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CHOOSING A SOLAR SUPPLIER – AVOID THE PITFALLS!

You are contemplating spending a substantial amount of money so ask the questions and get a YES

1. THE BUSINESS

Have they been in the solar business long enough for you to feel confident? NO YES

A long time in business might mean a solid business, but it doesn't mean a long time in the solar industry and the experience that goes with that, so find out how long they have been installing solar.

Are they free of lots of customer complaints, legal actions and dodgy directors? NO YES

Often an on-line search will provide links to a history of the company from different sources. Care when looking at blogs as dodgy companies will often post their own blogs about how good they are so look for the real ones.

Can they provide testimonials or contacts with previous customers? NO YES

Talking with others who have dealt with the company can be important if you are unsure.

2. THE SALES PEOPLE

Are they providing an on-site visit to properly assess your job at no cost? NO YES

This would involve assessing the building for any installation issues, examining your power bill and discussing your power use to determine the daytime vs night time power use for correct system sizing.

Are the people trying to sell you a solar system, employees of the company? NO YES

Commission only sales people often have a focus on their commission rather than what you need. They are also more likely to apply high pressure sales tactics and they may exaggerate the benefits.

Does the sales person have design and/or installation accreditation? NO YES

If they haven't been trained on design and/or installation, they may not be able to realistically assess your situation and therefore provide the right advice and quote on an appropriate system.

Do they offer you a complete installation with nothing left for you to do? NO YES

Leaving it up to you as the customer to lodge rebates, obtain approvals and especially complete all the meter replacement requirements is a half-baked job and a trigger for you to find someone else.

Does the quote / contract detail the exact make and model of the equipment? NO YES

An unscrupulous supplier can tell you they are installing one product and install a completely different product and there is no recourse if the quote or contract doesn't provide the detail.

Does the quote provided give an indication of the savings you could expect? NO YES

There are many customers who have purchased a system based on verbal exaggerated claims only to be disappointed with the savings and with no redress on the company.

3. THE INSTALLERS

Are the solar installation crew employees of the company or long term contractors? NO YES

If they are employees or long term contractors on an hourly rate, they are more likely to ensure a quality installation. If they are fixed price contractors, usually poorly paid, their only interest is getting the job done as quickly as possible and moving onto the next job so they can make a decent living. This often results in poor quality of installation and corner cutting to get through the job quickly. Poor quality of installation can not only result in under performance of the system, but also has safety implications for electrical faults and potentially a house fire.

Is there an accredited solar installer on the installation team or supervising your job? NO YES

Without an accredited person on site it is illegal to claim the STCs (your deduction on the job). Ask for the accreditation number of the person who will be on site, and check that they actually turn up for the installation. Do NOT sign STC deduction forms or pay any bills if they have not turned up for your job.

4. THE PRODUCTS – PANELS, INVERTERS and for some jobs BATTERIES

Does the manufacturer of each product quoted have an office in Australia? NO YES

If they do, then the after sales support you expect for your system is likely to be available. If the manufacturer is overseas but has appointed a distributor in Australia with a long history in the industry and is an authorised warranty agent then you are also likely to have good after sales support. If there is no manufacturer, and/or the warranty is provided by the company selling you the system, then fingers crossed, because when the company stops trading the warranty disappears. The Australian solar scene is littered with companies that are here today and gone tomorrow and have left behind a lot of upset customers with a warranty not worth the paper it is written on.

Is the product being supplied fit for purpose? NO YES

Some products have been designed with specific applications in mind and may not work well if operated outside that application. For example, a product designed for on-grid applications may not work well in off-grid applications and vice-versa. Some products are designed to only provide system performance with internet connection or mobile phone Apps and may not provide the information you need to fully understand what is happening with your system if you have neither. Ensure you are informed about the limitations if any of the equipment chosen.

Will the product supplied meet your future needs? NO YES

Can the system be expanded in the future if that is needed? If not, what is involved to be able to expand? Can the system have batteries added at a later date and if so what are the limitations with size and type? If you have batteries installed, is the system limited to certain types or makes of batteries? If you want blackout protection does the equipment quoted provide that or can it be added in the future?

5. AFTER SALES SERVICE

Is the person providing your after sales service within reasonable travel distance? NO YES

If you have a system problem and the person responsible for looking after you is too far away, then it may be weeks or even months before you have someone able to check your system.

Will you receive comprehensive operating instructions and manuals at completion? NO YES

It is important that you as the owner are familiar with the system and what it can do, what is expected and that you have a point of contact for any queries regarding the system or someone to contact for service.

IF THE PRICE IS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE, IT PROBABLY IS. BUYER BEWARE.