

BULB SWAPS: A Case Study



Why swap bulbs or lamps? Our owner thought it was a good idea 23 years ago when we were a company of three. Now here we are. Buckle up to learn about bulb swaps and take backs, and what they can do for your program.

Take backs are not new to us.

Did you know our entire executive team got their start in bulb swap or take back programs? That's right. Adam and Jay used to collect inefficient halogen torchieres and give out fluorescent versions at the turn of the century. Mark entered the industry collecting not lighting, but air conditioners, and helping to write bounty checks. So, it's kind of all true.



Going from taking old bulbs to selling new ones.

A bulb swap is program delivery mechanism designed to remove old light bulbs from circulation and replace them with efficient lighting. Since you are literally taking the bulbs from a customer's sockets, they are more apt to put in the replacements you give them. We started with torchiere swaps and moved into doing the same for light bulbs, until we became a full-fledged retailer and focused on sales only (a humbling experience for a small shop in this industry pre-2007).

That's a perfectly good light bulb you want me to replace.

During our early days of selling lighting, we kept running into the same issue when talking with customers about upgrading – they had a hard time replacing perfectly good light bulbs. As New Englanders adept to Yankee frugality from our upbringings, we get it and know where customers are coming from. We always knew it'd be an uphill battle to do bulb swaps, especially with polarizing technology.



A bulb swap event for Efficiency Vermont in 2019

The CFL enigma.

CFLs were once the go to product of many efficiency programs and a main staple of our product offering; however, they came with many trade-offs. Jokingly, we tell our new managers "if they can sell a CFL, you can sell anything." You literally had to address all their faults when talking to customers. Programs sank hundreds of millions into driving CFL adoption only to stop cold turkey in favor LEDs that use better technology. CFLs are now ready for their retirement.

What we are up to.

We know there are lots of questions surrounding lighting for programs that will be answered in due time. We also know after talking with thousands of customers each year that there are many questions on what to do with their existing lighting, something not openly discussed. We decided to take a page out of our past and have brought the bulb swap in 2018 as a turnkey method to get CFLs and inefficient light bulbs off the street AND to replace them with LEDs.

TechniArt has been operating in numerous states the past few years, some in partnership with other retailers and stakeholders, to offer a central location for customers to exchange their bulbs. Programs like this because they can confirm the types of bulbs are removed from grid and know they are being replaced with an efficient alternative. Plus, homeowners leave happy.

What do we do with the bulbs we collect?

No matter what we collect, it gets recycled. The parts that comprise bulbs can be extracted and reused when properly recycled, which also allows for recovery of some of the energy that it took to make those materials. It takes much less energy to make a product from recycled material than it does to make that same product from scratch.

What does the evaluation community think about this?

Great question. We think they would like it because bulb swaps eliminate evaluation scenarios for lighting like snaphack because the customer has nothing to fall back on as a replacement measure. In addition, you can contain benefits and spillover since programs are run in specific geographic areas.



How do you set up a bulb swap?

It's easy. A market manager either makes it a part of our pop-up retail program offering so customers can participate at work or on their own time. We also partner with household hazardous waste sites, and even other retailers, to do ad hoc events and extend reach into targeted communities. Events are marketed ahead of time to generate interest. We bring ENERGY STAR certified LEDs bulbs and bins to collect the old ones. After we gather and distribute bulbs, we send out a post event report.

Bulb Swap Success.

Since we started back up in 2018, we have removed more than 80,000 old bulbs from programs in three states and provided LED replacements for free. On average, we take in 6 old bulbs from customers, so we have managed to help more than 13,000 people improve the lighting in their homes. The customers we engage with are very excited and appreciative of the swap, often directing their appreciation at the supporting utility or efficiency program. Some customers even expressed that they felt more comfortable purchasing LEDs in the future on their own, based on the face-to-face education our team provides. Participation programs and stakeholders think bulb swaps are a win-win, too.

Back to our roots.

We joke that after all these years as a company, we're still doing some of the same things that just may never change. While the future is uncertain for lighting programs, if we've learned anything from our experience, customers will continue to have interest in participating and they will be a viable way to drive measurable change in your program.

The event was super successful and brought many new customers to our store. We swapped more than 1100 light bulbs in 4 hours!

**- ZACH DUPUIS, rk MILES
Manchester Center, Vermont**

Want to start swapping out bulbs for your program?

Contact us at marketing@techniart.com to learn more!