



What stands between you and a successful Christmas dinner



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It's 11 am on Christmas eve in Brussels and you are preparing the family dinner when your heating system suddenly breaks down. You frantically look for the number of a heating technician, miraculously find one and beg him to come fix it before your dinner is served. While you are hoping for a free slot in his

overbooked schedule, you think back to last summer: holiday or new heating system? I guess you went for 'holiday'. It seemed a good idea then...and a bad choice now, as your technician gives you an appointment for 30 December at the earliest.

If this story resonates with you, it is because installers of heating systems are a ‘precious good’ and a scarce resource and we realise it only when we need one. Not only they fix your broken heating system, they also literally bring the energy transition into every home, by advising consumers like me and you and by installing the modern technology which is most suitable for our house.

Their role is important, because while the European Union has set ambitious climate goals for buildings by 2050, it has failed to think about how to drive millions of consumers to adopt new technologies. Installers certainly have a pivotal role in influencing consumer choices.

A recent survey conducted by Centerdata reveals that 96% of consumers who had recently purchased a new heating appliance relied on the advice of installers in making their decisions. Installers not only guide consumers but also act as the linchpin between manufacturers and end-users. Manufacturers depend on installers – who are mostly small businesses and heating manufacturers’ clients - to install their systems, making them a crucial bridge in the adoption of new technologies.

Buildings need energy-efficient heating

The buildings sector accounts for a substantial 40% of energy consumption in Europe. Addressing it is important to reach climate-neutrality in Europe. The challenge of reaching these goals is underscored by the inefficiency of most European buildings, particularly in their heating systems, which contribute to a staggering 80% of a building’s energy consumption. To meet these challenges the focus is on replacing (faster than at today’s 4% annual rate!) outdated heating systems with innovative, renewable energy-based technologies such as heat pumps, solar thermal systems, hybrid heat pumps, green gas appliances etc. It is installers and maintenance technicians that actually carry out the replacements of old systems with modern ones.

Reskilling Installers: A Dual Challenge

The heating industry estimates that there are currently 1.5 million installers in Europe. On average, they are 50 years old. Most of them have predominantly worked with traditional gas and oil technologies. To meet the EU’s ‘REPowerEU’ goals, which aim to install 30 million hydronic heat pumps in European homes by 2030, we face a dual challenge. Firstly, 50% of existing installers must be retrained to work with new

technologies such as heat pumps and, secondly, our societies need to attract another 750,000 new, young talents to meet the growing demand.

Overcoming the Catch-22 Situation

Despite massive investments from the heating manufacturing industry in new training facilities and programs, there exists a catch-22 situation. Installers, being small independent businesses and the clients of the manufacturing industry, are less motivated to retrain when they already have enough installation and maintenance work today. To address this, the industry is offering them training in essential new skills, including electrification, digitalization, hybridization, system optimization, and the safe use of new refrigerants and green gases.

Teaming up with installer associations and other partners, the heating manufacturing industry is launching campaigns to highlight the benefits of pursuing a career in heating technologies and HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning). These campaigns emphasize the local job opportunities, the secure future and the meaningful purpose of contributing to the energy transition on a grassroots level. An interesting example of such campaigns is ‘Zeit zu starten’ promoted jointly by the German heating industry and the German installers association (zeitzustarten.de).

Attracting New Talents: A Collaborative Effort

The industry and its partners are making strides, but this is not enough. Public administrations at both national and European levels must play their part. Initiatives such as matchmaking laid-off workers with similar skill sets, nationwide communication campaigns, consideration of targeted and innovative migration policies as well as curricular upgrades that focus on new technologies are essential to preparing the future workforce for the evolving needs of the sector.

Achieving the EU’s climate goals requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders. By recognizing the pivotal role of installers, investing in their reskilling, and attracting new talents to the sector, Europe can contribute significantly to the transformation of its buildings. Public administrations must actively support industry efforts, to ensure a smooth and effective transition toward a sustainable and climate-neutral future. And an old, inefficient heating system should never stand between you and a successful Christmas dinner. ■