

2008 Behavior, Energy and Climate Change Conference Roundtable Abstract

11. Getting Efficiency on the Radar: How Can We Effectively Appeal to Commercial Customers?

Moderator: Curt Nichols, Idaho Power

Abstract: The commercial customer is often hard to reach and even harder to engage. Even more so when we want to engage them on energy efficiency. Energy is often a topic they have misconceptions about or don't understand at all.

Given enough resources, engagement is possible. However, money and manpower are always limited. So, the real question is how to effectively use our resources to effectively engage our commercial customers.

Effective engagement has three key elements: • Speak their language • Address their interests • Meet their needs

First, we need to speak their language. Very few commercial customers have terms like "kWh", "therms", or even "payback" in their vocabulary. If it's a retailer, we need to speak in terms of "sales" or "market share". If it's a government building, we might want to talk about "tax base". For an investment firm, "return on investment" (ROI) would be appropriate.

Speaking their language will get their attention, but we must address their interests to get them engaged. Sometimes market share or ROI will do that. In other cases it will be publicity, production, or accomplishments that align with their corporate objectives.

Finally, we have to meet their needs. That is what will keep them engaged even if their needs revolve around issues like employee turnover, product quality, sales volume, or anything else.

If we're not effective, we won't influence much efficiency from our commercial customers. Efficiency and effectiveness are interconnected, no matter which side of the gas or electric meter you're on.

Bio: Curt Nichols is an Oregon native, a Mechanical Engineering graduate from Oregon State University. He is a Certified Energy Manager (CEM) with over 25 years of commercial energy efficiency experience. Curt has worked for Pacific Gas & Electric, the Eugene (OR) Water and Electric Board, the Oregon Department of Energy, the City of Portland's Energy Office, and the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance before moving to Idaho Power in December 2004.

At the City of Portland, he was responsible for creating and managing the award-winning BEST Business Program (Businesses for an Environmentally Sustainable Tomorrow). He was instrumental in a number of business outreach, energy efficiency, and renewable energy projects that Portland undertook. While serving as the City of Portland energy manager, the Association of Professional Energy Managers (APEM) named him "Energy Manager of the Year" in 2000.

At Idaho Power, he's led the creation of two brand new business incentive programs – Easy Upgrades for simple retrofits and Building Efficiency for new construction. These incentive programs have shown significant success in involving the trade allies, reaching the customers, and achieving energy savings. Curt will lead a roundtable discussion titled "Effectively Engaging Commercial Customers in Energy Efficiency".