How are utilities encouraging water conservation awareness?

An Ask E Source answer
By Jessica Bailis
September 4, 2019

How are utilities encouraging water conservation awareness?

Q:How are utilities encouraging customers to conserve water?

A:Utilities are engaging with residential customers to improve awareness around water conservation via their website, social media, and primarily print, radio, and direct mail advertising and marketing campaigns.

For this Ask E Source answer, we look at four examples of successful water conservation awareness campaigns as well as social media posts from utilities and examples of utility water conservation web pages.

Utility water conservation awareness campaigns

SRP

One of the most successful water conservation campaigns is SRP's 2011 Together We Conserve campaign. According to the entry in E Source Energy AdVision—our database of thousands of examples of utility marketing and advertising campaigns—SRP wanted to showcase its expertise in building and managing a structure that ensures water for the Phoenix area. It also wanted to tell customers about the utility's efforts to protect and deliver water to the Salt River Valley and to teach customers how to conserve water, how it benefits them, and how their water efficiency helps the overall community.

How did SRP do it? SRP targeted a broad audience of Valley-wide residents ages 25 to 54, and then more specifically ages 35 and older with print advertising (**figure 1**). The utility ran ads in local newspapers and magazines from January to May 2011.

Figure 1: SRP's water conservation ads

SRP ran these ads in local newspapers and magazines during the first half of 2011.

Print ad



WATER PARTNERS. SRP and the City of Phoenix work together to supply safe, reliable water to our homes and businesses. For more than 100 years, SRP has collected snowmelt from northeastern Arizona and delivered it to our cities through a system of lakes, rivers, dams and canals. From here, the cities treat the water and send it to your tap. Also, reclaimed water is cleaned by the cities and used for irrigation, wetlands and to generate electricity. It's a long journey from the watershed up north to your showerhead at home, which is why it takes a team effort to ensure we have enough water – today and tomorrow.

Learn more and find water-saving tips at **togetherweconserve.com**.

SRP
Delivering water and power.™

Source: SRP

Magazine ad



Source: SRP

Why was it successful? SRP was successful with this campaign because the utility focused on how the community contributes to conservation goals. Messaging in the ads included: "As residents of the Valley, let's work together to conserve our water to ensure there is enough—today and tomorrow" and

“It’s a long journey from the watershed up north to your showerhead at home, which is why it takes a team effort to ensure we have enough water—today and tomorrow.”

How did the utility measure success? SRP evaluated the campaign via phone surveys, focus groups, and website traffic. After the first phase of the campaign, the preliminary field measurement showed that consumers were more likely to change their behavior to conserve water and 60% indicated they made a behavior change in the previous six months to conserve water. More than 10,000 consumers went to the website to obtain information about water conservation.

Fort Collins Utilities

In 2010, Fort Collins Utilities launched its Make Efficient Choices campaign to educate and engage customers in energy and water conservation goals. According to its entry in Energy AdVision, Fort Collins Utilities developed an integrated citywide marketing campaign to drive customers to nine utility events and encourage efficient appliance and WaterSense purchase choices.

How did Fort Collins Utilities do it? Fort Collins Utilities’ newspaper print ads featured eight images that pushed the value of efficient appliance and WaterSense choices, with each ad based on a question headline within the campaign framework (**figure 2**). The ads were on a rotating placement schedule, with three different ad placements per week on strong readership days, during the six-week campaign. The campaign targeted all electric and water residential customers ranging in age from 18 to 85.

Figure 2: Fort Collins Utilities newspaper print ad

The utility ran this ad three times per week for six weeks.



Source: Fort Collins Utilities

Why was it successful? Fort Collins Utilities' campaign was successful because it matched the ad images to its community profile: highly educated, upper-middle class, environmentally conscious, and family-centric.

How did the utility measure success? Fort Collins Utilities evaluated this campaign based on participation rates and rebates turned in for purchases of appliances and WaterSense fixtures. The overall participation goal was 2,000 for the campaign, and the organization came very close to that

goal, with actual participation of 1,887 customers—a 6% increase over the previous year. The utility also exceeded rebate goals for clothes washers (1,000 versus 750) and dishwashers (520 versus 500).

Minnesota Energy Resources

In 2012, Minnesota Energy Resources ran the How Much? radio ad to promote its rebates and free water conservation kits, which, according to its entry in Energy AdVision, was part of its spring campaign.

How did Minnesota Energy Resources do it? The utility placed radio ads in seven markets that ran for four weeks from mid-March through mid-April 2012. The campaign targeted middle-income, residential customers, ages 25 to 55, who were homeowners.

Why was it successful? Because the utility used a unique campaign landing page, cashrebatesnow.com, Minnesota Energy Resources could accurately measure attribution and results. The utility supplemented the radio ads with a customer bill insert mailed throughout April, which created an additional touchpoint for awareness.

How did the utility measure success? Minnesota Energy Resources evaluated this campaign based on website traffic, participation rates, and awareness levels. The utility saw a 114% increase in web page visits to its unique landing page during the four-week campaign. By June 2012, Minnesota Energy Resources reached approximately 28% of its residential rebate goals, which was typical for the utility because most rebate redemptions tend to happen in the fall, at the beginning of the heating season. The utility was happy with the results and planned to run a similar campaign in the fall to further increase participation.

Denver Water

One of our favorite water conservation awareness campaigns is Stop Running Toilets, a 2007 publicity stunt by Denver Water. A person dressed as a toilet ran across the football field during the Colorado University versus Colorado State University football game, and a security guard chased and tackled the toilet. The ad directed customers to its landing page, useonlywhatyouneed.org.

In 2015, Denver Water partnered with ad agency Sukle to put together a creative billboard and public transportation advertising campaign (**figure 3**). See the My Modern Met article Creative Billboards Cleverly Encourage People to Use Less Water for more details.

Figure 3: Denver Water ads

Denver Water used creative advertising on billboards and at bus stops.

Billboard 1



Source: Sukle

Billboard 2



Source: Sukle

Bus stop ad



Source: Sukle

Water conservation awareness examples on social media

Some clever water conservation examples from utilities on social media come from GRU, SRP, SDG&E, and Columbia Water & Light (**figure 4**).

Figure 4: Social media is a popular channel for utility water-efficiency messages

GRU, SRP, SDG&E, and Columbia Water & Light promoted water conservation on Instagram and Facebook.

View this post on Instagram

[It's Gators vs. Bulldogs for the Mayor's Challenge for Water Conservation! During the month of April, cities all over the U.S. will compete to win by taking the water conservation pledge. Help Gainesville beat Athens, GA. by pledging at mywaterpledge.com before April 30th to beat the Bulldogs! #GoGators]

A post shared by Gainesville Regional Utilities (@gru_4u) on Apr 2, 2019 at 10:32am PDT

View this post on Instagram

Did you know we offer the community free presentations on topics like energy efficiency and water conservation? We had a great time educating our customers in Mesa this morning!

A post shared by Salt River Project (@srpconnect) on Mar 16, 2019 at 12:05pm PDT

View this post on Instagram

Interested in learning about water conservation and gardening? @thewaterconservationgarden (thegarden.org) provides free admission to gardens, plus courses on using rainwater, composting, landscaping, and more. They also offer fun courses and field trips for kids. See their website for more information, including their upcoming Butterfly Festival and a live stream of their resident barn owls, Hoot and Holler. #earthmonth #greensd #gardening #sustainability #sandiego

A post shared by San Diego Gas & Electric (@sdge) on Apr 11, 2019 at 2:19pm PDT

Utility water conservation web pages

Several utilities advise customers via water conservation web pages:

- The SRP Water Conservation page includes tips and tricks, rebates, and event information.
- The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power Water Conservation page also has a Residential Program Overview page with watering days, how to calculate your water usage, rebates and free items, and conservation tips.
- The Tacoma Public Utilities Water Conservation Plan and Goal page informs customers about the company's conservation plan as part of its overall water resource plan.
- The Snohomish County PUD Water Conservation Tips page offers tips and free water conservation kits.
- The OUC Conservation Tips page includes water conservation and strategic landscaping tips as well as information on the importance of watering restrictions.
- The Eugene Water & Electric Board Water Conservation Tips shows customers how to save water in their homes and outdoors.

© 2008 - 2026 E Source Companies LLC. All rights reserved.
Distribution outside subscribing organizations limited by license.