



Save Energy - Save Money - You Have the Power

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Summary: 2013 Silver Anvil Award Winner — Public Service — Government

Alaskans are facing a crisis that threatens to cripple the state's economy. Energy prices in many communities are four times the national average, forcing some to choose between heat and food. The Alaska Energy Authority was tasked with increasing energy efficiency and did so by informing Alaskans of the cost-benefits of efficiency, inspiring efficient behavior with social-norming, and illustrating a clear actionable path towards efficiency improvements. In one month AEA was able to reach one in three Alaskans, increase Web traffic by 69 percent from the previous year and expand enrollment in the state's efficiency program by 46 percent.

Public service includes programs that advance public understanding of societal issues, problems or concerns. The government subcategory includes all government bureaus, agencies, institutions or departments at the local, state and federal levels, including the armed forces, regulatory bodies, courts, public schools and state universities.

Full Text: **BACKGROUND**

Alaska is twice the size of Texas and home to lakes larger than Rhode Island—it's a big place, geographically. While the state stretches across tundra, arctic and rainforests, less than a million people call it home. Residents of this rugged place are facing a crisis that threatens to cripple the state's economy and the well-being of every Alaskan. Energy prices in many communities are four times the national average, forcing some Alaskans to choose between heating their homes and putting food on the dinner table. From the oil executive living in the multi-million dollar mansion in Alaska's largest city, to the Native hunter that survives off the land in the most remote corner of the state, *energy connects Alaskans* and has become the driving force in shifting demographics throughout the state. The Alaska Energy Authority (AEA), the state's agency for energy issues, was tasked with increasing energy efficiency in the state. **AEA's Energy Awareness Month Campaign was the first step toward achieving that goal and was developed to inform Alaskans about the benefits of saving energy, inspire energy efficient behavior, and drive individuals to make energy efficient improvements to their homes and businesses.**

RESEARCH

AEA's Energy Awareness Month messaging, creative and tactics were influenced by research at several levels. Primary research indicated that behavioral change around energy efficiency is driven most by the definition of clear, actionable steps. AEA worked with a research group to determine which specific actions would make the biggest impact on energy consumption in Alaska's commercial and residential sectors.

The study identified five key changes including:

- Using energy efficient lighting;

- Installing a programmable thermostat;
- Reducing the water heater temperature;
- Undergoing a home or commercial building assessment; and
- Make appropriate upgrades and renovations.

These five behaviors became the focus of the majority of the campaign.

Primary and secondary research revealed the most effective energy efficiency campaigns utilized messages which emphasized monetary gain (a cost benefit tactic) or that demonstrated the prevalence of certain energy efficient behaviors (a social-norming tactic). Additional secondary research examining energy efficiency campaigns conducted throughout the U.S. provided insight into the effectiveness of certain components of local campaigns. This research indicated visual content needed to be hyper-localized.

PLANNING

The campaign needed to reach residential owners, renters and commercial stakeholders throughout the entire state and while a relatively small audience, the sheer distance and diversity of Alaska's population makes delivering the message complicated. Alaskans can all relate to the harsh, sub-zero winters where energy bills skyrocket but energy use and price varies greatly among users. Furthermore, driving a message of less energy consumption to an audience whose economy is driven primarily by the extraction of petroleum provides a unique challenge. Oil and gas development is the centerpiece of the Alaska economy; without the jobs and income from the industry, thousands of Alaskans would be forced to leave. Conservation messages have historically been received as alienating and harmful to the economy.

The campaign's strategy emphasized the following:

1. Reaching the mainstream, since early adopters were already on board and influencing late adopters would require considerable resources,
2. Energizing and leveraging the value, specifically resources and extended networks, of Alaska organizations sharing an interest in energy efficiency, and
3. Driving participation in state sponsored incentive programs.

Campaign messaging utilized cost-benefit and social-norming messages as identified in the research to motivate individuals to learn more. The five key behaviors were used as a hook, representing a few simple things everyone could do. But meaningful efficiency solutions are not one-size-fits-all and given Alaska's remarkably diverse population and geography, each property requires a different set of changes: Therefore, interested stakeholders were directed to a newly update AEA website which highlighted customized solutions, actionable steps and encouraged participation in state sponsored incentive programs.

While the research formed the basis for the campaign's content, the overall look and feel was influenced by testing multiple creative themes with stakeholder organizations.

National campaigns, such as the U.S. Department of Energy, have had limited success influencing Alaskans' energy efficiency behaviors as these past campaigns have heavily emphasized solutions that do not apply to Alaskans such as cooling—air conditioning. Testing of multiple campaign themes by a focus group of energy efficiency stakeholder organizations indicated that one of the most commonly used color schemes of past initiatives, cool colors, made Alaskans feel cold. In a state where many residents spend the majority of the year in freezing temperatures, conveying a message that energy efficiency means sacrificing comfort is counterproductive. Additional comments indicated that communities valued Alaska solutions for Alaska issues. To address the austerity perception, a natural color palette was adopted that contained mostly warm colors, reminiscent of the Alaska summer. Alaska-specific and friendly photos, icons and imagery were selected to hyper-localize the campaign avoiding a generic tone, aimed at better connecting with Alaskans.

Nationwide people celebrate Energy Awareness Month during October and to capitalize on that

momentum, AEA convinced Alaska's Republican, pro-resource development, Governor to declare October Energy Awareness Month. The campaign was crafted to use a rush of earned media, paid and online media. **Because there is a lot of information associated with energy efficiency, promotional materials were used to drive traffic toward AEA's website (www.akenergyefficiency.org) which contained detailed information that will help AEA realize its goal of energy savings.** The website also served as a tool to track the number of people accessing information.

The budget for the Energy Awareness Month campaign was \$81,500, which is 41 percent of AEA's total marketing budget of \$197,000 for the year.

EXECUTION

The campaign was rolled out in the days just before October, with a big push coming in the first days of the month. Paid advertisements carried general information about energy efficiency, financial benefits and contact information. AEA's 30-second television commercial aired 700 times during the highest viewed newscasts in Alaska and several primetime, popular television shows. One of the initial campaign challenges was developing content for the 30-second radio ad that was scheduled to air 400 times across the state. Initial creative had political figures spreading the message, but as the presidential election ramped up, it became clear this association had a polarizing impact. To avoid alienating the audience, a decision was made to instead go with a proven method of emphasizing cost savings.

Earned media articles were developed telling the energy-saving stories of individuals around the state. These were placed in local papers and written to highlight the values our research had shown to resonate most in specific communities. Public relations efforts in the form of multiple television stories and print articles, including a front-page article, resulted in significant buzz. The most notable was a series of five energy-related stories that aired during the morning newscast on Alaska's most popular statewide news channel. Through these stories hundreds of thousands of Alaskans were exposed to information that could influence behavioral changes, which will in turn make progress toward AEA's goal of decreasing energy use in the state.

As the state's energy authority, AEA is tasked with setting the campaign's direction and measuring its long-term success, but it works with over 20 organizations including public and private advocacy groups, utility companies and nonprofits. AEA crafted compelling, persuasive and informative content and made it available to these constituents. With the help of its partners, a conservative estimate shows at least 12,000 people had the potential to view promotional materials at numerous events including two energy conferences and the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), the largest annual gathering of Alaska Natives. AFN allowed materials to be distributed to people who live in rural areas of the state that may not have been exposed to the message anywhere else. AEA's partners also helped spread the message through social media. Facebook and Twitter posts concentrated on providing Alaskans with clear, actionable steps.

EVALUATION

The Energy Awareness Month Campaign was a remarkable success; conservative estimates show that at least 250,885 Alaskans had the potential to be exposed to the campaign through paid advertisements, earned media and promotional materials. **These results mean that one in three Alaskans were potentially impacted by the campaign.** An effective way to measure the amount of exposure of the campaign was to track activity on AEA's website, which was the centerpiece for the contact information on materials and in advertisements. Within days of the campaign's launch, the website saw a dramatic increase in activity. During October, **Web analytics showed new visits were up 58 percent and returning visits were up 69 percent from the previous October.** Many areas of the state saw huge boosts in visitors, in Soldotna Web hits were up 543 percent, Eagle River saw a 567 percent boost and Bethel had an

incredible 850 percent increase from October 2011.

Not only did the campaign drive people to educate themselves about energy efficiency, it promoted Alaskans to invest in energy efficient improvements. One of the five behaviors that the campaign focused on was encouraging people to get an energy assessment. **During the campaign, enrollment in the state's flagship incentive program increased by approximately 46 percent**, 783 people requested home energy assessments in October 2012 compared to 358 in 2011.

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