally friendly choice.”

Other steps retailers can take to become more energy efficient include something as simple as fitting closed doors to open perishable refrigerators or placing strip curtains between cold storage areas and the rest of the shop can make an enormous difference in the amount of power a food retailer consumes in a month.



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There are also opportunities to save money on lighting through steps such as outfitting the retail environment with LED lighting, which is more expensive upfront than incandescent or fluorescent lightbulbs but lasts longer and uses much less energy over its lifespan.

“Another simple step retailers can take is to use motion detectors to trigger lighting in low-traffic areas such as bathrooms, stockrooms and passages,” says Heilbron.

He adds: “Energy efficient lighting has the spin-off of reducing the heat generated in a store, which can help to bring air conditioning costs down, too.”

HVAC energy efficiency

Heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) is another area where retailers can achieve quick wins in terms of energy efficiency.

Modern HVAC systems with smart, central controls and features like heat recovery can enable a retailer to get the temperature right for customer comfort and food safety while ensuring efficiency.

“While it can be expensive to replace old fridges or air conditioning units, the energy efficiency of refrigeration technology has improved significantly over the years.

“Many retailers might find that upgrading to energy-efficient equipment will save them money in the long run,” says Heilbron.

“Retailers can also benefit from using the natural heating of the sun through large windows and natural cooling from clever ventilation rather than depending solely on artificial climate control,” he adds.