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## Blackout brightens sales for generator sellers

By ALEX PHILIPPIDIS

After the Aug. 14 blackout, Warren Azzara expected more business owners and residents to show interest in the emergency power generators sold by his Yonkers company. Less expected, he said, was that interest to sustain several weeks after the outage, which crippled Westchester, the Northeast and parts of the Midwest.

During the three weeks following the blackout, Power Performance Industries answered hundreds of calls from potential customers, 20 of whom requested quotations. It sold two large generators.

Based on that experience, the company predicts a sales jump of 20 percent this year. Power Performance grossed \$5 million last year.

"We've seen requests from businesses as small as the owner of a local pizzeria. We're getting a lot of requests from management companies looking to keep priority services running, like elevators and emergency lighting," Azzara said. The projection by Power Performance exceeds a forecast by a national trade group.

"I would expect a 10 to 15 percent increase in sales in the next couple of months over what they (sellers) have normally showed," said Herb Whittall, technical adviser to the Electrical Generating Systems Association in Boca Raton, Fla. Nonetheless, the new orders and inquiries are turning out to be a silver lining for power generator sellers in an otherwise disruptive event.

"We're finding a lot of people all of a sudden want to upgrade their systems," said Anna Broccoli, Power Performance president.

In fact, as many as 500 businesses, institutions and residents in the metropolitan area already have their own power generators.

Cablevision, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the city of Yonkers as well as former President Bill Clinton and actor Al Pacino are among them.

Decisions on backup power systems take months to study and carry out, so many sellers won't know till year's end whether the blackout will lead to a sales boom, said Phil Herman, director of marketing and business development for ConEdison Solutions in White Plains.

"We've started to get calls from customers who now truly understand the value of having backup energy service," Herman said, though no systems had yet to be sold at deadline directly due to the blackout.

A local Home Depot manager says interest in backup power has already peaked.

"Initially, we saw a surge of sales, but then they leveled off back to normal volumes," said John Montefiore, manager of

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Home Depot's Port Chester store. "Customers are still being advised by the store that it's good to plan for any eventuality."

**\$500 PER KILOWATT**

The smallest and lowest-priced generators run on batteries, followed by diesel power and gas-run generators. Diesel generators have the advantage of restoring power within 10 seconds, compared with 30 seconds for gas, but many communities forbid their use because of emissions concerns. Juliet Cavallaro, vice president of operations-business development for the Elmsford electrical engineering consultancy Current Solutions P.C., said generator buyers have typically been businesses and building owners that need to keep operations going 24/7, such as grocers that need to refrigerate milk and other perishables.

She says would-be customers can expect to pay \$500 per 1,000 watts or kilowatt (kw). That would mean up to \$500,000 for the 1,000-kw systems needed by hospitals, nursing homes and many manufacturers.

To power a large home would require a 100-kw system costing \$50,000. Azzara says homeowners can start with 10-kw systems to power essential systems, such as refrigerators, for around \$2,000.

Norm Cotrona, president of Alta Power Corp., said his company has received more than 500 requests for quotations on battery-powered generators nationwide, and sold more than 100.

"I've got proposals on the table that run between \$2,500 and up," Cotrona said. "Every time there's an event, customer interest does peak."

Since the blackout, Cotrona said, his business has seen more interest in larger stationary generators, rather than cheaper portable systems selling for up to a few hundred dollars.

A sampling of products on Alta's Web site ([www.altapower.tv](http://www.altapower.tv)) shows generators ranging from a portable 300-watt battery unit selling for \$99.95 to a 5,500-watt stationary gas generator system costing \$4499.95.

Alta sells generators of up to 9,000 watts (for about \$7,500, including installation.)

Though Alta is based in Trumbull, Conn., its units are installed by Mamaroneck-based Norco Electric Corp., a family business from which he and family members spun off Alta Power three years ago.

Cotrona said it's too soon to tell how much Alta's sales will increase this year from the current half-million a year as a result of the new demand.

"I'm 80 to 90 percent optimistic that revenues will increase," said Cotrona.

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