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New Report Highlights Energy-Related Challenges Facing Small Businesses

Interviews with small business renters reveal ways that electricity providers can better engage with this often-overlooked customer segment

ATLANTA – December 8, 2021 – Small businesses tend to prioritize their day-to-day business operations, and most do not have the bandwidth or spare resources to learn about or investigate energy efficiency or green amenities, according to a new report from the [Smart Energy Consumer Collaborative](#) (SECC).

The “[Understanding Renters: Serving the Needs of Small Business](#)” research is based on 20 in-depth interviews with business owners that occupy rental properties across the United States. These commercial spaces include offices, warehouses, industrial spaces, retail/shopping complexes and more, while their industries include manufacturing, professional services, medical/dental, beauty, retail, construction and others. All pay for their electricity and have under 100 employees.

According to these interviews, plus an analysis of relevant publications, small business renters are often overlooked as utility customers and face critical challenges to becoming more energy efficient or engaging in utility programs and services. For example, landlords can be a barrier as many property owners are resistant to making upgrades – even when tenants volunteer to pay for them. The tenants interviewed interpreted the landlord objections they received as such:

- The building is old, and they don’t want to put any money into it.
- If they do it for one tenant, then they must do it for them all.
- The property owner does not see a need – they had someone look at the problem, and “everything was fine.”
- They don’t pay the energy bill so there’s “nothing in it for them.”

Regardless, many of the small business owners interviewed did not want to leave their current spaces despite uncooperative landlords or less-than-ideal conditions. They cited difficulties in moving an established business, the likelihood that rent would be higher elsewhere and concerns they wouldn’t be able to find exactly what they need in a new location.

The report also outlines steps that electricity providers can take to better serve small business renters, including energy audits. While many of the interview subjects were familiar with home audits, they did not realize they could receive a similar service for commercial spaces and welcomed the idea to identify opportunities for improving energy efficiency. Energy audits also provide independent justification for requesting upgrades from property owners.

The full “Understanding Renters: Serving the Needs of Small Business” report can be downloaded by SECC members [here](#) and is available to members of the media on request. The research team will be hosting [a free webinar](#) on the report’s main findings on Wednesday, Dec. 15 at 1 p.m. (ET)

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