



Calculating a client's lighting costs shouldn't be a guessing game. Durability and quality are a good starting point for any budget checklist, says **Robert Webber**

I remember Saturday nights as a kid. I'd get my two quid pocket money and be straight down the corner shop. Cream soda, a packet of Puff crisps and some Mento's, rushing home ready for the bling and excitement of The Price Is Right.

Guessing the combined cost of a sandwich toaster, nest of tables, tape-to-tape deck and a plastic plant has never been as exciting since.

Now, 30-something years later, my business approach has changed. Not everybody would appear to have moved on, however. When it comes to costing, some of the more 'creative' among us seem to apply the principles of Eighties Saturday night TV.

One of the main factors to consider when lighting a garden is the durability of the lights. My motto is always try to fit the best first time. So often new clients comment to me that in a previous property they spent a lot of money on garden lighting and it kept failing. Paint blistering, water



BUDGET CHECKLIST

- **Labour** – time is money, and expertise has a value of its own.
- **Maintenance** – always get a maintenance contract, it's far cheaper with the installer.
- **Light fittings** – 316 Stainless is durable, and nothing below IP65 (I'll expand on this next month).
- **Cabling** – it's copper; prices are at their highest at the moment.
- **Conduits** – so cheap to put in at the time. Why not add lighting later? But you'll need a design so you know where to place them.
- **Burying** – always cheaper to get the landscapers to do this. They have machines on site.
- **Drivers or transformers** – fit the best first time.
- **Trust your installer** – if you don't, then don't use them! Always use a specialist when it comes to exterior lighting. Their 'added value' is invaluable.

THE PRICE IS RIGHT

ingress, flooded joint boxes – these are the reasons new clients are hesitant to spend again. One bad experience with an inadequate design solution can cost future lighting installers dearly.

That's why I won't get into a bidding

competition with clients or other installers. Yes, we think our costs are competitive, but that's in light of the quality we believe we offer. As you know, there is always going to be someone cheaper than you.

Where are you going to set yourself in the marketplace? I've set out my

stall at the higher end, and that's not necessarily our price point – it's our commitment to producing lighting solutions that will last years.

I recently gave a seminar at FutureScope.

One audience member asked about issues with external transformers and drivers. I replied, "I've heard of those issues, but not from us." Those issues are associated with cheap imported drivers that by their nature last a short time. Their price point is roughly 25% the cost of ours. Yet ours will last 1000% longer and beyond. Otherwise we replace them free of charge.

The price point and value of garden lighting should be realistic for all. Don't give a budget to your client unless you have fully worked out the costs first. I'm often called to price work and told the budget that's been given to the client. I'll then ask for the specification on which the works were budgeted and, you guessed it, there isn't one. The lighting budget was plucked out of the air and our hands are tied from the start line.

I am lucky enough to work with some very competent garden designers and landscape architects. They have learnt how to cost lighting effectively, and if unsure they ask prior to telling the client, whether it's a project we will install or help design. There's no hidden agenda. Every cost is upfront and documented. A great place to start for comparative costs for your client.



ABOUT ROBERT WEBBER

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