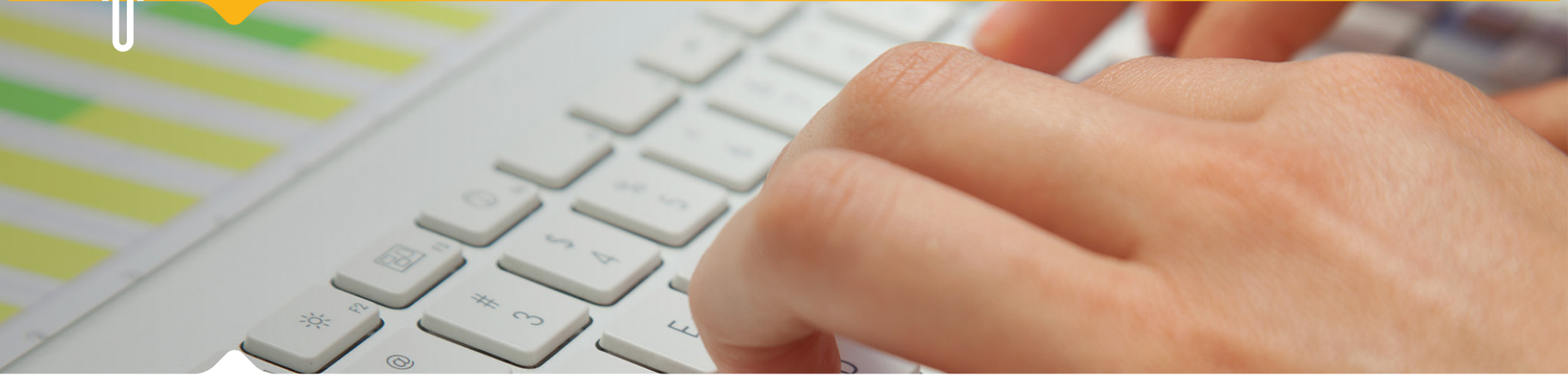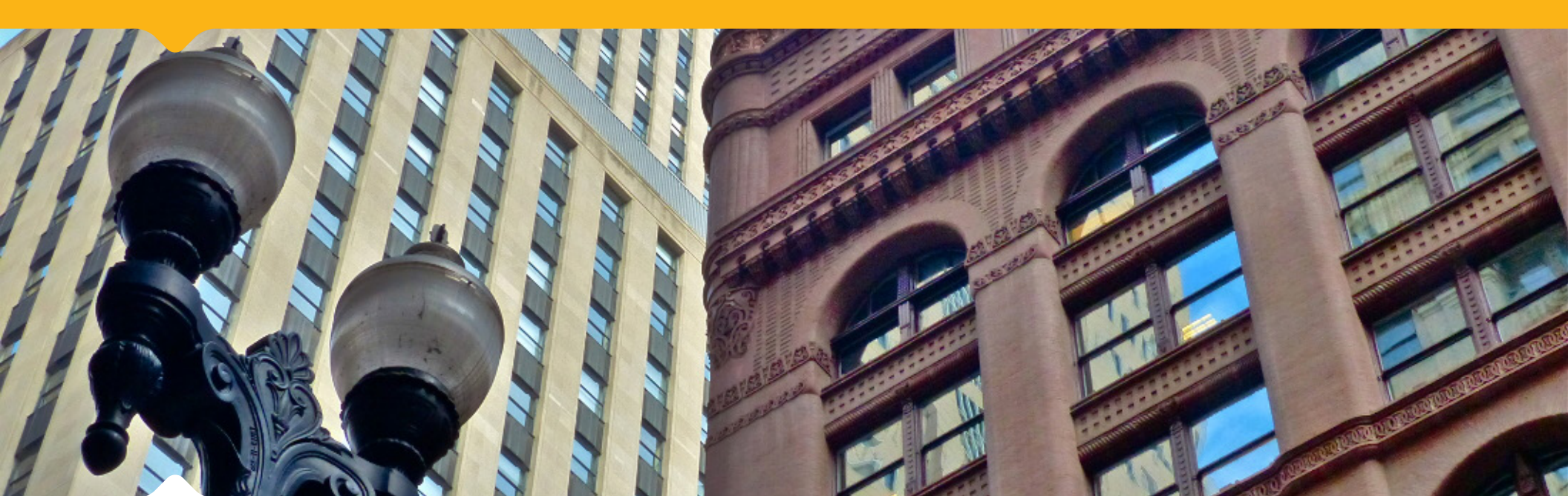# Top **5** Hidden Costs
of "Do It Yourself" Data Entry

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INTRODUCTION

If you manually collect, aggregate, normalize and enter utility data for buildings that you maintain and service in order to better understand their true energy usage and costs, chances are good you're falling victim to numerous hidden costs yourself.

And while some energy solutions providers have yet to embrace labor-saving data services platforms, cloud-based solutions do exist that could save you thousands of dollars per year—dollars that can be easily recaptured and sent right to your bottom line.

To understand the benefits of cloud-based data services solutions, let's take a look at the most common hidden costs of in-house utility data entry, one step at a time.

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1. It's inefficient and time consuming

Even in the simplest iteration, a building's utility bills typically come from 3-5 different sources, and potentially many more. In order to collect all of a building's utility data, first you must track down numerous bills from numerous places, some of which may exist only in paper form in a random filing cabinet somewhere in the maze of accounts payable. It can take days or even weeks just to track down the bills from all of the different utility sources and you haven't even gotten started.

Utility bills typically come from
3 to 5 different sources

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2. Aggregation and Normalization are not automatic or intuitive

Each utility company speaks its own foreign language. Bills reflect different date ranges, different datasets and even different units of measure...

Once you've collected the bills, the real work begins. And if you have any experience with utility bill analysis, you know standardization is not a given. Each utility company speaks its own foreign language. What's more, bills from different providers—or even from the same provider in different markets—are laid out and organized differently, reflecting different date ranges, different datasets and even different units of measure. On top of that, there are dozens—if not hundreds—of different data points available, only a handful of which are actually captured or presented in a "typical" utility bill. Before making sense of it all, you first have to "crack the code" to figure out what they're talking about, normalize the data (not an easy task) and then determine how to present it in a digestible format for your clients—assuming you haven't made any mistakes or overlooked key information.

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3. It's error prone and leads to costly mistakes

Data entry is a
tedious, mind
numbing task.

Nobody likes manual data entry. It's a tedious, mind numbing task. Even worse, once you've gathered a building's utility data, you still have to input the data into a spreadsheet, third-party software program or some other separate system that readies the data for analysis and normalization. You are hours into the process and you haven't even begun what you actually set out to do: analyze the building's energy use to find valuable insights and savings opportunities. Ideally, you're looking for baselines, patterns, trends and anomalies. You've spent hours and hours cleaning your data, and by the time you finally dig into the numbers, you've run out of steam. And without the attention span and mental energy required to fully analyze the data, you're in prime position to make a simple mistake or miscalculation that could blow up your entire building analysis. These time consuming tasks set the stage for making costly mistakes due to simple data entry errors.

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4. It increases lag time and slows decision making

30

Can you really wait 30+ days for relevant, accurate insights?

Utility bills are historical snapshots, not real-time reports. There is still tremendous value in capturing, compiling and analyzing this critical data—but time is of the essence. Utility bills arrive monthly, either electronically or via snail mail. And every different bill, from every different provider, arrives at a different time. Same thing with where the bills go: pieces of paper end up in one file, electronic data in another. It's a hassle from start to finish and you feel like an amateur private detective, rifling through file cabinets in one department or interrogating your co-workers in another. By the time you've followed every lead and tracked down every bill, the next cycle has begun. Now you're in reactive mode, responding to datasets that may or may not reflect what's really going on. Decision-making grinds to a halt as you wait for more timely, accurate data to justify a new project or prove the results of the last one. Can you really wait another 30+ days for more relevant, accurate insights?

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5. It leads to burn-out of high value talent

"Do It Yourself" data entry, can't help but overlook or fail to capture the vast majority of key data points.

Analysts and engineers are high-value personnel who want to do the jobs they were hired to do—not manually enter data into clunky spreadsheets or ad hoc software programs that barely scratch the surface. There's an incredible wealth of granular data out there. Properly used, these datasets can lead to valuable insights and smarter business decisions. "Do it yourself" data entry, on the other hand, can't help but overlook or fail to capture the vast majority of key data points. From the proverbial 30,000-foot view of your entire building portfolio, right down to a specific project in a specific building for a specific month—a robust data services platform gives your engineers and analysts the information they need to do what they do best—finding better, smarter and more impactful energy solutions to improve building performance for clients.

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As you can see, the costs of in-house data management may not be immediately obvious, but they are very real and highly preventable. What's more, manual data entry is simply a lousy user experience. In today's world, when there's seemingly an app for everything, low tech, DIY solutions lead to user burnout and high levels of frustration. But it doesn't have to be that way. Data services solutions do exist and the best ones are highly intuitive and frictionless.

The best cloud-based data services platforms are designed to routinely collect, aggregate, normalize and visualize utility data for buildings with zero administrative burden for the end user. Needless to say, there are numerous advantages and strong points to utility data services— with some unique benefits for energy services and solution providers.

Operational efficiency and speed

Data services platforms are faster, more efficient, more accurate and virtually worry-free. Precise, timely data is gathered on an ongoing basis, processed effortlessly and delivered seamlessly.

Look for a software platform that will gather, enter, normalize and standardize data for you. This will set you up to make quick and easy comparisons with simple metrics that your clients will easily understand.

Now, the engineers and analysts can dive right into crunching the numbers and digging deeper, instead of manually entering data and creating unwieldy spreadsheets. High-value talent can spend their time doing exactly what they were hired to do— providing energy-saving solutions for your clients.

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Reduce administrative burden and cost

Think about who currently gathers utility data for the buildings that you maintain and service. Is it an engineer or analyst? Maybe even a member of your sales or customer service team? Who builds your spreadsheets or manually enters the data into a third-party program?

A data services platform works seamlessly in the background, effortlessly gathering utility data and validating information. Put your engineers and sales personnel back to work building your business by eliminating the time they waste on "busy work." Factor in the dollars you net from reduced internal labor, and the cost of a cloud-based data services platform is essentially zero. How's that for return on investment?

Create more and better customer touchpoints

You are a building solution expert. Your customers hire you to maintain and service their buildings. One way to add value to that equation and separate yourself from the pack is position yourself as your client's trusted energy advisor by demonstrating real ways to increase energy efficiency and recapture wasted dollars. A data services platform is a great customer engagement tool, especially when integrated into ongoing customer meetings. Every month, new data points will help spark important discussions and raise key questions, helping you to build and foster important relationships and lay foundation for new service contracts and projects.

Prove ROI and find new business opportunities

Similarly, utility analysis reports that demonstrate energy savings from the completion of past projects, or even something as simple as regularly scheduled maintenance, are the perfect way to prove ROI. Unbiased, objective data from a third-party solution easily shows your customers how valuable you are, and how their savings really add up. The best data services platforms can present data in a simple, easy to understand visual format. Build trust with your customers while also building the case for additional projects and services. Extend your existing maintenance agreements and explore new opportunities by definitively proving your value as the trusted energy advisor.

Put your engineers and sales personnel back to work building your business by eliminating the time they waste on "busy work."

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Imagine...

...what if instead of using your engineering, sales or other high-value staff to manually collect, aggregate, normalize and enter utility data for buildings that you maintain and service, a cloud-based data services platform did all the heavy lifting? Finally, you and your customers could focus on using utility data to make smarter, more impactful decisions while eliminating hidden costs and administrative burden. Stop hassling with utility bills and get back to the business of doing what you do best—giving your customers unrivaled value and customer service.

Find, Track & Prove
savings for the buildings you serve.

Are you ready to leverage the true power of utility data for your business? With EnergyPrint's utility monitoring and data services, you will eliminate unnecessary administrative burden, increase operational efficiency and keep your customers engaged for the life of the building—and beyond.

Better insights, better engagement, better opportunities.

Learn More

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