

Stop Selling Energy Efficiency. People and Business don't want it

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About this update

This dated news record has been reorganised for clear reading and connected to current guidance.

Publication date: January 30, 2018.

Status note: Present-tense statements, market figures, deadlines and program details in the archived record belong to its publication date. Check current official sources before making a decision.

What this article reported

'Energy Efficiency isn't sexy, nor is 'saving energy'; one sounds technical and difficult and the other sounds like you are a miser. I've heard a number of titbits recently that makes me realise there another part of the story to help get more buy-in from customers.

Here are a few quotes I've paraphrased to set the scene.

"People inherently view the Australian star rating on fridges as an indicator of the quality and it works so much better than in the US where they show the yearly dollar savings." Rob Murray-Leach, Energy Efficiency Council

"Our vision for the factory is that it will be cool and quiet, then we'll know it's highly efficient." Craig Morgan, Northmore Gordon

"We stopped selling the savings and efficiency of double glazing, LED lighting, good insulation and high efficiency heat pumps. Instead we talk about high quality apartments, which are highly liveable and very comfortable." Rory Martin, Fraser Properties

Put simply, those of us in the industry should start talking much more about the quality that results from energy efficiency. People desire quality. Classical Economic theory says that people are rational and they aim to maximise utility; to get the best value for money. But, people don't want something that's cheap and saves them money, they want something that's the best they can afford that improves their lives.

So back to energy efficiency.

LED Lighting really is superior to traditional lighting, it lasts much longer, degrades very slowly over time and can be manufactured in a wide range of colour temperatures.

Buildings with a good thermal envelope, good insulation, low-e double glazed windows, and high thermal mass are so much more comfortable to live in.

Temperatures change slowly and you don't end up with hot or cold areas, draughts, or noise from outside.

Buildings with good HVAC control systems maintain consistent temperatures, are nice to work in, and hence again are less wasteful.

Producing high quality in a consistent fashion involves carefully monitoring all inputs so it is the same each time, and nearly always, this minimises waste (energy, water, raw materials) and adds to the bottom line of the business.

Equipment that is well-maintained lasts longer, performs better and cost less to run over its lifetime.

The list goes on, but the underlying premise is that a higher focus on quality outcomes is a great way to frame energy efficiency for customers - and perhaps without even needing to mention the technical, complex and thrifty things that only the more cost-focused amongst us think about. It's potentially a way to engage to a much broad group of people in businesses as well as with the public. They may not care about saving money or the planet, but most people do want the best quality they can experience.

How to use this information now

For current use, confirm the applicable scheme rules, regulator notices, market date and reporting period. Keep historical prices or forecasts separate from present quotes and verified outcomes.

Separate source-reported facts from forecasts, targets and commentary. For a current project, retain the official source, version, effective date, assumptions and decision record in the evidence file.

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Why does Northmore Gordon argue that 'energy efficiency' and 'saving energy' are poor sales messages?

We contend that 'energy efficiency' sounds technical and difficult, while 'saving energy' carries connotations of being miserly or cheap. These framings don't resonate with what people and businesses actually want. Instead of promoting efficiency as an abstract goal, we recommend selling the tangible quality outcomes that result from efficiency measures—such as comfort, reliability, performance and durability—since people inherently desire high-quality experiences regardless of whether they prioritize cost or environmental impact. This reframing makes efficiency improvements more commercially compelling.

How does the Australian star rating system for refrigerators demonstrate the power of quality-based messaging?

Rob Murray-Leach of the Energy Efficiency Council, cited in the article, notes that Australians view the star rating on fridges as an indicator of quality, making it far more persuasive than the U.S. approach of showing yearly dollar savings. This demonstrates that consumers respond better when efficiency is presented as a quality signal rather than a cost-saving proposition. The star system succeeds because it communicates that a higher-rated fridge is simply a better product—more reliable, longer-lasting, and superior in performance. We use this insight to advise clients that positioning energy improvements as quality upgrades generates stronger demand than framing them as cost-reduction measures.

What is the connection between high-quality equipment operation and minimized waste in industrial settings?

According to the article, producing high-quality output in a consistent fashion requires careful monitoring of all inputs to ensure identical results each time. This disciplined operational approach almost always minimizes waste of energy, water and raw materials—directly benefiting the business bottom line. In manufacturing and industrial contexts, we apply this principle by framing energy optimization not merely as waste reduction, but as a quality-control imperative. Well-maintained

equipment lasts longer, performs better and costs less to operate over its lifetime, making quality and efficiency mutually reinforcing rather than competing objectives.

How do thermal comfort and indoor environmental quality relate to energy efficiency in commercial buildings?

We highlight that buildings with good thermal envelopes, quality insulation, low-emissivity double-glazed windows and high thermal mass deliver superior comfort: temperatures change slowly without hot or cold zones, draughts or external noise. Occupants experience these as quality-of-life improvements rather than 'energy savings.' For commercial-building owners and tenants, we recommend marketing retrofit projects around comfort, productivity and liveability rather than efficiency alone. This approach appeals to decision-makers across multiple stakeholder groups and justifies investment based on operational quality, making it easier to secure approval and demonstrate value beyond utility cost reduction.

Why does Northmore Gordon recommend that manufacturers frame energy optimization through a quality lens?

Craig Morgan of we stated: 'Our vision for the factory is that it will be cool and quiet, then we'll know it's highly efficient.' This encapsulates the quality-first messaging approach—operational excellence (cool, quiet conditions) signals high efficiency without mentioning the technical or cost dimensions. For industrial clients, we apply this by positioning energy management as part of a comprehensive quality strategy: consistent product output, reliable equipment performance and optimal working conditions all stem from disciplined energy and operational control. This framing makes energy investment a natural extension of quality assurance rather than a separate compliance or cost-reduction exercise.

How has Fraser Properties shifted its marketing of energy-efficient residential features based on this principle?

Rory Martin of Fraser Properties stopped emphasizing the savings and efficiency of double glazing, LED lighting, insulation and high-efficiency heat pumps. Instead, Fraser Properties now sells these features as components of high-quality, highly liveable and comfortable apartments. LED lighting's superior longevity, slow degradation and colour-temperature flexibility become quality attributes; insulation becomes a comfort and livability promise rather than a cost-saving message. We apply this lesson when advising property developers and builders: framing energy features as quality standards helps attract quality-conscious buyers and justifies premium positioning without reducing the offer to dollar savings or abstract efficiency targets.

What does LED lighting's technical superiority have to do with selling energy efficiency to consumers?

The article notes that LED lighting surpasses traditional lighting because it lasts much longer, degrades very slowly over time, and offers a wide range of colour temperatures. Rather than marketing LEDs as 'energy-efficient,' we advise clients to highlight these quality outcomes: longevity means less frequent replacement and disruption; slow degradation means consistent light quality; colour flexibility allows optimization for specific spaces and moods. These tangible benefits resonate with occupants and facility managers who care about reliable, high-performing lighting systems. This quality-focused messaging is particularly effective in commercial and residential projects where our energy assessment and retrofit recommendations include lighting upgrades as part of a broader livability or operational-excellence proposition.

How can Northmore Gordon help clients reposition energy projects to stakeholders using this messaging framework?

Northmore Gordon helps develop energy strategies and project business cases. By applying the quality-over-efficiency messaging framework, we help clients articulate energy improvements in terms

that resonate with decision-makers: buildings that are comfortable and quiet; factories that maintain consistent product quality and optimal conditions; apartments that are liveable and durable; water systems that perform reliably. When developing investment cases and procurement strategies, we can position energy initiatives alongside operational, comfort, reliability and brand-quality objectives. This integrated framing strengthens business justification and stakeholder buy-in compared to efficiency-only or cost-saving narratives.