

Executive Summary

Renting solar can make sense if your business needs a system now and wants to spread the installation cost over monthly payments. That can leave cash available for stock or equipment the business also needs. A well-designed system can reduce the electricity you draw from the grid during operating hours. With a suitable battery and backup design, it can also keep agreed circuits running during an outage.

Some agreements let you take ownership at the end. Others give you an option to buy at a stated price, renew the rental or have the equipment removed. The monthly amount alone cannot tell you which arrangement you are getting or whether service and repairs are included.

Start with what you want the system to do and whether you want to own it. Then compare what will be installed, what you will pay over the term and who will support the equipment after installation.

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Renting Solar for Your Business? What Does the Monthly Rental Actually Cover?

A business can need solar before it is ready to pay for panels, an inverter and batteries upfront. A rental can get the equipment installed while leaving cash available for the stock order, extra delivery vehicle or other work already planned. The business takes on a monthly commitment in return. Whether that is a good deal depends on what the system will do, how long the business expects to use it, and what it pays over the full term.

01 When does renting solar make sense?

Start with the problem you want to solve. A business that uses plenty of electricity while the sun is up can use some of that solar generation on site. A business that loses trading or dispatch time in an outage may also value battery backup, even where the bill savings alone would justify a smaller system. Ask the installer to show those benefits separately. Use your own operating hours and tariff to check the savings estimate, and establish which fixed electricity charges will still apply.

Consider the other side of the decision. If the business may move in two years, a five-year rental attached to the building could be difficult to carry to the next site. If the business can buy the same system outright and wants to own it from the start, compare the purchase and the rental over the same period. Include installation, service, any increases and any amount payable to keep or remove the equipment. The monthly rental is only one part of that comparison.

02 Does renting lead to ownership?

Read the end-of-term clause before relying on the words “rent to own”. One agreement may transfer ownership once the required payments and conditions are met. Another may give you an option to buy, with a separate amount to pay and a date by which you must exercise the option. A rental without a purchase option may end with renewal or removal. Ask who owns the equipment during the term, what the final payment buys, and whether any paperwork is needed for ownership to pass.

Take a fictional Garden Route food wholesaler. It wants to draw less power from the grid during the day and keep dispatch and selected refrigeration running through an outage. Its owner prefers monthly payments because the business also needs to replenish stock. With that decision made, the owner can compare two five-year quotes on the same basis. First establish whether both proposals will do the job on site. Then compare when payment starts, who deals with faults and what happens at the end.

03 Confirm what will be installed and tested

Put both quotes against the same equipment and installation schedule. Record the panel capacity, exact inverter and battery models, usable battery capacity, backed-up circuits and monitoring access. Two batteries with the same rated capacity can have different usable capacity or operating limits. Ask how much energy the installer expects you to be able to

draw for the agreed loads and under what conditions. Check which site work is included, such as mounting, cabling, protection and distribution board changes. Ask which items are provisional and how additional work will be approved.

For the wholesaler, the key question is whether dispatch can keep working while a selected refrigerator cycles. Ask the installer to demonstrate the agreed circuits under representative conditions at commissioning. Record the loads, starting battery charge, result and any shortfall. If a full runtime test is impractical, agree in advance what demonstration and supporting evidence will be accepted.

Get a handover list. It should identify who supplies the electrical Certificate of Compliance for the installation work, commissioning records, warranty details and monitoring access.

04 Do you need to register rented solar?

Check who supplies electricity to the premises. Eskom's 30 September 2026 update says grid-connected generation systems of up to 100 kW must be registered with the licensed distributor. That is Eskom for an Eskom-direct site and the municipality for a site on a municipal supply. The statement directs grid-connected systems above 100 kW to register with the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA). Confirm the route with your distributor when planning a larger system.

A hybrid solar system can stay connected to the grid even when it is set to export nothing. That zero-export setting still requires registration where the system works in parallel with the grid. A genuinely off-grid installation has no point of connection and is exempt from registration under the Eskom guidance. Eskom may still require a declaration for an off-grid or electrically isolated installation, and a municipality may have its own paperwork. A Certificate of Compliance covers electrical safety. Keep it alongside the distributor's authorisation or registration confirmation.

What changed recently is the fee waiver. Eskom extended it until further notice for eligible customer-owned systems of up to 50 kVA connected directly to its network. The announcement describes relief for qualifying Eskom-direct residential customers. If your business is renting and the provider or funder owns the system, ask Eskom to confirm any eligibility and applicable charges for that site. Municipal customers should check their own distributor's requirements and fees. In the Garden Route, for example, Knysna Municipality directs applicants to apply for authorisation to install rooftop solar through its online process.

Put the responsibility in the rental proposal before anyone installs equipment. Ask who submits the application, who signs as the electricity account holder, who provides the inverter certificate and commissioning documents, and who pays any application or metering charges. Ask when written permission is needed, when you get the final paperwork and whether delays can trigger rental charges before the system is ready for use.

05 Know when the rental starts and what it covers

One of the wholesaler's quotes says the first rental is due after successful commissioning and signed acceptance. The other says it starts on delivery. If equipment is delivered on 1 February but board work pushes commissioning into March, the second arrangement could

leave the wholesaler paying while it is still using the old setup. Ask for the actual trigger and first billing date, who may sign acceptance, and what happens if a test fails or work is outstanding.

Ask for a written breakdown of the equipment rental, installation charges, monitoring, maintenance, insurance and any separate service charges. Check whether amounts include VAT and whether any line changes during the term. A five-year equipment rental can sit alongside a service arrangement with a different term or renewal date. Put both dates on the same comparison sheet and ask what continues if one agreement ends.

If a separate finance provider appears on the paperwork, identify the party that invoices the rental and the party that handles a fault or incomplete installation. Ask both what the agreement says about rental payments during downtime. Confirm any promised credit or remedy in the signed documents. This matters most when the invoice issuer has no technician to dispatch.

06 Find out who gets the system working again

Imagine the inverter stops producing on a Friday afternoon. At the wholesaler, the owner wants to know whether dispatch still has backup, who can see the fault remotely and whether anyone can attend before Monday. Ask for a support number, hours of cover, target for an initial response and expected timing for a site visit. A call back within four hours still leaves the question of how long the system could be out of service.

Separate routine maintenance from fault repair. Find out who receives alerts, who arranges inspections, and whether labour, call-outs, travel, replacement parts and any temporary equipment are included. Ask how a warranty claim is logged, who removes and reinstalls the affected equipment, and who picks up the costs while a claim is being assessed. If the manufacturer replaces a part, the rental and service documents still need to explain how it gets fitted and tested at your site.

Ask for the battery warranty in writing. Check its duration, any retained-capacity promise, use limits such as cycles or energy throughput, and the conditions for making a claim. Then ask what happens if battery runtime becomes too short for your operation while the battery still meets the warranty terms. The answer could be a chargeable expansion, a change to the protected loads or a replacement under a separate service commitment. Agree who can access the monitoring history and download it if support changes.

07 Plan for a move, an upgrade or the end of the rental

If you rent the building, confirm the landlord’s written permission and what the premises lease says about the roof and electrical alterations. A move in year three raises practical questions. Can the system be removed and reinstalled? Who approves the move, covers the work and makes good the old roof? Who checks the new site and handles any fresh distributor paperwork? Ask what the existing rental requires if the system cannot move, and request the settlement calculation in writing.

If the wholesaler adds another cold room, its original system may need more battery capacity or a different inverter. Ask whether the equipment can be expanded, whether the equipment

owner must consent, and whether the upgrade changes the rental term or service coverage. Get a new equipment schedule if the design changes.

Before signing, ask what happens after the last scheduled payment. The documents should state whether there is a transfer, a buyout option, a renewal or a return. Record any amount payable, the notice deadline, who removes the equipment if required and who restores the roof and board. If ownership transfers, check whether warranties and monitoring access transfer too.

08 Use the solar rental quote checklist

Complete one checklist per quote. Write the contract clause or equipment schedule reference next to each answer. Mark open items and give each one an owner and a date.

Quote item	What to confirm in writing
Equipment and site work	Models, usable battery capacity, protected circuits, exclusions and approval of extra work.
Commissioning and handover	Tests, acceptance, Certificate of Compliance, registration route, responsible party, fees and written clearance.
Rental and service	Billing trigger, term, VAT treatment, separate charges, price changes and support coverage.
Faults and battery cover	Single reporting contact, site attendance, parts, labour, warranty conditions and responsibility while the system is down.
Change or exit	Landlord consent, move or upgrade process, settlement, notice, transfer or removal and reinstatement.

09 Before equipment goes on the roof

Read the equipment schedule and the rental and service terms together. If a promise matters to your operation, ask for it in the documents you sign. A colleague should be able to find the support number, explain who pays for a failed component, and tell you what happens when the rental ends without having to find the original salesperson.