

# 10 Top Tips to get a great solar & battery solution

What does it take to get a great renewable energy system?



## Company Profile



# Solar Integrity

**Solar Integrity** is a trusted solar power and battery installation company based in Albury-Wodonga.

Our focus on solar energy and storage goes back over 15 years, and we are one of the most experienced operators in the region. We have installed thousands of solar systems in homes, businesses and community buildings throughout the area and pride ourselves on quality workmanship and product choice.

Solar Integrity is proud to offer a great range of solar power systems for use both on grid and off grid and also hybrid systems with battery backup. We are happy to travel up to 2 hours from our base to residential or commercial projects.

All of Solar Integrity installations are carried out by our teams of in-house installers and recently we added EV charging station installation to our range of services. We also offer affordable solar and battery repair and post-installation servicing, repairs and maintenance, and are signatories to the NETCC (New Energy Tech Consumer Code) with all the required licenses, certificates, and qualifications, we also have memberships to peak industry bodies – Smart Energy Council, Clean Energy Council and NECA (National Electrical and Communications Association).

We will also be able to assist commercial, residential, or government customers with energy audits and suggestions with how they can reduce their electricity bill significantly.

If you go with Solar Integrity – you get access to an extensive range of long-lasting renewable energy solutions with strong local after sales service.

**Bobbi McKibbin** - Solar Integrity



# What does it take to get a great solar & battery quote?

Solar and home storage batteries are becoming increasingly popular in Australia and it's no surprise that this will continue to occur.

Not only can solar help reduce your electricity bills and make your home eco-friendlier, but a solar/battery combo can also help increase the value of your home.

However, if you are thinking about making the switch to renewable energy and want an excellent installation here are 10 key tips to consider when asking for a quote.





1

## Understanding your energy usage

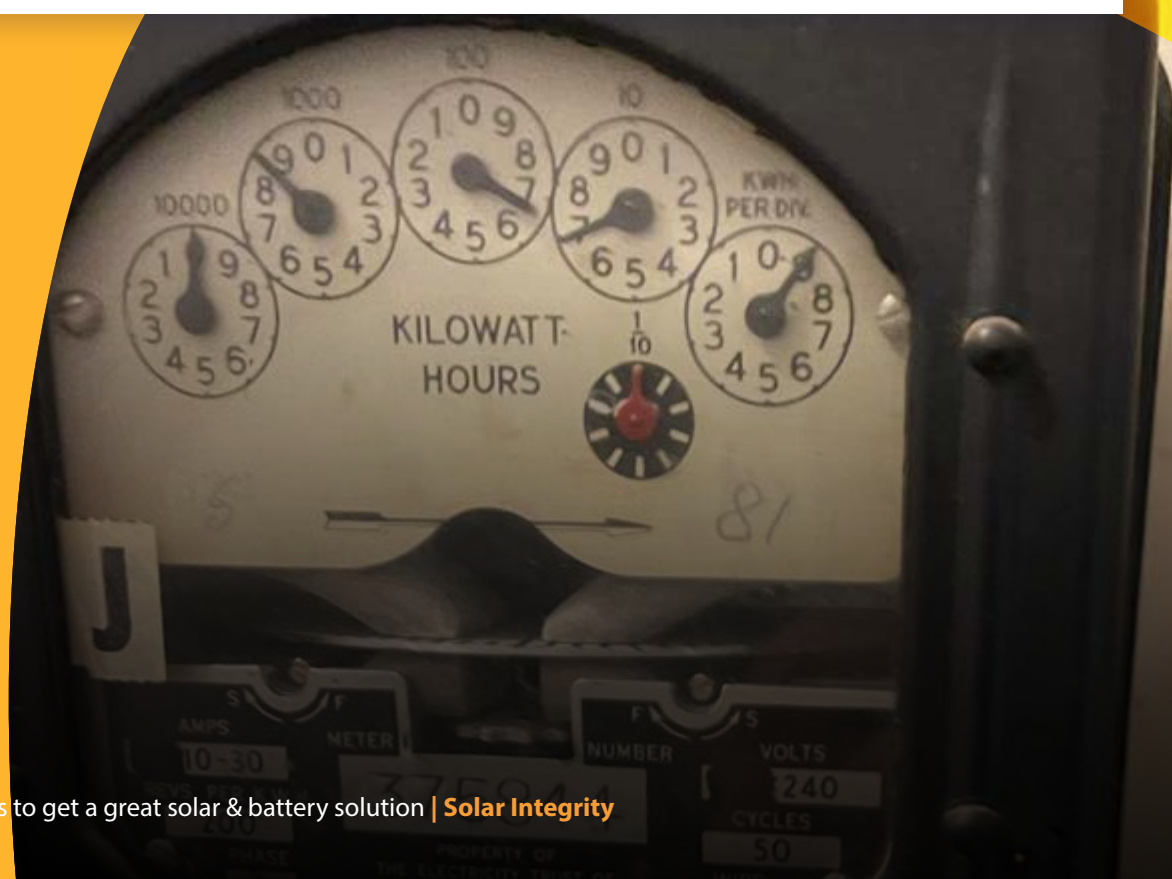
The most important piece of information that a solar & battery installation company needs to know before supplying you with a quote is your energy use patterns. The best time for residential solar generation for grid-connected systems is between 8.00 am and 4.00 pm, obviously this varies with seasons.

If you don't want battery storage yet, then none of the excess energy your system will produce will be stored, it will simply come off your electricity bill as credit. Therefore, it's important to understand how much energy you use during this time to determine the right size for you. A little excess is ok, a lot means a longer return on investment.

For the installer, understanding your energy usage habits will also aid in their sizing process as well as the location of the panels. Some installers gain your consumption data via your electricity meter, which is possible if you have a modern smart meter.

Otherwise, you might need to explain how you use electricity in the home. The best way to assist is to find your electricity bills – preferably for the last 12 months and explain your future electricity usage plans. Are there more children on the way? Are your 11 year and 12-year-olds turning into energy-guzzling teenagers in a few years? Will you purchase an EV shortly? Or are you putting in that pool to ease those hot summer days?

These are the questions you should answer to ensure your solar system is sized the correct way. It might also lead to the installer recommending a battery if you are ready to go ahead with an EV and seek to charge it from home.





## 2

### **Know your roof condition & check the proposed panel layout**

To get the best results, your solar installer needs to understand various aspects of your roof. In general, a solar system will produce the most amount of energy if it is facing north or northwest. Panels installed on the east will produce well for morning consumption and north - west or west facing panels can support the air-conditioning consumption in the afternoons. In saying this, most roofs will be able to have solar installed; it just means the installer will have to do a little more analysis of your roof orientation.



Therefore, they must understand your roof's orientation and the details of your roof type whether it be tile, metal, or slate.

For example, if you want a battery and EV charger, your solar system size must be bigger than a standard solar-only system, as now you seek to cover your night-time use and car driving energy as well.

As part of the quote, you may wish to see your roof layout with the panel location marked to appreciate your new system's aesthetical aspects.

A site inspection will help the installer determine whether there may be a longer installation process that requires more work than a typical solar system installation. For example, slate roofs or roofs with old brittle tiles will take longer.

## What is the condition of your meter board?

A physical site inspection will allow your installer to work out the condition of your meter board. Will there be switchboard upgrades required, which can cost more? We are sure you would agree it is best to know this before going ahead, no one likes unexpected additional costs.

The installer, while on-site, can also determine the cable run from the solar system on the roof to the switchboard. They can also work out the position for a string inverter or battery should you decide on these technologies. Roof access and panel orientation can also be determined during this site inspection.

Satellite mapping technology, such as Near Maps, cannot give you this kind of detailed overview. For this reason, installers need to go onto your site before finalising the quote to avoid unexpected issues arising on installation day. Companies who decide that they have no time to give you a site inspection should simply be eliminated from the quoting company pool.







## 4

### Is the installation company you are considering the right fit?

In solar and batteries, there are two types of companies that install and supply systems.

Firstly there are solar/battery sales companies that are good at selling solar and then subcontracting the installation to other parties. Energy retailers and large national cheap solar players fall into this category. They are often set up in high-rise call centers, and visiting them and seeing the person in charge or any product showroom will be difficult.

Secondly, you have medium size businesses, being solar/battery/ EV charger companies that have dedicated staff for selling and other staff for installing. They have a bricks-and-mortar head office and welcome a visit to their showroom to explain products and technology to you. Such local quality-focused companies are usually known for excellent after-sales service.

### Which company should I choose

We recommend you choose us as your local renewable energy specialist. The reason is that reliable after-sales service is such an important part of a long-lasting solar system's journey. Type 1 companies rarely excel in after-sales service. They are often too busy selling the next system to worry about past customers. So we say - **Go with an installation company - not a sales company.**

One quick tip: Only CEC-approved panels, inverters, and racking will be allowed onto your roof if you seek to claim any Government rebates.

The fact that the installer is accredited and the equipment is on the CEC-approved list, nevertheless, does not indicate anything about the quality of the equipment or the technical workmanship capability of the installer.







## 5

### Check out the companies you consider for the job

The solar & battery industry, unfortunately, has been infiltrated by fly-by-night operators. You need to make sure you pick the right installation company

**We suggest only engaging a company that ticks the following boxes:**

- ✓ The company has been in existence for at least 8 years. Solar Integrity has been going since 2009.
- ✓ Are they local, and do they have a showroom, a real Australian office, and real electricians employed, not just contractors?
- ✓ Check out the google reviews – anything below a 4.2 rating is not too impressive. Also, you want them to have a decent number of reviews. Shy away from companies that have many hundreds of reviews. Fake Google reviews can be purchased in big volumes.



- ✓ If possible, ask them about any customers whom they installed recently or 12 months ago and ask if these customers would be ok to have you talk to them. If so - talk to them and check out the service and results.
- ✓ Get the company to explain their after-sales service to you and make notes. How long does it take for a warranty claim inverter to be replaced? Who will install it?
- ✓ Do not go with companies that give you a one-size fits all quote, deadlines on specials, too cheap pricing, employ pushy salespersons on commissions, and give you the “last chance for this great special” deadline.
- ✓ Do not purchase from door-to-door solar salespersons if the price is clearly below or well above market rate because the only way these prices can be achieved is with sub-standard equipment and installations.
- ✓ Finally, avoid anyone that claims the panels are Tier 1 or says they will deliver a bill buster system to you, or claim “You will never have another electricity bill because their panels work under the moonlight.”



## 6

### **The quote should list all the equipment you are purchasing in detail**

Watch out for the slick sales person with the : "She'll be right answer to everything". Your quote should in detail list the number of panels, their brand, and wattage. Same with the inverter and battery solution. Is it string, micro-inverter, or a solution with optimisers? What brand, and what is the inverter capacity? What brand racking do you get? What are the battery's model number and capacity?



## 6

Quotes that just say panels or racking without these details are not as helpful as those that give you the brand and product details.

Finally, are there extra costs not included in the quote, such as meter upgrades, special safety equipment for steep and high roofs, or travel fees? Make sure you ask, “Are there any extras I might be expected to pay for, or is your price fully inclusive of all matters and possible issues?”



## Study the quote in detail

Quotes usually have a deadline, e.g., valid for 14 days. One of the reasons that this period is chosen, is that the solar industry has a high level of volatility in the cost of materials.

Every drop in the value of the Australian dollar can have a big impact on the overall system cost.

So make sure then when you get a quote you are ready to make a decision soon after as otherwise the job might have to be requoted.



A close-up photograph of a person's hands writing on a document with a fountain pen. The pen is dark with silver accents. The document has some text on it, but it's out of focus. The background is a bright orange color with a yellow curved shape on the right side.

## 8

### **The quote or attached material should list all the various warranties you get**

Panels have a product warranty from 15 years to even 25 years and now some beyond. This is a long time. Inverters should again have a product warranty. 5 years should be the minimum and 10 years is what you really want. Same with the mounting system, 10 years is a minimum, longer is better.

Battery warranties can be more complicated, but 5 years product warranty should be the minimum. The more life cycles and the more years warranted, the better.

Then there is the workmanship warranty, which is the warranty by the installer that the system has been professionally installed, and none of the circuit breakers constantly trip or panels become loose

If the given warranty is extremely long e.g. 15 years, that can be a red flag, hinting that the installer does not consider to be hanging around that much longer. The workmanship warranty must be realistic. Also, make sure the workmanship warranty stays with the installation company. The NETCC minimum warranty is 5 years whole of system, including installation.

Sometimes they use sub-contractors and try to palm off the workmanship warranty onto them. Make sure you ask who is responsible for honouring the workmanship warranty. It must be the company that sells you the system.

With your product warranty it is important not to be tricked into thinking that a cheap solar panel or inverter is good just because they have a long warranty.

A warranty is worthless if the manufacturer is not willing or able to back it up.

The best way to avoid trouble down the track is to choose quality as your chance of having a warranty claim is far less with quality products.





## The quote should give you detailed system output info

On the internet, a website called [yourenergyanswers.com](https://yourenergyanswers.com) offers a calculator that estimates the output of your solar system for each month of the year.

The calculator takes the weather station data of over 800 stations across Australia to calculate predicted solar hours and solar generation. Solar Integrity will also give you an expected annual and monthly system output, considering any shading issues in your situation, it's all in their proposal.

The quote should then take this information and make some predictions of annual savings that could be achieved. If this information is not included in the quote – ask the installer to supply it. That way, you can check if these savings were realised in future years.





## 10

### **Whom do you call if there is an issue?**

The quote, or if you go ahead – the handover material should clearly state whom you call for after-sales service and warranty matters. In the first instance, you want to deal with the installation company and not the manufacturer. Do not let yourself be fobbed off to the manufacturer.

They often have time-consuming processes, and you are not an expert, and they can tell you fibs or truths, and you cannot tell the difference. You want the company that sold you the gear to look after you – and the Australian consumer law backs you in this desire.

# Contact us for free advice or an obligation free quote

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