



Fact Sheet Which Powerboard Is For You:

When it comes time to purchase a power-board for your workplace, or home, a trip to your local hardware store will reveal there's an ever growing range of power-boards available to choose from. Gone are the days where your choice was simply a matter of how many outlets you wanted. Although you'll still need to make that choice, today there's a range of extra features and add-ons to consider as well.

With basic power-boards starting at just a few dollars each, prices can exceed \$150 or more for power-boards with lots of extra features. The problem for many buyers is knowing which of these extra features are worthwhile getting and which you really don't need. This short article is designed to help you through the maze and decide which power-board is best for you.

The first thing to consider is the number of outlets you need. It's always handy to have a spare outlet or two, so if you think you may only need a four outlet power-board, then it might be worth considering upgrading to a six outlet – usually the extra cost is just a few dollars. If you have a number of power adaptors to plug in, then also consider the spacing of the outlets as some adaptors can be bulky and make it hard or impossible to use the adjacent outlets and this might mean you will need to buy an extra power-board as a result. Fortunately many manufacturers are recognising that more appliances are powered by adaptors and are incorporating some widely spaced outlets into the design of their power-boards.

The second consideration is the overall load you will put through the power-board. This usually has little to do with the number of appliances you will connect to it as some appliances, like phone chargers, draw only a tiny amount of power and others, like heaters and kettles, can draw significant amounts of power. All power-boards have a maximum power rating – this must be displayed on the chassis. For the non-technical person, it probably means nothing to them but it is a very important bit of information. Most power-boards sold in Australia are rated at 10 amps / 2400 watts. If you are not sure about this, ask the sales person for advice.

By law, every power-board sold in Australia MUST have an overload protection device installed. This detects if more load is put through the power-board than what it is rated at and turns the power-board off. Although this can be inconvenient at times, it prevents the power-board from melting or catching fire. Overloaded power-boards with faulty overload protection device, or one that isn't working at all, are a common cause of house and workplace fires!

With these in mind, let's now go through some of the more common features you should consider;

- **Individual switches** for each outlet. Remember, if these aren't fitted, then ALL outlets are live immediately you turn the power-board on.
- **Outlet covers.** These can prevent foreign objects falling into to the outlets and making contact with the live components which could give you an electric shock if you touched them, or create a dangerous short circuit in the power-board. Covers can also prevent toddlers and small children from "exploring" the outlets, as some like to do.
- **Surge protection** devices. These are different to overload protection devices. They protect the power-board and everything connected to it from potentially damaging voltage surges.
These are highly recommended when using the power-board to supply power to IT equipment, data storage devices and other expensive or sensitive appliances. Remember all surge protectors have a limited life span according to the number of surges and the severity of them. Many power-boards have a warning device to show if the surge protector is still working or not – usually a small led light.
- **Safety Switch / RCD.** These devices save lives by tripping in the blink of an eye where it detects an "earth leakage" situation arising from a faulty appliance connected to the power-board. Although you will pay a lot more for a power-board with a safety switch fitted, the investment in having this protection is well worth it.

If you are planning on using your power-board outside, be sure it is specifically designed for this use.

Some power-boards have "green" features. The value of these is open to debate and you should consider them on merit. some claim to have power-saving devices fitted, but a simpler and cheaper power-saving option might be to turn off any unused appliances at the switch.

Powerboards are a convenient way to provide access to additional power sources, however they should not be used as a permanent replacement – consideration should be given to installing additional power points by a licensed electrician.