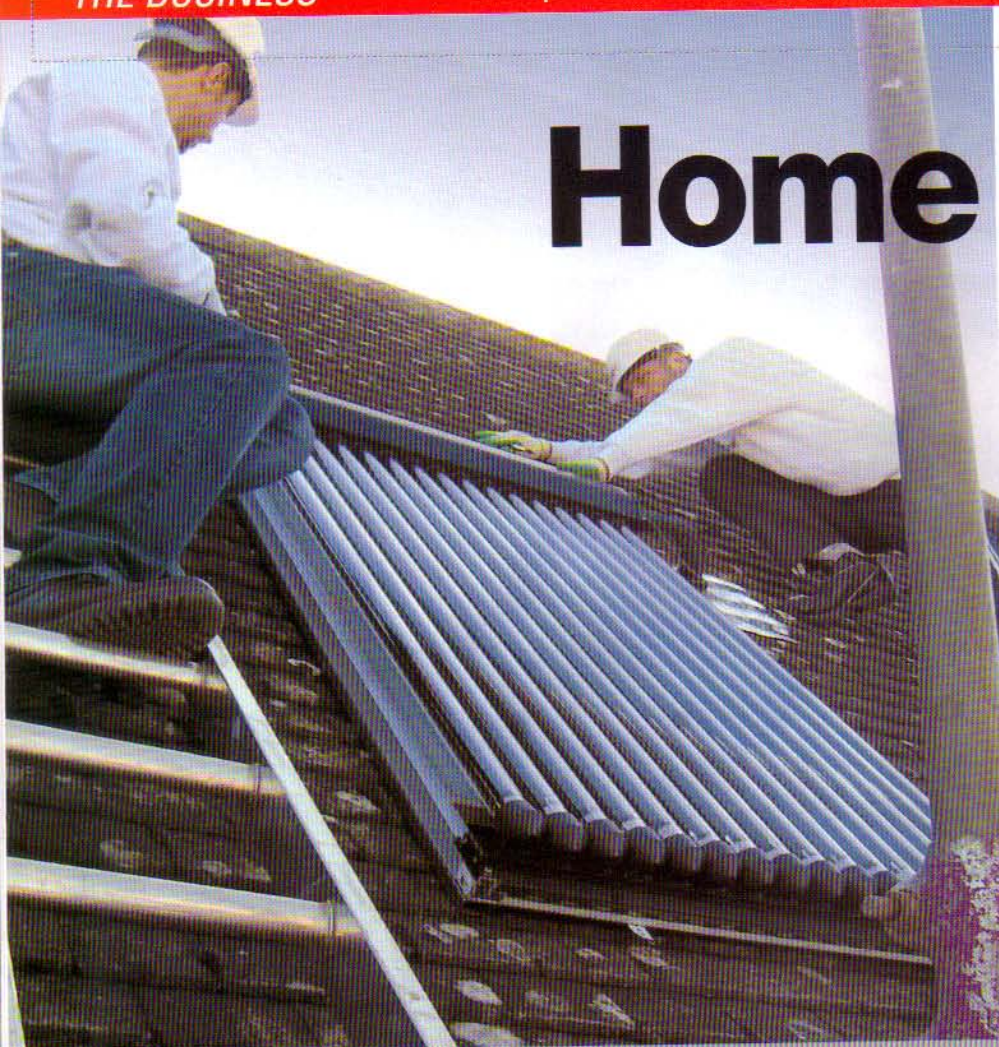


# Home straight



The window industry has transformed itself over recent years and double glazing companies have become home improvement companies. Paul Clapham takes a look at some of the latest products that are available.

**W**FI readers may regard themselves as glazing specialists, but you can just as easily regard yourself as a home improvement specialist. You are used to selling direct to the public; you are used to working in their homes; your core product has a virtuous environmental story; you have a customer base who invest in their homes. Few business sectors have that combination of experience and skills.

#### So what allied product areas can you look at to boost sales?

Consider expanding into the renewable energy sector. It is a simple fact that anyone who buys into renewable energy without also having fitted modern double glazing is wasting money, so there is a natural fit with your existing business.

Ground source heat pumps are already assuming a high profile and it's little wonder. They achieve up to 70% savings on the running costs of heating a home. They are less harmful to the environment than oil and gas boilers. They are safe, with no risk of carbon monoxide poisoning or gas explosion. They have a 25-year life span with no scheduled maintenance.

Predictably, it's a rapidly expanding market with new entrants coming in all the time. The biggest supplier in Europe is Calorex; look too at [www.iceenergy.co.uk](http://www.iceenergy.co.uk). Given that everybody thinks that energy costs will continue to rise, it's not going to be a temporary phenomenon, either. Heat pumps start at £6,000 plus installation costs so it's not a five minute decision for the homeowner. Equally, applying that dramatic fuel saving figure, it's a sound long-term investment. Entering the market

isn't straightforward, because the skills required are essentially those of plumbing and heating engineers, but, given the state of the housing market, they are becoming available skills.

#### Solar so good

Talk about solar energy in the UK invariably attracts a cynical response, given the climate. However, that's simply because people are unaware that the technology absorbs, and uses as energy, solar radiation, not sunlight. The reality is that solar panels can supply up to 70% of hot water requirements for a home. The technology has been around for quite a while, but it's the current energy cost which is making it a highly viable business sector. Eco Solar Equipment has put together a full package for new installers.

It provides a complete system – right down to screws, nuts and bolts. It has focused on making installation simple with no complex brazing and copper pipe work. In-depth, hands-on training is available at the Oxfordshire site, plus subsequent technical support. There's also a full set of marketing support, including personalised brochures and advertising templates.

Like Captain Kirk, many homeowners find space is the final frontier – they simply haven't got enough. Equally, they may not have the opportunity or funds for an extension or a loft conversion. The humble shed is the answer, not least because the shed is no longer remotely humble. Structures are being used as offices and gyms; they're housing saunas, hot-tubs even swimming pools. Given that first time buyers are being forced out of the housing market, living space for young adults could become the biggest prompt for purchases.

There are many different options available to window installers, especially ones with a mixed skill set that can turn a hand to a number of jobs. In a difficult market, you need to keep your ear to the ground and make sure that you are aware of all of the different options available to you. There is money to be made, you just need to do your homework properly and there is still profit available to anyone.

**For more information on the different products and how they can help your business circle readerlink 104**