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Solar power for small business pays for itself in 4 years

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When someone says "solar power" - quick, what do you think of? More than likely, you thought of your neighbor with those odd-looking panels on his roof, who brags about energy savings and freedom from his local utility. Or maybe you thought about the massive solar farms being developed by private investors, like the 4.5-megawatt one in Westford, Mass. You probably didn't think about small or medium-sized businesses, but that's about to change as the SMB market increasingly turns to solar.

Consider Lester and Marvin Gould, owners of the 78,000 s/f Gould's Plaza in Acton. New England Breeze Solar installed 230 solar panels on their L-shaped building's south-facing red metal roof in late February. Those panels are now happily absorbing sunlight and generating 43 kilowatts of pollution-free power.

They are also saving the Goulds almost \$10,000 a year in electricity costs, and will generate around \$15,000 a year in solar credit income for the next 10 years.

"While we're excited to go solar because we believe in using renewable resources, it was the rebates and tax credits provided by the state and federal governments that made it work for us," said Lester Gould, who also co-owns and operates the 10,000 s/f Gould's Clothing with his brother.

In Massachusetts, business owners who install solar can:

- Reduce operating costs through lower electric bills
- Generate revenue by selling solar credits (called Solar Renewable Energy Certificates, or SRECs) for between \$0.33 - \$0.55 per kilowatthour
- Increase property re-sale value
- Earn tax incentives from the federal government
- Receive a tax deduction from the state government
- Depreciate the system over five years.

The end result of these financial benefits is a virtually maintenance-free solar electric system that pays for itself in about four years - the shortest timeframe ever. After that, it generates income for six more years, and savings for 30 or more years.

"I'm surprised more retail centers like ours are not thinking solar. It's probably because they charge back electricity costs to their tenants, so they're not invested in the cost-savings. But if they realized they could generate income with SREC's, they would be running to the closest solar company," Gould said.

Business owners and property managers owe it to themselves to get a quote for solar electric or hot water - now, while the solar financial equation in Massachusetts is so strong.

Mark Durrenberger is president of New England Breeze Solar, Hudson, Mass.