

Contractor-Led Social Marketing to Promote Energy Efficient Decisions and Behaviors in the Residential Sector

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Problem

Only one third of homeowners who complete a Home Performance with Energy Star (HPwES) audit go on to complete a recommended whole-house energy upgrade (NYSERDA, 2012). Financial incentives and information campaigns may not be sufficient to change complex and deeply rooted habits. Barriers to uptake after audit include:

- Lack of trust
- Significant upfront costs
- Time constraints
- Confusing paperwork/complicated program incentives
- Uncertainty about quality of contractor work
- Uncertainty about cost benefits of retrofits

Our project aims to demonstrate that a contractor-led behavioral intervention will increase the average audit conversion rate and homeowner investments in energy efficiency measures following participation in a home energy assessment. Our Energy Educator intervention utilizes an array of social marketing tools (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith, 1999; Vigen & Mazur-Stommen, 2012) to foster energy-efficient behaviors and investments.

Participants

Participants in this behavior pilot will be 170 owners of 1-to-4 family residential buildings within a 30 miles radius of Ithaca NY who contact Snug Planet to request a comprehensive home energy assessment.



Randomized Control Intervention

Experimental treatment group:

- Homeowner receives a face-to-face visit from Energy Educator prior to their energy audit visit from a building analyst.
- The Energy Educator will:
 - Build trust and rapport (cultivating relationships)
 - Provide data on the average household usage as a comparison (activating social norms).
 - Provide customized recommendations for no cost and low cost steps to reduce base load energy use in lighting, appliances, electronics and hot water.
 - Provide a checklist that doubles as an **Energy Action Plan** for homeowners to sign if they choose to commit to completing the items they check (making a commitment).
 - Provide information and paperwork assistance regarding NYSERDA grants, loans and rebates to homeowners.
 - Follow up with each of the homeowners visited one month from their initial visit to check on homeowner progress and encourage action steps to complete the no cost and low cost improvements and audit recommendations.

Control Group:

- Homeowners will receive energy audit only.

Hypotheses

- 1) The energy educator intervention will increase homeowners' participation in the existing Home Performance with Energy Star (HPwES) program and increase the conversion rate, average job size and average dollars per lead.
- (2) Homeowners who receive the energy educator intervention will implement low-cost/no-cost energy-saving retrofits at a higher rate than homeowners who do not receive the energy educator visit.

Early Lessons Learned (Anecdotal Evidence)

One year of piloting our behavioral intervention in the field suggests that:

- Increased ease with the HPwES application process helps homeowners feel excited about working with us.
- Customers have greater trust in the quality of the company and the install work they are obtaining.
- Energy savings often happen immediately because homeowners learn easy low- and no-cost actions (ie.g., base load reductions, shower heads, turning down hot water)
- The Energy Educator conveys information and insight about the performance issues in the home, customer's goals, and any barriers to the building analyst. This information facilitates a more efficient and productive audit. Audit times are decreased and sales close rates have increased as a result of the EE program (statistical analysis forthcoming once the funded project is underway).

Selected References

McKenzie-Mohr, D., & Smith, W. A. (1999). *Fostering sustainable behavior: An introduction to community-based social marketing*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.

NYSERDA. (2012). *Green Jobs - Green New York: Annual Report* (pp. 49-66). Albany, NY: New York State Energy Research and Development Agency.

Vigen, M., & Mazur-Stommen, S. (2012). *Reaching the "high-hanging fruit" through behavior change: how community-based social marketing puts energy savings within reach*. Washington, DC: American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.

