



## Ameren Missouri Powers Change

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Weber Shandwick and Ameren Missouri, Jan 1, 2013

**Summary:** 2013 Silver Anvil Award of Excellence Winner — Integrated Communications — Consumer Services

Utility companies might be called the Rodney Dangerfield of service providers. They get no respect. Customers don't appreciate the 525,508 minutes (99.98% reliability) of power during the year— while only remembering the short time it was off. In order to enhance our reputation for value and reliability, Ameren Missouri focused on our customers: the unsung heroes who power our community and propel it forward. Our integrated communications campaign spotlights the people and organizations that we rely on to power the state of Missouri forward, just as Ameren Missouri's reliably powers our quality of life and energy future.

Integrated communications includes any program that demonstrates leadership of public relations strategies and tactics in a creative and effective integrated campaign, along with other marketing or communications. The program must demonstrate the clear leadership of public relations, along with its integration with other disciplines.

### **Full Text: SITUATION ANALYSIS**

Utility companies might be called the Rodney Dangerfield of service providers. They get no respect. Customers don't appreciate the 525,508 minutes (99.98% reliability) of power during the year— while only remembering the short time it was off. The challenge for Ameren Missouri was to enhance our reputation for value and reliability across the wide swath of Missouri that we serve. In order to achieve this goal, we focused on celebrating our customers: the unsung heroes who power our community and propel it forward. Informed by extensive research, we developed an integrated communications campaign under the umbrella concept, *Ameren Missouri Powers Change* (AMPC). Heavily supported by earned media coverage, paid media and our digital platform, we engaged our customers, motivated them to take part in our program and achieved participation levels far beyond our expectations. We launched our campaign on Facebook where fans nominated and voted for people who went above and beyond in powering positive change in their communities. The winner received a \$10,000 grant for a nonprofit community organization of his or her choice. In total, more than \$20,000 in grant money was awarded to individuals and nonprofits across the state.

### **RESEARCH**

We relied on extensive research to help us understand Ameren Missouri's current situation and hone our strategic thinking. Our insights were drawn from our own survey fielded with Missouri residents. The findings were revealing. We knew that Ameren Missouri was taken for granted by its customers, but we were surprised to learn that they had no appreciation of how much more energy they relied on to power all the electronic devices—the iPhones, iPads, the Nintendos—that are now part of their daily lives. Despite this increased consumption, customers expected their bills to stay the same. In order for customers to understand the value of our service, findings in the Weber Shandwick Survey on Attitudes on Utility Service led us to conclude that we needed to connect with their personal values. Our survey results showed that

62 percent of our customers believe it's important for local service providers to actively support their area's civic, cultural and charitable organizations. This insight drove our strategic approach to include corporate citizenship as the cornerstone of our program. And that planted the seed for the AMPC campaign, which rewarded unsung heroes who power positive change and community progress. We also used Radian 6, Factiva and online research to analyze the traditional and social media landscape to determine how most effectively to engage our audience. Paid media and demographic analysis of the St. Louis Metro area played a crucial role in targeting and placing our communications.

## **PLANNING**

Informed by our research, we developed a plan that would increase customer satisfaction, trust and appreciation for Ameren Missouri, and allow us to be seen as a valuable and reliable energy partner powering the state. Our total integrated budget of just \$450,000 did not keep us from setting some lofty objectives:

- Enhance Ameren Missouri's reputation for reliability and value within the communities it serves.
- Generate positive earned media coverage, and achieve 90 percent branded stories that contain at least two campaign key messages.
- Show Ameren Missouri to be a caring corporate citizen in at least five to six key markets in the state.
- Grow the size of our Facebook community to 1,500 and increase their level of engagement.
- Drive positive sentiment, as measured by message penetration and Facebook analytics.
- Promote the AMPC program and secure at least 40-50 nominations and 500 votes.

We planned to achieve these objectives with a strategy that can be summed up in three words: Elevate, Empower, and Engage.

- Elevate awareness of Ameren Missouri's reliability and articulate our shared values.
- Empower and support people and organizations that power change in the community.
- Engage our customers in an online dialogue, emphasizing our good corporate citizenship and support of the community, thereby increasing customer satisfaction.

## **EXECUTION**

Ameren Missouri executed an integrated multimedia campaign featuring traditional media relations, paid advertising and digital media activation. All the work positioned Ameren Missouri as a good community partner sharing our customers' values to propel our communities forward.

- Introduced the AMPC program on Facebook, growing and engaging our online community.
- Kicked off the program by enlisting former pitcher for the beloved St. Louis Cardinals Rick Horton, state government officials and kids from local boys and girls clubs to participate in a launch event that drew media attention across the state.
- Engaged media across Ameren Missouri's coverage area, earning positive media coverage throughout the campaign that drove traffic to Facebook.
- Developed TV, radio, print and online advertising focusing on reliability and value, and supporting the AMPC program on Facebook.
- Launched a digital campaign that included online banners, Facebook and mobile ads.
- Engaged Missouri residents to nominate peers who power positive change, entering them for a chance to win \$10,000 for a nonprofit of their choice.
- Crowdsourced the top ten finalists by allowing fans to choose the winner.
- Provided the top ten finalists with communication tools to encourage family, friends and colleagues to vote for them.

## **EVALUATION**

Results of the AMPC campaign were indeed powerful, with outcomes far exceeding goals.

- More than 90% of media coverage contained at least two campaign key messages. Not a negative word was heard—100% of our coverage was positive.
- The size of our Facebook community skyrocketed from 181 fans to 3,3391, a growth of nearly 1775%. Our goal of 1500 was modest by comparison.
- Paid media over delivered and drove fans to Facebook, with 50% better click through rate on mobile/digital than the national average. In broadcast we reached 30% more households than we purchased.
- Expecting 40-50 entries in the AMPC program, we actually received 231 total nominations.
- 500 votes cast in the grant competition would have met our goals, but the final tally came in at more than 5,900 votes.
- Positive sentiment soared typified by Facebook comments like “This is a great thing you’re doing to help our communities,” and “THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!”
- The ripple effect of Facebook fans reached nearly 100,000 people, more than 50 times our fan base. For a total audience of 1.2 million residential customers.
- Every hard number and subjective measure leads to the inescapable conclusion that the campaign achieved its goal of increasing positive sentiment toward Ameren Missouri across the state.

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