

Resource Solar LLC

Providing full-service solar solutions to residential and commercial clients

BY MEGHAN BOYER

AS A GROWING SUPPLIER OF SOLAR-thermal systems to residences and businesses in Wisconsin, Resource Solar LLC helps mitigate misconceptions about solar energy use in the northern United States. "We always hear that Wisconsin does not have a sufficient solar resource to justify solar installations, but that's incorrect," says John Young, CFO of Resource Solar. According to Young, Wisconsin has more solar-energy potential than Germany, which produces roughly 50 percent of the world's solar-electric power and leads Europe in the amount of installed solar-energy systems.

To supply Wisconsin buildings with cost-effective energy while reducing dependency on nonrenewable resources, Resource Solar creates custom-designed solar-thermal system installations. "Our company is not married to any one type of solar-thermal collector or to any one manufacturer," which is an important difference between Resource Solar and many of its competitors, Young says.

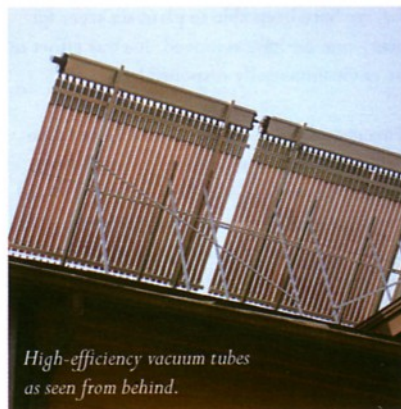
Founded in Madison in late 2007, the start-up company's five owners spent the first year establishing the company through marketing efforts before focusing on project opportunities in 2009. The early marketing focus resulted in fewer projects initially, but the company looks to expand its projects, with 12 already completed in solar-thermal system installations, site assessments, and repair work. The company in 2008 posted less than \$50,000 in sales but looks to roughly double that total in 2009, with projected sales of close to \$100,000, Young says.



Residential solar hot-water collectors.

Young—with fellow owners Mike and Greg Ward, Adam Chern, and Mark Daugherty—created Resource Solar to combine their respective skill sets into a business that helps people consider their long-term energy use. Young, Chern, and Daugherty contribute knowledge from their respective backgrounds in finance, property management, and technology, while the Wards contribute more than 30 years of hydronic heating-system installation experience. The brothers also own E&W Heating and Air Conditioning Inc. and are skilled in system design. Resource Solar subcontracts to E&W, among others, for labor during projects and currently does not employ a salaried project team.

In working with potential clients, Resource Solar addresses both the financial and ecological benefits of solar energy. "When we provide proposals to customers," Young says, "we like to think about it in terms of the environment." For instance, a recent grocery-store proposal noted that a 200-square-foot system would eliminate roughly three metric tons of carbon dioxide annually.



High-efficiency vacuum tubes as seen from behind.

Financially, residential clients' systems will pay for themselves in roughly 12–17 years, while commercial systems potentially could pay for themselves in 5–11 years, he says, noting that the estimates are dependent on market conditions. Projects can receive incentives and grants to help lower costs. Resource Solar is a Wisconsin Focus on Energy renewable-energy market provider, and its customers can receive up to 30 percent in cash-back rewards to help fund installation costs.

AT A GLANCE: LOCATION: MADISON, WI / YEAR FOUNDED: 2007 / AREA OF SPECIALTY: SOLAR-THERMAL SYSTEMS
PROJECTS SINCE INCEPTION: 12 / PROJECTED 2009 SALES: \$100,000



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—John Young, CFO

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Resource Solar hopes to soon begin signing thermal-power purchasing agreements with businesses in utility-style arrangements. “Our company would sell the thermal energy to the customer over a 5–10-year period,” Young says. At the end of the agreement, the customer would purchase the equipment at a discounted price, potentially between 25 percent and 35 percent of the original cost, he says.

While the benefits of solar energy are great, not every business or residence is a good match for solar-thermal systems. There are two aspects to consider when choosing projects, Young says: solar resource and hot-water needs. If a building’s roof receives too much shade, it could not effectively sustain a solar-thermal system, he says. Additionally, the building must have a sufficient need for hot water. Young believes Resource Solar is poised for growth in the commercial sector because many businesses—such as hotels, healthcare facilities, and water parks—have large hot-water needs.

As the company continues expanding in Wisconsin, Young envisions hiring a full-time marketing executive to focus on promoting the company, as well as the overall environmental benefits of solar energy. “If people are willing to look at the horizon [over] 30 years,” Young says, “solar-thermal systems can be very competitive when compared to other energy-delivery system.” GBQ

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