

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

The open door debate continues to generate heat. Amy North speaks to Jeannie Dawkins, director of the Close the Door campaign, to find out what success she has had to date

Retailers' green credentials are being blown out of shop entrance doors which they continue to leave open. While many claim they are working hard to improve the energy efficiency of their overall operations, including their stores, the act of leaving a shop's doors open during the winter and running the heaters above it has been proven to be incredibly inefficient.

The debate over whether or not retailers should close their doors or leave them open has rumbled on for many years, with the arguments swinging back and forth between energy efficiency (and therefore financial) gains and the impact on sales. The issue, understandably, comes to the forefront at this time of year as the temperature drops and the Christmas shopping season gets underway.

So what has changed over the past few years? With the debate gaining national media coverage, the most noticeable campaign is Close the Door. Launched at the end of 2007 by Jeannie Dawkins, Margaret Mair and Sian Reid it advocates a closed door policy when heating or air conditioning is being used and actively approaches shops, restaurants and national chains encouraging them to get on board.

It may seem like a bold stance to take by someone outside of the retail sector but it shows how much of an emotive issue this can be for those environmentally-minded customers. So what spurred Ms Dawkins to launch the campaign? It all started one winter in the below freezing temperatures when she noticed the heat from an open shop door had melted the snow and ice

on the pavement in front of it. Having the heating on at home and leaving windows and doors wide open just wouldn't be done, she explains, so decided to tackle the issue herself. The difficulty came when proving the benefits to retailers, who she claims "are often very conservative and slow to embrace change".

What ensued was the launch of Close the Door and a major piece of research by Cambridge University which revealed shocking results.

"We knew it was important to gain hard data to show the impact closing the door could make but we had no idea what it would show. Our first figures came from the Carbon Trust and while they were just guesstimates they thought that 20% of heating energy was being lost out of the door. After that we got the engineering department at Cambridge University to do some independent work on this and they found that it was in fact 50% of the entire energy was being wasted through this. If



you multiply that by all of the shops in the country that is a massive amount," she affirms.

Since then, the campaign has gained national reach as well as endorsements from some of the highest government ministers, including Boris Johnson, Vince Cable and Ed Davey with many describing it as a 'common sense' move.

Offering his support to the campaign Mr Davey said: "I thoroughly support Close the Door's objectives to save energy and cut carbon emissions in shops with such a simple measure. This is such an easy and positive contribution retailers may make to cut energy use significantly while reducing their fuel bills – and increasing the comfort of their staff and customers. I applaud the many stores of all types and sizes who have adopted a closed door policy when using heating or air conditioning, and urge those who haven't to join the campaign now."

Most notably the campaign has gained traction among some of the big players in the retail sector with Marks & Spencer, John Lewis/Waitrose, Selfridges, Ryman, Travis Perkins/Wickes and Tesco among those signing up.

"It is great that we have some of the big names on board and there are also many thousands of independent stores who do close their doors and none of them would do it if they lost money," Ms Dawkins enthuses.

In addition, there are also thousands of independent stores up and down the country taking part. The sheer volume of smaller retailers on board, Ms Dawkins believes, is because they are much closer to their bills.

The rise of omnichannel retailing and increased online sales also means the percentage of retailers' costs represented by store energy bills is decreasing, says Ms Dawkins, which could mean the attention paid to them could be doing the same.

Footfall: the impact

So with such large savings on offer in terms of energy efficiency, what is stopping other retailers getting on board? While the simple act of closing a shop's doors can make heating and air conditioning systems more efficient, and the climate inside more comfortable for shoppers and staff alike, many are concerned about the potential impact it will have on footfall and ultimately the bottom line.

Offering its view on the debate, the British Retail Consortium (BRC) told *Retail Environment*: "The retail industry continues to lead the way in energy efficiency and are constantly innovating to reduce waste energy use and cost. Retailers have seen significant savings on their energy bills from adopting a closed door policy and this is one of a number of low and zero cost measures retailers can undertake to avoid waste energy use and associate cost. There is concern over the impact on consumer behaviour of a closed door policy and in some cases footfall is so high that it's not a viable solution to energy reduction."

The research conducted by Cambridge University measured the energy efficiency and footfall of the Cambridge Toy Shop – an independent toy retailer – and Ryman Stationery in the city. The

energy consumption data of the shops is undeniably in favour of closing the door when the heating or air conditioning is on – Cambridge Toy Shop achieved average energy savings of 30% while Ryman saw an impressive 54% saving. This was attributed to the reduction in space heating load and eliminating the need to operate air curtains.

However, the picture regarding footfall is more complicated as it is notoriously hard to measure. During the study different methods were used to measure footfall at the shops for open and closed doors. For closed doors people bunch together (as someone holds the door open) and the measurement was taken with each door opening not per person while the open door measurements were taken per person, allowing for misleading figures. Ms Dawkins notes that when the figure was adjusted the footfall was up on both shops and the research concluded that footfall was not adversely affected. She adds that dwell time is also longer in shops with closed doors due to increased comfort which accounts for increase in transaction rate, however retailers are unwilling to share this data meaning the evidence so far is only anecdotal.

While not taking a side in the debate, the Carbon Trust does offer advice to those who, for whatever reasons, have decided to keep their doors open. While the Carbon Trust suggests trying to keep external doors open only at bust times, it notes in its energy management guide for retailers that one solution is to install automatic or revolving doors to help maintain the inside



temperature while ensuring that shoppers and personnel have easy access.

These solutions may not be the cheapest but Ms Dawkins maintains they can actually help reduce costs over time as, similarly to some other energy efficiency technologies, retailers can be recompensed for the cost of installing them by savings on their energy bills.

And, advances in the technology means that a customer's direction of travel can be determined on approach to the shop meaning the doors only open for those entering the building as opposed to those walking by. It is understood that Boots, one of the newest retailers to offer its support to Close the Door, is set to trial one of these solutions.

Employee welfare

Another aspect to the debate is the impact leaving the door open in the summer or winter has on employees. Having previously worked on the ground floor of a notable store on Regent Street, I can vouch for just how cold it gets when the doors are left open in the depths of winter despite above door heating. While this is not necessarily representative of the broader retail sector, employee comfort and welfare is worth taking into consideration.

"While many are focusing on their supply chain what they don't realise is that it continues all the way to the customer including in the actual shop. Quite often people working in the shops are young and due to the economic climate they aren't able to make any sort of criticisms or demands

without being at risk of losing their job. There are very strong guidelines from CIBSE which any decent business would adhere to on different working temperatures (depending on how much you are moving). In order to comply the door would have to be closed in cold weather. There are businesses that aren't looking after their employees in this way," Ms Dawkins says.

One solution to the open/closed door debate would be regulation. In 2008 New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed a law prohibiting businesses from wasting energy by blasting air conditioning out of open doors onto city sidewalks to attract customers.

However, Ms Dawkins suspects this may not be a suitable way to enforce the policy in the UK, and can understand why it is not high on politicians' agendas.

So going forward, what are her hopes for the campaign? "Getting more retailers on board and raising awareness of the campaign and its benefits and approaching each of them at a senior management level," she says. "This is a business friendly campaign – everyone benefits by closing the door.

"Trying to make the link that getting the supply chain sorted is absolutely fundamental and I can't think of a company that keeps its doors open while using heating or air conditioning, that I wouldn't have a very good reason to be sceptical of in general ethical terms including further down the supply chain, whatever their claims. The shop is an ultimate interface between the customers and the retailers." **RE**



Jeannie Dawkins, director, Close the Door Campaign

After graduating from Cambridge University in 1980, Jeannie changed to law and trained as a barrister. She lived abroad in Brussels, Paris and Tokyo before returning to Cambridge. She founded Close the Door in 2007 with Sian Reid as a local initiative. This has now become an award winning national campaign.

