

## SOLAR CASE STUDY: CURRENT CONSULTING, PORT IT



### Current Consulting is setting a positive example for neighbouring businesses.

Never tell Lis Fenwick that something can't be done. A director at electrical engineering consultancy Current Consulting, Lis was determined to install solar panels at the company's premises in Port IT business park, but there was a significant barrier to overcome.

The roof of the premises isn't owned by Current Consulting. It is common property, requiring 75 per cent agreement from other owners in the business park for the solar system to be installed, and many of them were not owner/occupiers or were absent and hard to track down. "The manager of the body corporate said to me, 'You'll never do it'," says Lis. "I said, 'Watch me'."

And so followed a concerted campaign of emailing, door knocking and cold-calling to lobby the other owners to post a ballot in favour of installing the solar system. After four months she had the numbers (only two owners voted against) and Current Consulting had the panels – a 3 kW system that has reduced power bills by 35 per cent.

### Features:

The solar system features 14 polycrystalline solar panels from leading manufacturer Canadian Solar, all tilted north on a frame. The panels aren't visible from the ground or other offices so they don't affect the building's exterior appearance.

### Location:

Office 82, 85 Turner Street, Port Melbourne

### System Size:

3 kW

### Estimated Annual Production:

4.5 MWh

### CO2 Avoided Annually:

5.8 tonnes

### Solar inverter:

Clenergy

### Solar panels:

14 x Canadian Solar 220 W

### Mounting system:

Clenergy

### Payback period:

6 years

### Upfront cost:

\$11,000

### Funding model:

Capital outlay (24 monthly payments)

### Installation date:

November 2011

### Installer:

Service Stream

## **Funding model and business case:**

The upfront cost was \$11,000, but after the initial deposit it was paid off in monthly instalments of \$400.

Lis says since installing the panels, Current Consulting has saved money in three ways. First, power bills have been reduced by about \$100 every month. Second, the company receives a feed-in-tariff of 67 cents per kilowatt hour, which is worth about \$60 a month. And third, there are savings from cancelling GreenPower, which the company decided wasn't needed after the panels were installed.

"This means we're looking at a five or six year payback period, and we're saving over 5.8 tonnes of carbon emissions a year," says Lis.

## **Key challenges:**

There were no major technical issues, so the only challenge was needing the approval of 75 per cent of owners in the Owners Corporation before installing the panels. Lis has now joined the committee of management and is putting forward a special resolution that would allow other businesses to sidestep this onerous requirement, streamlining the process.

Current Consulting also had to sign a licence agreement with the Owners Corporation to use the roof space. It was signed as a fixed-term agreement for a nominal fee.

## **Other benefits:**

Prior to installing the panels, Current Consulting embarked on a range of environmental upgrades, including de-lamping 30 per cent of existing lights, switching to energy efficient lamps, reducing paper use, sourcing ecofriendly products and suppliers, adjusting the airconditioning temperatures and times of operation, increasing recycling, placing solar protective film on all windows and installing a shower to encourage cycling to work. Lis, who is on the board of the Port Phillip EcoCentre, even collects all food scraps and coffee grounds from work and puts them on her worm farm at home.

In recognition of its efforts, the company is a member of the Silver Club under VECCI's Grow Me The Money environmental management program. "We take our corporate position fairly seriously, so we had an eye on being a good environmental corporate citizen," says Lis. "In terms of our standing as an organisation, our credibility has been enhanced. The solar system strengthens the company badge. We've been operating for 22 years and we believe that money spent now on looking after our environment is an investment in the future of the company – otherwise it could cost the Earth."

[melbourne.vic.gov.au/solar](http://melbourne.vic.gov.au/solar)