



What are the best ways to reach business customers through community-based marketing and events?

An Ask E Source answer

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Q: What are best practices for engaging with business customers via events and community-based marketing?

A: Utilities can engage business customers by getting out into the community and hosting events. The E Source report [Connect with your SMB customers to increase program participation](#) provides information on event and community-based marketing for business customers. We pull out some relevant insights, including approaches to expanding your multichannel marketing and using testimonials to increase engagement.

Expand your multichannel marketing approach

Including nontraditional channels in your marketing approach can help you get in the door with hard-to-reach small and midsize business (SMB) customers such as mom-and-pop stores or small businesses owned and operated by non-English speakers. Consider the following strategies.

Connect with well-known organizations within your service territory. Your customers already trust local and state trade and business associations, chambers of commerce, and other organizations within your service territory. Partner with them to increase outreach.

Leverage community newsletters or bulletins. Community members, including the owners and managers of hard-to-reach businesses, frequently read these publications.

Participate in local community events. Having a community presence will give you the opportunity to develop relationships with your customers (including SMB owners) and provide information about your programs and offerings.

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Use testimonials

SMB customers view their utility and colleagues at similar businesses as the most trusted resources for energy-efficiency advice. Leverage this trust by including testimonials from efficiency program participants in your marketing campaigns. Testimonials that present a specific business challenge and describe a solution and its results are the most compelling stories. They're a great way to reward SMB customers who have participated in your programs by providing them with more community exposure. For more examples of effective ads targeted to SMB customers, visit E Source [Energy AdVision](#), our database of thousands of examples of utility marketing and advertising campaigns.

Utility examples of customer recognition

SRP embraces recognition through its [Champions of Energy Efficiency Awards](#) program, which encourages commercial customers to participate in the utility's energy-efficiency programs. SRP chooses energy-efficiency champions based on their implementation of new technologies, behavioral changes, and support of ongoing energy-saving initiatives. There are awards in seven categories: small business, midsize business, large business, K-12 schools, colleges and universities, charitable and nonprofit organizations, and outstanding achievement.

Utilities such as New York State Electric & Gas and RG&E encourage businesses to display window signs that show their participation in energy-efficiency programs. Both utilities also sponsor open houses at participating businesses to showcase the energy-efficiency work. These events provide marketing for both the business and the utility.

We've gathered a few other examples of utility award and recognition events.

BC Hydro. The [Power Smart Excellence Awards](#) are a biannual, provincewide engagement program and event that honors the utility's best-in-class energy-efficient business customers, retail partners, and trade allies.

Businesses must be members of BC Hydro's Power Smart Program to be considered for an award. The utility offers awards in categories such as Power Smart Leaders, Leadership Excellence, and Energy Conservation Awareness and Engagement.

Efficiency Nova Scotia. The annual [Bright Business Awards](#) honor Nova Scotia's best-in-class energy-efficient organizations and individuals. According to the company's website, "These winners lead by example and are instrumental in taking the message of energy-efficiency to new heights by inspiring fellow Nova Scotians." Efficiency Nova Scotia features the winners in its ads and provides award videos that can be used for promotional purposes.

Efficiency Vermont. The [Best of the Best Awards](#) recognize innovative and integrated design approaches for energy-efficiency in Vermont's commercial and residential buildings. Awards are given out annually at the Better Buildings by Design Conference and publicized by Efficiency Vermont throughout the year." There are four categories of awards: Commercial Building Design & Construction, Residential New Construction, Building Performance, and Home Performance with Energy Star.

Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships (NEEP). To recognize businesses for their outstanding efforts to advance energy efficiency, NEEP created the [Northeast Business Leaders for Energy Efficiency](#) recognition program. According to the press release [NEEP Names 2014 Northeast Business Leaders for Energy Efficiency](#), the program "highlights the accomplishments of organizations that are participating in energy-efficiency programs across the region."

Benefits of community-based marketing

There are two main benefits to community-based marketing: You can leverage the reputations of local organizations and it's cost-effective.

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Customers are more likely to respond to your efforts when you partner with local organizations that are already known and trusted within the community. These organizations have already built a reputation of trust and are tied into your target audiences in the business community. They also have regularly scheduled meetings, which makes it easier to connect with these audiences in a familiar setting.

You may also be able to partner with local organizations for funding purposes and cross-promote with them via social media, digital marketing, print marketing, and advertising. Use local organizations' existing relationships and communication channels to get the message out to your target audiences.

Community-based marketing strategy recommendations

Strategies that can be effective for events or community-based marketing include:

- Partner with local community-based and regional organizations
- Engage in door-to-door canvassing and phone calls
- Sponsor or exhibit at community events
- Conduct neighborhood energy sweeps
- Organize an energy-saving competition
- Engage local school students
- Present to trade associations, professional organizations, and clubs
- Promote businesses through business energy sweeps and rewards programs
- Advertise in local newspapers, newsletters, and radio stations