

Bright idea

Will banning incandescent light bulbs be a boon, rather than a burden, for Nova Scotia businesses?

Nova Scotia businesses need not fear the province's recent ban on the import and sale on traditional 75 and 100 watt incandescent light bulbs.

At least, that's the narrative being spun by Efficiency Nova Scotia, a not-for-profit organization tasked with helping Nova Scotia residents and businesses use energy better. It says the move will save businesses money in the end. "There are huge savings for businesses when they do this changeover," says Donald Dodge, an Efficiency Nova Scotia spokesperson.

Minimum energy performance standards for light bulbs came into force in Canada on January 1, which led to the ban. But stores can sell their remaining stock of incandescent light bulbs and Dodge says Nova Scotians won't be fined for using them in their homes and businesses. Incandescent bulbs are being phased out because they waste too much energy generating light and don't last as long as their more efficient (but costlier)



competitors: halogen, compact fluorescents and LED bulbs. However, Dodge says as manufacturers produce more of the latter and demand for them grows because incandescent bulbs are out, prices will go down.

Not that businesses use a lot of small lighting anyway, according to Dodge. He says they tend to need four and eight-foot fluorescent tube lighting for their operations and most Nova Scotia businesses have already switched over to more energy efficient tube lighting. "Look at the cost of running some of these warehouses," Dodge says. "You can cut your lighting bill in half by switching."

For businesses which haven't done so already, Efficiency Nova Scotia's Business Energy Solutions program allows businesses which use less than 350,000 kilowatt hours of electricity a year to apply to upgrade their operations with energy efficient products, including lighting. Efficiency Nova Scotia says it will cover up to 60 per cent of the cost. It will also order the materials, install them and dispose of the old materials free of charge.

That's a deal provincial businesses likely can't afford to refuse.

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Slow burn

CMHC predicts less than robust housing market in 2014 for Atlantic Canada

Atlantic Canada Realtors, we come bearing bad news. Don't expect the region's housing market to heat up in 2014.

The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation's latest 2014 market forecasts calls for minimal growth in housing sales (less than one per cent) and housing prices (1.4 per cent) compared to 2013. The reason is, surprise, sluggish economic growth forecasted for all Atlantic provinces.

Alex MacDonald, the CMHC's economist for

the region, says 2015 could be a better year for the Atlantic Canadian housing market. That is when Irving Shipbuilding will start cutting steel to build the first ships in a \$25-billion contract to provide combat vessels for the federal government, the Muskrat Falls hydro project will be in full swing and BP and Shell could be exploring for oil and gas in Nova Scotia's offshore. "Hopefully that will stabilize and improve our [housing market] outlook going forward," MacDonald says.

CMHC's forecast for housing resales for the four biggest markets in each Atlantic province:



Saint John
2013: 1,550
2014: 1,500*
% change: -0.3



Charlottetown
2013: 475
2014: 460*
% change: -3.2



St. John's
2013: 3,450
2014: 3,400*
% change: -1.4



Halifax
2013: 5,150
2014: 5,600*
% change: 8.7

* Forecasted numbers. Source: CMHC

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Old school

In rural communities, a study shows money isn't the only way to win over an aging labour force

Business owners in rural areas need to do more than respect their elders; they would be wise to cater their work schedules to them.

So says Gordon B. Cooke, an associate professor at Memorial University's Faculty of Business Administration. Cooke's opinions are shaped by a 2013 study he and two other academics conducted that looked at how rural residents in Newfoundland and Labrador and Ireland view work quality.

The study, entitled "The nuanced nature of work quality: Evidence from rural Newfoundland and Ireland", is based on 88 interviews and found that for people living in these rural areas, many considered a good job to be one that allowed them to enjoy family and friends, hobbies and ample time off (unpaid, of course). "It's a work to live, not a live to work philosophy," Cooke says.

So what's the implication of the study's findings for business owners in rural communities? A key takeaway is that the majority of the labour available to them isn't made up of 20 and 30-somethings looking to make big money and work 50 weeks a year. Instead, these rural areas are populated largely by people 40 years of age and older who still want to work, but just not as often as they once did. Cooke thinks business owners need to adapt work schedules to this reality.

"Shrewd business owners who want to attract, retain and energize staff should be looking at older workers and customizing work schedules," Cooke says. "A business doesn't have to offer



a permanent, full-time job. That's not what is going to entice these people. There are people 58 years old who are keen to work another 20 years if they could get six months off."

That kind of flexibility might be more than many business owners are willing to provide their employees. But as rural communities get grayer in Atlantic Canada, Cooke thinks finding ways to employ the senior set on their terms could pay dividends for employers by giving them access to an underutilized source of human capital.

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American dream

Could a devalued loonie lead to an uptick in U.S. visitors for New Brunswick?

The fading value of the Canadian dollar versus the U.S. greenback isn't good news for snowbirds looking to catch a little sun stateside, but it could provide a boost to operators in the Canadian tourism business.

Take New Brunswick, for example. It's the closest Atlantic Canadian province to people living in the northeast United States. It shares a border on its western flank with the state of Maine. Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Rhode Island are close as well. So with the Canadian loonie's value recently

dropping to 90 cents versus the American dollar, could that convince more American tourists to visit New Brunswick in 2014?

Greg Hermus, associate director with the Canadian Tourism Research Institute, says a devalued loonie will have a positive impact for New Brunswick tourism. "For every 10 per cent decline in the value of the Canadian dollar vis-à-vis the U.S. dollar, we would see a five per cent increase in U.S. auto travel to New Brunswick," Hermus says.

Hermus says the Institute's

forecast for U.S. auto travel to New Brunswick was made before the Canadian dollar's value started falling and projected travel would increase two per cent in 2014. "Now instead of two per cent growth, we could be looking at four-to-five per cent growth," Hermus says. "This could even provide a boost from other international travelers because Canada is looking a little cheaper than the U.S. right now."

Surprisingly, statistics provided by the New Brunswick government show the number of U.S. resident border crossings into the province (by auto) of more than one night haven't changed much since 2008, even when the Canadian dollar was valued almost at par with the U.S. dollar.

	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
exchange rate	0.97	1.00	1.01	0.97	0.88	0.94
U.S. border crossings into N.B. by auto trips of one or more nights:	232,770	233,705	237,450	255,051	233,678	229,251



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- Tony Robbins

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Fight the (no) power

Rolling power blackouts got you down? We've got some solutions to the problem

Rolling electricity blackouts in January left Newfoundland and Labrador businesses seeing red. Just how are you supposed to turn a profit when power reliability in this province is akin to something you'd experience in Haiti?

Since they can't depend on government-owned Newfoundland Power to upgrade the province's infrastructure sufficiently so blackouts are a thing of the past, here at Atlantic Business Magazine we suggest business owners be proactive in ensuring their shops aren't left in the dark when the island encounters another stretch of foul weather. Here are three suggestions to help get you started.



Power by the people:

Invest in treadmills so employees can run in-house turbines to generate electricity? The plan could be a work scheduling nightmare, as business owners would have to make sure they had enough employees to get work done and generate electricity. But the strategy could be a real win-win. Not

only would it keep employees fit and mentally alert, it would eliminate the business's power bill and any excess electricity could be sold back into the grid, generating another revenue stream.

Old school lighting:

A chicken in every pot? How about a large candle at every desk? If the power suddenly goes out, just have your employees switch their computers to battery power and get them to light their candles so they can carry on with their work day. The pros to this? No loss of productivity due to low lighting and you'd create a unique, cabin-like office ambience. The cons? Your fire insurance premiums will probably go through the roof.



If you can't beat 'em, join 'em:

Unwilling or unable to spend cash on in-house electricity generation or old-time lighting options? Then why not institute rolling power blackouts on your own? Once or twice a week, without warning, just shut off the power. This will keep your employees on their toes and should make them more efficient and productive because they'll never know when work will grind to a halt. Sure, you might lose some staff who get fed up with your draconian scheme, but desperate times call for desperate measures.



Slow advance

The Bitcoin craze hasn't hit Atlantic Canada – yet

It's taking some time for Atlantic Canada to warm up to the Bitcoin concept.

At least that's the opinion of Halifax's Reed Holmes, who works in the fledgling digital currency business for Calgary-based CaVirtex. The firm is a trading market that allows people to buy and sell Bitcoins using Canadian dollars. "We're still way behind on using Bitcoin," Holmes says of Halifax. "Lots of university students and kids are dabbling in it, but it hasn't been picked up at the street level by merchants."

Never heard of Bitcoin? You are not alone. Bitcoin is a digital payment system that uses a "cryptographic" or secure computer algorithm. While it is legal, it isn't regulated by any government's central bank and isn't backed by any commodity like gold and silver. How it works is clients pay cash to earn Bitcoins, which are stored in virtual wallets and are mathematically generated by a peer-to-peer computer network. The fact that traditional financial institutions like banks aren't holding the currency scares off some consumers, but Bitcoin is being embraced in some Canadian markets. The first Bitcoin ATM was installed in Vancouver last year and similar ATMs have popped up in Toronto and Ottawa.

Could Halifax, St. John's or Charlottetown be the next place where acceptance of Bitcoin takes hold? It's possible, although Holmes says Atlantic Canada's small population and geographic isolation from Canada's Bitcoin hubs mean the technology could be slow to catch on here. "It takes a little while for people to wrap their heads around it."

But wrap their heads around it they will, Holmes predicts. He thinks a Bitcoin ATM will be installed in Halifax in 2014, and he expects digital currency to become more commonplace. He adds that it has advantages for consumers and businesses over other forms of currency like cash and credit cards. "I like the utility of it. You can move money so quickly and there isn't the same kind of processing fees along the way. You can save a lot of money."