



## Remote Possibilities

CONTROLLING YOUR STORES' TEMPERATURE FROM AFAR CAN BE A MONEY-SAVER.

**ELECTRICITY CAN BE A SIGNIFICANT** monthly expense for hot tub retailers.

"Employees will play with thermostats," says Bob Dooley, owner of Lake Norman Pool & Spa. "And, God bless 'em, they'll go off and forget."

Dooley, however, found a way to reduce his company's energy costs. He installed \$99 Internet-enabled Filtrete thermostats from Home Depot on all the HVAC systems in his stores. Now, he can control the temperatures at all the locations, even when he's not there.

"[Employees] are not writing the check," Dooley says. "You take these steps not to be big brother, but in order to manage expenses. And energy is a huge expense."

Dooley was concerned that the thermostats might be "gimmicky," so he installed them in just one of his three locations in the Charlotte, N.C., area. "Now I've got all six units [two units for each store] that I'm monitoring on my smartphone, and it's worked out really well."

Dooley is able to look at the current settings of the thermostats using an app on his iPhone. From

### PROGRAMS FROM ELECTRIC COMPANIES

As power companies move toward time-sensitive pricing, many have started to offer Internet-enabled thermostats, meters and remote monitoring. Check with your local provider to find out what cost-saving programs they offer.

there, he can turn things off and on, or change the temperature. If he wants to program certain temperatures on certain days or times, he can log in and make those changes from his computer.

When Sam Boutros upgraded to central air in his home, he purchased an Internet-enabled thermostat similar to Dooley's. But when Boutros wasn't satisfied with its run-of-the-mill free features, Boutros, a veteran of the software industry, developed software to supplement those features. For a small subscription fee, his company InThrMa monitors HVAC systems, offering programming, a smartphone app and loads of reports so you can see everything your system is doing.

"The reports will show you, down to the minute level, what the current state and settings of the thermostats are," Boutros says. "Or you can blow it up to the next level — the furnace came on for 45 minutes, here's the starting temperature and the ending temperature. We roll it up to the day, the month and so on. So you can look at your usage history month over month or day over day. We also provide graphs so they can see this information visually."

Many variables will determine how much you can save using this type of monitoring and remote access. Dooley has had his thermostats installed for about six months, and the winter was so mild that they barely needed to turn on the heat. But, he adds, "I know I'll be able to report back with significant savings."

Boutros says they've seen customers save 3 to 24 percent using InThrMa, but the average is in the teens. Saving money isn't the only benefit to remotely monitoring and managing your energy. As information presents trends, you can spot inefficiencies before the bill comes.

"An employee will only call if they're uncomfortable," Boutros says. "They won't call or be aware if something's running inefficiently — maybe a belt is slipping or a compressor is failing. By virtue of monitoring it 24/7, you can detect those situations."

Since he began monitoring his stores, Dooley says he can tell which store isn't well-insulated and which store's lights give off the most heat.

"We've had programmable thermostats in the stores for years," Dooley says. "The unfortunate thing is the programs get messed up, or they'll stop working and you don't know about it unless you're by a location on a regular basis. So the ability to remotely monitor this high-overhead expenditure just makes sense. It doesn't take long to pay for setting it up in the first place." ■

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