

To Tweet or Not to Tweet? That is the Question

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Abstract

As technology continues to change the way we live and work, many marketers are finding it increasingly difficult to reach their customers. While traditional approaches like newspaper, radio and in-store advertising remain key drivers for the promotion of energy efficiency programs, more and more consumers are turning to the Internet for their news and information.

To meet this challenge, Wisconsin Energy Conservation Corporation, through Focus on Energy, Wisconsin's statewide resource for energy efficiency and renewable energy, has evolved its marketing portfolio to include social marketing at some of the Internet's most popular social destinations. The goal? To increase awareness and interest in energy efficiency and Focus on Energy programs by cultivating productive, ongoing conversations with energy-conscious consumers.

The ultimate goal of incorporating social marketing activities is to drive energy-minded residents to the Focus on Energy Web site, where they can learn more about our programs and contact us to get started.

Introduction

The statewide Focus on Energy Program (hereafter referred to simply as "Focus") was established in 2001 as a result of Public Benefits legislation in Wisconsin. The program's goal is to achieve direct energy savings (kilowatt, kilowatt hour, and therms) while increasing public awareness of, and interest in energy efficiency. Focus programs include a strong market component and strive to transform the markets for particular products and services so that consumers will routinely demand energy-efficient solutions, and the market will routinely deliver them.

While it may appear that the program's biggest challenge lay in influencing the market to deliver energy-efficient products and services, simply reaching the consumer with the message of energy efficiency may be an even tougher proposition. Bombarded as they are by thousands of marketing messages every day, consumers have become ever more difficult to reach.

While traditional marketing remains a key driver for energy efficiency programs, the rise of the Internet and the increasing sophistication of today's computer-savvy consumers presents clever marketers with opportunities to dream up ever-more creative and engaging approaches. For years, online marketers have utilized tools such as banner advertising and search-engine submissions, but today, advances in technology and creativity have expanded the range of tools and techniques in the online marketer's repertoire.

The Focus program, like many others, faces the challenge of reaching its prospects with limited marketing dollars. Confronted with the need to balance messaging with energy savings at a reasonable rate of return to the rate payers, program managers must look for new and innovative ways to reach their audiences effectively—and cost-effectively. Social marketing becomes an important part of the solution.

What is Social Marketing?

First, I'd like to clarify two terms that are thrown around a lot and are related, but really have different meanings—social marketing and social media. Social marketing seeks to influence social behaviors not to benefit the marketer, but to benefit the target audience and the general society. Social media are the Web sites where users actively participate and determine what is “popular.” This would include Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Digg, YouTube, etc. Below are definitions of some of the more popular social media sites on the internet.

- **Twitter.** Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages, known as 'tweets.' Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to the author's followers.
- **Facebook.** Facebook is a free, global social networking Web site where users can add friends, send them messages, and update their personal profiles to let friends know what they're doing. Additionally, users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school, and region and can choose fan pages according to their interests.
- **YouTube and Vimeo.** YouTube and Vimeo are free social networking, video sharing Web sites where users can upload and share videos. Companies can create a “channel” where all of their videos are stored in a central location for users to view.

Now that social marketing is defined, what does it really mean? It is the blending of people, communication, and the internet. Instead of just creating messages, social marketing allows you to create experiences, conversations, and connections with your customers. With social marketing, the focus is on the “social” aspect, and not the medium used to deliver the message. You don't want to try and craft a message; you should be real and genuine, and remember that in the end, it's just a conversation with your customer.

Why Social Marketing?

A brand's value is the sum of all the conversations that are happening. Traditional marketing jumpstarts the conversation, but social marketing keeps it alive. In order to keep your brand relevant, and in front of customers you have to be willing to be a part of the conversations that are happening. Your customers are out there talking about you and it is important that you are aware of the conversations. These conversations can provide a company with real-time feedback (positive or negative) on their brand, products, services, etc. and provide valuable information. It's really not a question of if you should integrate social marketing into you overall mix, it's a question of when and where.

A new research study by GroupM Search and Comscore¹ shows how effectively social media campaigns can help the bottom line—not just through direct results but also through altering people's future behavior. Among their detailed findings are that:

- Consumers exposed to a brand's influenced social media and paid search programs are 2.8 times more likely to search for that brand's products compared to users who only saw paid search.
- The study also showed a 50 percent click-through-rate (CTR) increase in paid search when consumers were exposed to influenced social media and paid search. This revealed consumers exposed to social media are more likely to click on a brand's paid search ad compared to those exposed to the brand's paid search alone. Among searchers using a brand's product name in the

1. Comscore.com

query, the CTR increased from 4.5 percent to 11.8 percent when users were exposed to both influenced social media and paid search around a brand.

- In organic search, consumers searching on brand product terms who have been exposed to a brand's social marketing campaign are 2.4 times more likely to click on organic links leading to the advertiser's site than the average user seeing a brand's paid search ad alone.

While these stats are specific to search, they do suggest that putting your brand in places where it can be discovered and part of the natural conversation will influence customers more than the use of traditional marketing tactics alone.

Customers want relationships, to be part of a community, and to interact with other people, organizations, and brands. Social marketing allows companies to create experiences, conversations, and connections with customers in a way that was not possible before. Social media can help your message spread exponentially and reach audiences it may not have reached otherwise.

For example, the chart below shows how long it can take to reach a targeted number of users through several different media resources:

Medium	Time to Reach	Number of Users Reached
Radio	38 Years	50 million ²
TV	13 Years	50 million ²
Internet	4 Years	50 million ²
iPod	3 Years	50 million ²
Facebook	less than 9 months	100 million ³
iPhone applications	9 months	1 billion ⁴

The use of social media sites allows companies to broaden their audience demographics. Not surprisingly, Twitter and similar services have been most avidly embraced by young adults. Nearly one in five (19%) of online adults ages 18 and 24 have used Twitter and rival services, as have 20% of online adults ages 25-34⁵. However, Twitter use is not dominated by the youngest of young adults, as the median age of a Twitter user is 31⁵. By comparison, the median age of a MySpace user is 27, while Facebook users median at 26 and LinkedIn users at 40⁵. Not only do these sites allow companies to reach a large age range of customers, the income levels and ethnicity is also very diverse.

- Online Americans who live in lower-income households are more likely to use Twitter than more affluent Americans⁵.
- Some 17% of internet users in households earning less than \$30,000 tweet and update their status, compared with 10% of those earning more than \$75,000 annually⁵.
- Twitter users (Twitter users) are slightly more racially and ethnically diverse than is the full U.S. population, most likely because they are younger—and younger Americans are a more ethnically and racially diverse group than is the full population⁵.
- Facebook is growing faster among women than men in almost every age group. Women now comprise 56.2% of Facebook's audience⁶.

2. United Nations Cyberschoolbus Document

3. Mashable

4. Apple, Inc.

5. Pew Internet & American Life Project study.

6. Inside Facebook.com

Focus has been on Twitter sharing energy-related tips, news stories, and links to interactive tools on our Web site. These messages are re-tweeted by Focus' followers to all of their followers, who may or may not be following Focus. (A re-tweet is like forwarding an email; it is when another Twitter user shares your post, or what you said with their followers.) In some cases we've had other Twitter users sending out tweets about Focus—just recently Twitter users from Brazil, Colorado, and elsewhere tweeted about the Focus Web site and the good information that was available. Below are some examples of re-tweets (RT) of Focus content:

- RT @focusonenergy Myth: CFLs are slow to turn on. Truth: ENERGY STAR qualified CFLs turn on in less than a second. <http://ow.ly/tCKG>
- RT @focusonenergy @WIGreenBuilding: 1 day til Solar Decade! Come for the day or just the afternoon...but don't miss it! <http://bit.ly/22by0>
- RT @focusonenergy: Did you know October is Energy Awareness Month? Find energy-saving tips from ENERGY STAR. <http://budurl.com/ajyu>
- RT @focusonenergy How much energy & \$ can u save by using ENERGY STAR CFLs? Use our online calculator to find out! <http://budurl.com/j5sk>
- Found a fun Wisconsin website debunking CFL myths, giving advice on use/recycling <http://budurl.com/lightbulbs> (via @focusonenergy) /Meg
- Learn how compact fluorescent lights can save you money: www.focusonenergy.com/General/changealight/2009/index.aspx
- Saiba sobre a enganação sobre lâmpadas eletrônicas. Só que está em inglês! <http://www.focusonenergy.com/General/changealight/2009/index.aspx>
- <http://twitpic.com/1mw21> - Shawano Sustainable School geothermal installation @mironconstruct @shawanoleader @mrea @focusonenergy @usgbc

Twitter users have mentioned Focus grants and incentives, sent direct messages, or just promoted Focus through "Follow Friday" mentions (where Twitter users suggest to their followers other Twitter users to follow).

- @focusonenergy thanks for the retweet, love what you do!
- @focusonenergy you are welcome, was excited to see you here on Twitter. Was on your website this weekend for my mom 4/rebate info
- Thanks for the RT! BTW...loved the stuff you guys did at the State Fair...really enjoyed the display!
- For all things green #ff @timwirtz @focusonenergy @twilightearth
- #Follow Friday @Oncor @aectnet @luminant @focusonenergy @homeenergydoc @SearsHTS @ShiftYourHabit

By being a part of the social community, Focus is able to answer questions and be the expert source for customers, reporters, etc. to turn to in Wisconsin for energy efficiency and renewable energy information. Just recently a TV station out of Wausau wanted to know about the upcoming American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) rebates that will be available:

- @focusonenergy We're looking for details on how the Appliance Rebate program that passed finance comm. today will work. Can you help?

Focus was able to respond directly to the TV station and provide them with a contact person to get the information they needed. Next we followed up with a Tweet letting everyone know that more information on the ARRA appliance rebates would be available soon:

- Wis. Lawmakers Consider Expanding Energy Rebates for Appliances -- plan still needs US DOE approval. <http://budurl.com/bzkm> (This link went to a NY Times article.)

Focus wouldn't be aware of any of this great "world-of-mouth" advertising if we weren't involved in, and listening to the conversations that are happening. Of course, it's always important to follow up with a word of thanks; and continue the social aspect of the conversation.

- Thanks [@GreenTeamTips](#), [@MREA](#), [@CoopNation](#), [@ColoradoREA](#), [@timwirtz](#), [@RyanThompson](#), [@ImageStudios](#) for the mentions and RTs!

When diving into the world of social marketing, there are a couple of key points to remember:

Isolation is not good for anyone, especially marketing tactics. There are many avenues to reaching a customer base, and social marketing should be considered just one piece of the marketing portfolio. Traditional approaches remain key drivers for the promotion of energy efficiency programs, and should not be abandoned. In a survey conducted by Glacier Consulting Group⁷ for Focus on Energy, it was found that "In-store Displays" played a dominant role in creating program awareness for CFL reward participants and was mentioned by at least 60% as a source of program information. "Friends, Relatives, Neighbors," was the next most frequently mentioned source of program information, with nearly 18% of participants. Point-of-purchase advertising is still highly effective and influential in the purchase of CFLs but as noted by the survey, social marketing (i.e. word of mouth) is also a highly influential source of information. By integrating social marketing into the marketing mix, you can reach more customers and enhance both your traditional marketing tactics and brand perception.

Stay true to the brand. Because social marketing is a complementary piece of the puzzle to an overarching, integrated marketing plan, the efforts should be seen as an extension of the brand. Therefore it is important that the company's branding standards are followed as much as possible—backgrounds, username (URL), logo, messaging, etc. It is also important to ensure that whoever is updating your accounts can represent the company's social media personality. Posts, tweets, and updates should be in the company's and customers' best interest. Too much posting, or not enough posting, can hurt the overall efforts. You want to post enough information to remain relevant, but not too much that you are annoying your followers with useless information. Also keep in mind that customers are not interested in following a company who posts pointless information that is not on target with the brand image and messaging.

The growth has only just begun. Not that long ago radio and newspaper advertising were essential to any marketer's toolbox. Newspapers are experiencing record declines in circulation because we no longer search for the news, the news finds us. The average daily circulation of U.S. newspapers declined 7% in the six-month period ending March 31, 2009⁸. And just a few years ago, interactive tools, games, calculators, podcasts, pop-up billboards and more were the "wave" of the future. Now we have social media sites. A few years from now, there will be more new tactics and opportunities for marketers to reach customers. Companies need to stop weighing the pros and cons of jumping into social marketing and instead join in. The cons of not addressing the social space could leave them behind their competitors. While the medium may change (Twitter vs. Digg), social marketing itself is here to stay. And as it evolves, marketers will find more and more opportunities to engage their prospects in creative new ways.

7. Glacier Consulting Group

8. Market Watch

Focus' Social Marketing Efforts

Focus on Energy recently evolved its marketing portfolio to include social marketing to increase awareness and interest in energy efficiency and Focus on Energy programs by cultivating productive, ongoing conversations with energy-conscious consumers.

Focus launched its social media presence on Twitter and Facebook on Earth Day, 2009. That same day, the “Ask Focus” Web site also launched. The ultimate goal of these Web-based activities is to drive energy-minded residents to the Focus on Energy Web site, where they can learn more about the programs and contact Focus to get started. Following are examples of the social marketing efforts WECC developed for the Focus on Energy Program.

Focus and Twitter

For the first several weeks, Focus sent a simple energy efficiency or renewable energy “tip” Tweet every day (Figure 1). These short, 140-character messages conveyed quick snippets of information to entice our followers to visit the Focus Web page and learn more. Soon, Focus added tweets about energy-related news, education events, and program activities to further increase interest and keep people talking. At the same time, Focus began networking with other energy-related organizations and groups, such as government energy programs, independent nonprofits, local utilities and even other state energy programs that Focus on Energy followers may find interesting. This allowed us to reach, and start conversations with, additional qualified prospects in related networks and groups.

It's important to remember that Twitter isn't the be-all and end-all of communications. It's simply one more tool in your marketing portfolio. Twitter will reach a portion of your customers, but not all of them. Make sure you communicate via other communication tools and social media sites to ensure you are reaching as many of your customers as possible. You don't want to leave any of your customers behind.

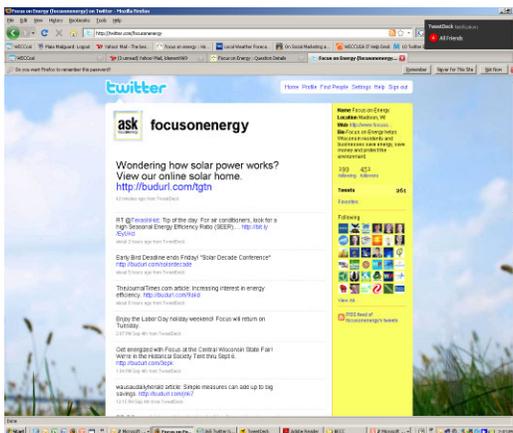


Figure 1. Focus on Energy Twitter page.

Focus and Facebook

The Focus page on Facebook (Figure 2) engages consumers with Twitter messages; status updates, photos of events, and links to related organizations such as energy-efficient home builders, the Midwest Renewable Energy Association, and more.

The same “rule” mentioned with Twitter also applies to Facebook. It's simply one more tool in your marketing portfolio. Make sure you communicate via other communication tools and social media sites (if applicable to your target audience) to ensure you are reaching as many of your customers as possible.



Figure 2. Focus on Energy Facebook page.

Focus and YouTube and Vimeo

The Focus YouTube channel (Figure 3) has had over 1,500 views since April 21, 2009. The site is loaded with various video clips that Focus has created whether to explain a Home Performance evaluation, or promote programs and services. We have also partnered with other organizations to help spread our message and posted these videos on the site as well.

- As a sponsor of Today’s Home Remodeler, a local home improvement show, Focus received a series of 30-second energy “factoids” featuring an energy saving idea/tip from Focus on Energy. The spots also encouraged viewers to watch the show and visit the Web site.
- Alliant Energy’s Power House TV shows feature a TV spot from Focus on Energy which airs during the show. Focus is currently working with Alliant to post certain segments of the show to our YouTube and Vimeo sites to help increase awareness and education of energy efficiency.



Figure 3. Focus on Energy YouTube page.

Ask Focus on Energy

You can also choose to mimic social media but still maintain more control than you have with an

open source social media site. Focus on Energy chose to do this with the Ask Focus on Energy Web site. This site maintains the feel of social media without the risk of uncontrolled users putting content on our site directly. This allowed us to create a feeling of dialog on a Web site, vs. a one-sided approach of just posting information, fact sheets, etc. the previously was more one sided.

Askfocusonenergy.com (Figure 4) puts Wisconsin residents and business owners in touch with real-life energy experts. This Web site was the first step in Focus' social marketing efforts, and launched on April 22, 2009. Visitors can search the online database for answers to their questions about energy efficiency and renewable energy—and submit questions of their own. Friendly Focus experts answer new questions each week to help Wisconsin residents and business owners save energy, save money, and protect the environment. Focus promotes the service using Internet and social marketing tools, together with radio advertising and public relations.

Thru October 12, 2009, 78% of the visitors to askfocusonenergy.com came from the Focus Web site (focusonenergy.com), and 4.28% of the visitors to the Focus Web site came from askfocusonenergy.com.

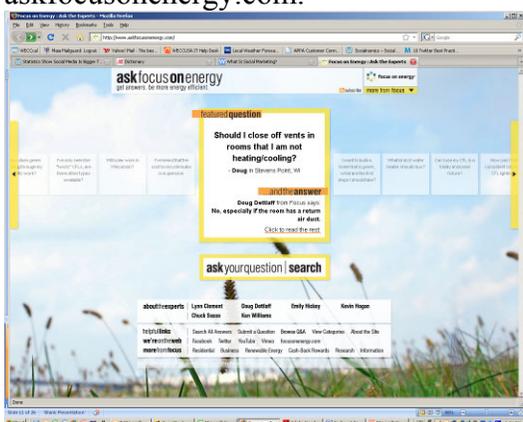


Figure 4. Askfocusonenergy.com home page.

Results

Twitter. The number of people following Focus on Energy grows daily; currently there are over 600 Twitter users receiving our tips and information. Response rates are tracked through unique Web addresses included in the tweets. If a tweet contains a link to a Web site, (press releases, stories about Focus, Focus Web tools) we can track the number of click-thrus. Twenty is considered a good CTR, and Focus hovers around that mark. However, Focus had a particularly good day back in September, with 145 click-thrus from various tweets, see Figure 5.



Figure 5. Budurl dashboard of tweet CTR.

Facebook. The number of Focus' Facebook fans is not growing as fast as our Twitter followers; currently there are over 340 fans. As was predicted, the Focus Facebook fan base is growing a bit slower than Twitter followers. This is directly related to Focus not necessarily being a brand customers interact with on a daily basis nor do they have an affinity toward (i.e. Coke). Conversely, Focus offers information for consumers that they find helpful, when they need it. Twitter provides a timely news source for followers, which is more closely related to Focus' efforts. Focus is currently exploring suitable ways to grow the fan base. Facebook "Insights" (Figure 6) offers great information for organizations on their fan base. Such as, the number of fan interactions, total number of fans and their demographics (gender, age range), media consumption, reviews, mentions, and more.

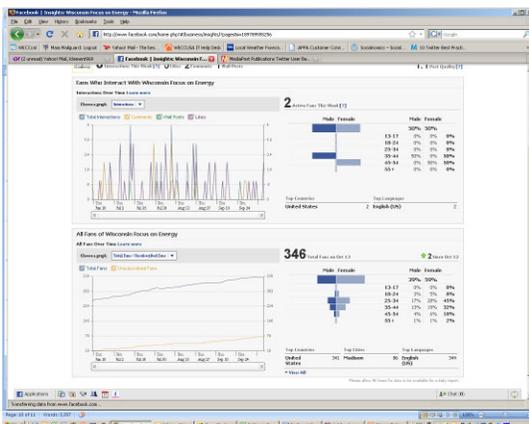


Figure 6. Focus' Facebook Insights page.

Ask Focus. The Ask Focus Web site has been well received by staff and the public alike. Here are the stats from April 6 to October 15:

- Number of questions asked = 500
- Number of visits = 8,623
- Number of unique visits = 6,524
- Average duration of visits = 3:29
- Top 10 Referral URLs = focusonenergy.com, we-energies.com, redflagdeals.com, wifocusonenergy.com, fox6now.com, weenergies.com, jsonline.com, ecec.com, twitter.com
- Percent of people that visit site and submit question = 482 visitors (7.4% of unique visitors)

Lessons Learned

There are several key lessons learned from our forays into social marketing:

1. **Know your target.** Know who you are trying to reach on the social media sites. Is your audience there? Which sites?
2. **Have a plan.** Without a clear goal, people may wonder why you're out there. Don't just do this to do it.
3. **Start small.** There are thousands of sites out there. You don't need to be on all of them. Do one or two well first and then add to the mix slowly.
4. **Content is king.** New information and interactions help maintain response rates. Keep it fresh, but don't overdo it. How you converse means just as much or more than what you say—don't bully or dominate the conversation.
5. **Branding.** Remember: these social media accounts are an extension of your brand so you should follow branding standards on these sites as much as possible—backgrounds, username (URL), logo, messaging, etc.
6. **Engage**
 - a. **Your audience.** Most interaction occurs at the impression level—provide enough to hook the prospect right away.
 - b. **With other groups.** Social aspect. Re-tweeting, links to stories, #FF mentions.
7. **Results.** It's not the same as traditional marketing, you typically can't directly relate to sales. Instead, you need to be willing to measure success in terms of: Did we learn something about customers? Did customers learn something about us? Were we able to engage customers?
8. **It's not "free".** It is a cost-effective way to reach customers as far as buying advertising space, but it does take staff time and investments to keep up to date, relevant, etc.

Conclusion

In today's over-communicated society, marketers are finding it increasingly difficult to find and connect with their audiences. Social marketing can be an effective tool to help build a company's brand, as part of the overall marketing mix. Social marketing is not a straight forward approach; it comes in many shapes and sizes, and requires continual education. It takes trial and error along with patience and persistence. Focus on Energy plans to continue to use social marketing as a component of the program's outreach to help us continue the conversation with our customers, grow program recognition, and ensure we are in the places people go to talk about issues related to energy and energy efficiency. Organizations who choose not to integrate social marketing into their marketing portfolio miss the opportunity to help drive the broader conversation about their company and the issues they care about. The conversation will be happening with or without you, being there matters.

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