Optimizing Con Edison’s electric vehicle messaging through ethnographic research

Consulting case study
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Key takeaways

- Con Edison planned to install 38 curbside EV charging sites to increase EV adoption and wanted to understand how residents would feel about the addition of the chargers to their already busy streets.
- E Source Management Consulting conducted ethnographic research to gather residents’ perceptions of EVs and curbside charging to help Con Edison craft a messaging, communications, and engagement strategy.
- Based on those ethnographic findings and the outcomes of an E Source–hosted design-thinking workshop, Con Edison developed a hyperlocal launch that highlighted EV owners in the community, spread awareness of EVs, and addressed community

The challenge

Con Edison was preparing to install 38 curbside EV charging sites on the streets of New York City. The project would expand the availability of EV charging to better support existing and future EV owners and boost EV adoption, but it would displace on-street parking for non-EVs.

In a city already experiencing traffic and parking challenges, the utility needed a deep understanding of residents’ perceptions and needs to develop a customer-first messaging, communications, and engagement strategy for the charger launch.

Ethnographic research can paint a more accurate painting of what your customers want

Fill out this short form to start a conversation about your needs and how we can help.

The solution

To best understand how NYC residents felt about EVs, curbside chargers, and the effects of chargers in their communities, Con Edison hired E Source to conduct ethnographic research and a design-thinking workshop. E Source gathered customer perceptions and opinions about driving, parking, traffic, EVs, and curbside charging through self-filmed videos, photos, and text messages supplied by research study participants. They provided their thoughts in an open-ended fashion, leading to unique insights that can’t be gathered from other types of market research.

E Source focused on EV owners, prospective EV owners, and passionate community members, recruiting participants in communities where chargers would be installed. These customer insights revealed challenges related to parking, traffic, and EV charging that helped Con Edison understand from a deeper human-centric level because of the ethnographic research.

The results

Using ethnographic insights, Con Edison crafted an overarching campaign messaging strategy with the goals of building awareness of and receptivity to curbside chargers, boosting EV adoption, and increasing charger usage. To alleviate customers’ concerns about the curbside charging stations, the utility developed a hands-on, localized engagement strategy to educate residents and spread awareness of the benefits of having readily available charging solutions on city streets. The strategy included:

- Early notification of host communities with signage alerting the community of the incoming charging stations
- Education programs at each station
- On-site EV specialists to answer questions and facilitate peer-to-peer discussions

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