



With Vegawatt, a Restaurant's Waste Oil Can Supply 25% of its Electricity (Interview)



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Published on January 19th, 2009

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Drivers of [WVO-powered cars](#) will either love or hate the work of Boylston, Massachusetts-based [Owl Power Company](#). Owl Power's founder and CEO, James Peret, has developed and launched a product they call the [Vegawatt](#), a fully automated cogeneration system for restaurants, designed to run on waste vegetable oil.

Peret's team says the Vegawatt system is more than just a basic generator. The device, which is about the size of consumer-size refrigerator, includes a turn-key waste vegetable oil (WVO) refinery that automatically transforms even the most disgusting used cooking oil into fuel appropriate to supply up to 25% of the electrical power a restaurant requires for lights and hot water.

I had a chance to speak with Ben Prentice, VP of Sales at Owl, who gave me the low-down on the Vegawatt.

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JR: How does the Vegawatt work?

BP: In short, the Vegawatt is a diesel generator that's been converted to run on waste vegetable oil. But what's most significant about it is that unlike most of the WVO cars on the road today, it requires no fossil diesel fuel for start up and shut down. We've created a proprietary, turn key process for restaurant owners that filters, heats, de-waters, and totally prepares the vegetable oil for use as a fuel. All you need to do is pour the oil in and it can run 24/7.

JR: What was the development process of the Vegawatt like?

BP: James Peret, our company's founder and chief engineer, took a hard look at people driving grease cars and realized that if you could use WVO to spin four wheels, you could apply the same principles to spin an electromagnet and create electricity. That led to discussion on ways we could directly benefit restauranteurs, many who struggle to squeeze out every dollar of profit they can in this challenging economic climate.

JR: Can you link several Vegawatt units together to create a larger power source.

BP: In theory, yes. But we've chosen to market a 5kW unit, based on the amount of waste oil most restaurants produce in a week (50-80 gallons). This will supply an average of 10-15% of the electrical needs of most restaurants, and at \$22,000 per unit, customers can usually get an ROI in about four years. We are currently developing a larger, 12kW unit for supermarkets and food manufacturing facilities that produce up to 170 gallons of WVO per week.

JR: What challenges have you faced marketing the Vegawatt to the restaurant industry. Have you had trouble changing restauranters' perception of how they traditionally dispose of used cooking oil?

BP: We've just rolled it out and sent out our first announcement last week. The phones have been ringing off the hook, so the word is definitely out there. Regarding the challenges, it's really too early to say. The restaurant industry is not known for embracing new technology, but many owners are becoming increasingly knowledgeable and conscious of their carbon footprints and what they can do to reduce it while saving some money in the process.



JR: Any maintenance that users need to be aware of?

BR: No. For the first two years, we handle all parts and labor. As part of that first two years service, we also closely monitoring how much energy is created and saved, so we can turn it into renewable energy credits which can be sold on the national market. We'll then amass those credits so that all our customers get a better rate of return than any one individual restaurant owner could ever get on their own.

There's also a federal tax credit of 10%. That, coupled with state tax credits, which vary from state to state, can dramatically increase the rate of ROI on the Vegawatt. As a former operator, I feel we've found something that can generate real savings for restaurant owners while doing the right thing in terms of making a significant, long-term environmental impact.

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