



Best customer rated solar system

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A recurring point we make on SolarReviews is that solar panels last a long, long time; 25-30 years to be exact. This makes it important to buy solar panels with the following qualities:

The concept of an elite list of Tier 1 solar panel manufacturers was first used by Bloomberg New Energy in a report on the "bankability" of different solar panel brands.

While Bloomberg's definition of Tier 1 is somewhat useful, in our view it's insufficient as a guide for consumers. It only judges the solar panels based on past performance, and doesn't attempt to predict the future reliability of each manufacturer.

Given that solar panels last 25-30 years, we think much more weight should be given to the future prospects of the brand, as well as the manufacturer's future economic viability.

They sign up a few dealers in America over the internet by offering cheap panels, but if there are any warranty issues they pin the blame on an "installation error" or a "cosmetic defect" that isn't covered by warranty. As these companies invest little to nothing in their brand in the US, they have nothing to lose. Often they will simply start selling panels under a different brand.

Among these companies are also those that buy B-grade cells and wafers, and build panels out of them for cheap sale. Many of these smaller overseas companies also outsource large parts of their production to the cheapest contractor in China, and so it is impossible to get a gauge on real manufacturing quality.

Leading US manufacturers SolarWorld, Suniva and Silicon Energy have all gone broke, while market leader SunPower has moved most of its panel manufacturing to Malaysia, the Philippines and Mexico. Tesla has also closed their planned solar panel manufacturing plant in Buffalo, New York.

Ironically, the only well-known solar company with large-scale manufacturing in the USA is the Chinese solar giant Jinko Solar, who have a factory in Jacksonville, Florida.

We do know of two smaller brands that still make their panels in America: Mission Solar in Texas, and Washington-based Itek Energy (now owned by Canadian company Silfab). However, they are small manufacturers and we are unsure of their current production arrangements or volumes.

Although the Trump administration attempted to boost US manufacturing of solar panels by imposing tariffs on Chinese modules in 2018-2019, American-made panels have unfortunately been unable to compete with the low cost and high quality of Chinese and other imports.



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This group contains LG, Panasonic and SunPower. Their panels are the most expensive on the market. They are all good companies and offer very good products, but they are placed in the premium category for different reasons.

LG and Panasonic make good panels. But they are considered premium because of the strength of their overall corporate brand -- and not because of the technical specifications of their panels. Their panels are only marginally, if at all, better than the other Tier 1 brands.

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