

Welcome to Your Home Energy Makeover

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ABSTRACT

Reality TV has become a national obsession. The thrill of living vicariously through others who are pursuing love and marriage, financial bounties for outlasting their peers, or fabulous careers on runways and Wall Street has captured our imaginations. Wisconsin Energy Conservation Corporation (WECC), through its Focus on Energy programs, has tapped into this craze with the “Home Energy Makeover”—a contest-driven marketing campaign that combines the allure of reality television with the nation’s growing interest in energy efficiency.

Designed to build awareness of and excitement for energy efficiency, the contest gave residents of the Milwaukee Metro area the chance to win a comprehensive energy efficiency upgrade for their homes. During the contest entry period, Focus captured 9,916 leads. After narrowing the field to six semi-finalists, Focus announced the winner during the NFL’s Super Bowl half-time show on February 3. The campaign continues to run through June with banner ads, television spots and segments on the Fox 6 morning show “Wake Up” featuring regular updates on the winning home’s progress. Focus plans to follow up with the nearly 10,000 leads in March and June to encourage home energy evaluations and offer Cash-Back Rewards.

While the campaign has not yet concluded and data is still being compiled, the first Home Energy Makeover has generated enough leads to ensure it will not be the last. Future campaigns will build on the lessons Focus has learned to reach more prospects and collect even more leads while propelling consumer interest in energy efficiency.

Introduction

The statewide Focus on Energy Program was established in 2001 as a result of public benefits legislation in Wisconsin. Focus on Energy’s goal is to achieve direct energy savings (kilowatts, kilowatt-hours 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 most Wisconsin residents have no idea if they have used or saved a kilowatt-hour or therm, they are very aware of whether their homes are comfortable and enjoyable places to live. If only there was a way to involve homeowners in the process of energy efficiency and interest them in the ways it can improve their quality of life, we might inspire them to take action. Noting America’s fascination with reality television, Focus on Energy conceived a plan to promote the benefits of energy efficiency using the hook of a reality-show contest.

In exploring the potential for this idea, Focus staff learned that similar campaigns have been attempted in other states and territories with great success. While no published research or formal case studies were to be found, it appears that programs in Illinois and Colorado shared a number of key components, including effective planning, public relations activities and an understanding that the goal for this type of contest should be to create many losers—in other

words, qualified leads—and not simply shower the winner with attention (ACI Presentations 2007).

With this in mind, Focus set about the job of planning and executing a contest-based marketing campaign for Wisconsin.

Objectives

Focus set several goals for its Home Energy Makeover campaign:

- Build interest in energy efficiency. Noting the public’s growing interest in “green” products and practices, Focus decided that branching out of its traditional advertising and promotional methods with a contest-driven campaign would be an engaging and innovative approach to further build interest and awareness among Wisconsin energy consumers.
- Reach a new audience. Focus understood that the innovative premise and promotion of this campaign would help it capture the attention of consumers it does not normally reach.
- Generate 10,000 new leads for Focus on Energy programs. As this was the first time Focus had attempted such a campaign, program staff were unsure how many leads they could expect to generate. Promotions staff at Fox 6 suggested, based on similar campaigns they had run, that the contest might see about 10,000 leads—so this is the goal that was set.
- Garner widespread media exposure. One of the primary reasons for choosing a contest-driven strategy was to excite the public about energy efficiency. Focus hoped that the thrill of “playing to win” a home energy makeover, fueled in part by television promotions and a Super Bowl announcement on Fox 6, would generate excitement throughout the Milwaukee area and across the state as other media outlets picked up on the story.
- Promote behavioral changes. With this campaign, Focus wanted to tell consumers, “You can do this,” and show them the benefits, both economic and environmental, of saving energy. The Internet banner ads, television spots and especially the morning-show coverage were all designed to engage consumers in the process of becoming more energy efficient, and communicate the message that whoever you are, you can reap the rewards of energy efficiency in your home and in your daily life.

Methods

Geographic Focus

With a state population of more than five million, Focus on Energy questioned the feasibility of reaching the entire territory with this campaign. Ultimately, program staff decided to target their efforts to the Milwaukee Metro area due to its potential for broad media exposure, the existence of well-established program consultants and infrastructure, the number of homes that would benefit from an energy makeover, and the number of homeowners who could afford improvements.

Partners, Prizes and Eligibility

A project of this nature is shaped by its budget, partners and sponsors. Once Focus established a budget, the media team began gathering information about potential media partners.

The local Fox affiliate had been working to increase its environmental involvement and reputation as a “green” company. This presented a great opportunity for both organizations. For the price of the partner fee, Focus secured a series of Web and television advertisements that included announcing the contest winner during the NFL’s Super Bowl half-time show.

With this partnership in place, Focus approached potential prize sponsors for donations. Rather than solicit specific products, Focus asked prospects to contribute whatever energy efficiency products and services they felt comfortable donating. In exchange, sponsors would receive a comprehensive benefits package that included a press release template to promote their participation in the contest, placement of their company name and logo on the official contest Web site and promotional ads, permission to use the contest logo in their own advertising materials, special pricing on television advertising with Fox 6, and the potential to appear in interviews during follow-up media coverage. Response was enthusiastic and resulted in high participation as well as generous donations of top-of-the-line products and services.

The program secured the following prizes and sponsors:

For the Grand Prize Winner:

- A Home Performance with ENERGY STAR® energy evaluation—Focus on Energy
- Forty compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs)—ACE Hardware
- One each of an ENERGY STAR qualified refrigerator, dishwasher, washing machine and clothes dryer, including delivery and installation—General Electric
- A Carrier Infinity 95% ECM furnace—Auer Steel (installed by a local dealer)
- Carrier 15 SEER air conditioner and installation—Auer Steel (installed by a local dealer)
- Takagi 83% efficient tankless water heater and installation—Auer Steel (installed by a local dealer)
- Air sealing and insulation, materials and installation—INTECH

For the five remaining finalists:

- A Home Performance with ENERGY STAR energy evaluation—Focus on Energy
- Twenty CFLs—ACE Hardware

Next, the team set out to define the contest’s entry requirements. Because eligibility for Focus on Energy programs is limited to customers who purchase their electricity and natural gas from participating utilities, clearly stating who was and was not eligible for the contest would be essential. In addition, Focus would need to ensure entrants’ homes were in reasonably good condition and gather basic information (such as age and square footage) about the homes and their energy needs. As a result, the official contest rules contained specific details about homes that would and would not be eligible to win. Focus also asked that semi-finalists supply their utility account numbers so that staff could see how the homeowners used energy, estimate the impact of energy improvements and compare the winner’s before-and-after energy use.

Contest Promotion

This campaign provided Focus an opportunity to showcase many of its residential programs for existing homes, lighting, appliances, and heating and cooling. When exploring potential contest names, Focus understood that some homeowners would be familiar with Focus on Energy while others would have greater recognition of specific Focus programs such as Home Performance with ENERGY STAR. As Focus on Energy's partner in the project, Fox 6 would want to promote its involvement as well.

The team's solution, "Home Energy Makeover," is a clear name that communicates a simple idea. The final contest logo (Figure 1) combines a graphic of a house with a green color theme and includes the names of both partners.

Figure 1. Home Energy Makeover Logo



Once Focus had agreed on a promotional schedule with Fox 6 (Figure 2), program planners had a roadmap for an advertising plan. Public relations activities, such as press releases, would be used to fill in where necessary and at key points throughout the campaign.

Figure 2. Fox 6 Promotional Schedule

Home Energy Makeover Contest—Television Schedule			
Pre-Education Campaign	Focus on Energy promotes energy efficiency and announces the contest to the public.	Programming during which the spots would run: -NFL Packers vs. Bears -Early morning news -Evening news -Late news -Seinfeld	December 2007
Call for Entries	5-, 10- and 30-second spots that officially call for entries to the contest. Message has high energy and impact, directing viewers to the contest's Web page to enter for their chance to win. Sponsor logos and/or names to rotate through the 85 purchased spots.	Programming during which the spots would run: -Early morning news -Early news -Late news -Seinfeld -BCS championship game -NFC divisional game -American Idol	January 2008
Announcement of Winner	One 30-second television spot.	To be aired during the Super Bowl half-time show.	February 3, 2008
Energy Segments/Tune-In	30-second spots prompting viewers to watch the Fox 6 morning show "Wake Up" for Gus Gnorski's segments following the progress of the winning home. Sponsor logos and/or names to rotate through the 117 purchased spots. *Sponsors have the option of being featured in one of the 13 progress stories to air on Fox 6 "Wake Up."	Programming during which the spots would run: -Early morning news -Evening news -Late news -Seinfeld	March–May 2008
Energy Segments/Sponsorship	10-second spots promoting Focus on Energy and the Home Energy Makeover contest.	Programming during which the spots would run: -Early morning news	March–May 2008
Thank You	10-second spots promoting Focus on Energy and the Home Energy Makeover contest and thanking the winner and sponsors.	Programming during which the spots would run: -Daytime -Early news/fringe -Late news/fringe	June 2008
Home Energy Makeover Contest—Internet Schedule			
Leaderboard Ads (standard-size banner ads) SuperCube Ads (larger box-style ads that appear on the right side of the page)	Two Internet ads running on the Fox 6/ myfoxmilwaukee.com Web site. Both promote Focus on Energy and link prospects to the contest Web page with a guarantee of 120,000 impressions per month. Ads will send prospects to the contest site for registration, updates, education and sponsor information.		December 2007–May 2008

The first stage of the contest's promotion was an educational campaign designed to promote energy efficiency and introduce the idea of a home energy makeover. This included two

public service announcements (PSAs) delivered during Fox 6 programming and two Internet banner ads appearing on myfoxmilwaukee.com. The television spots featured a local Fox 6 home-improvement personality who offered interesting and easy-to-understand information about the benefits of compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs), programmable thermostats, and tankless water heaters. The banner ads (Figures 3 and 4) linked prospects to a landing page on the Focus on Energy Web site offering energy efficiency tips to help prospects start their own home energy makeovers.

Figure 3. Internet Banner Ad Featuring CFLs

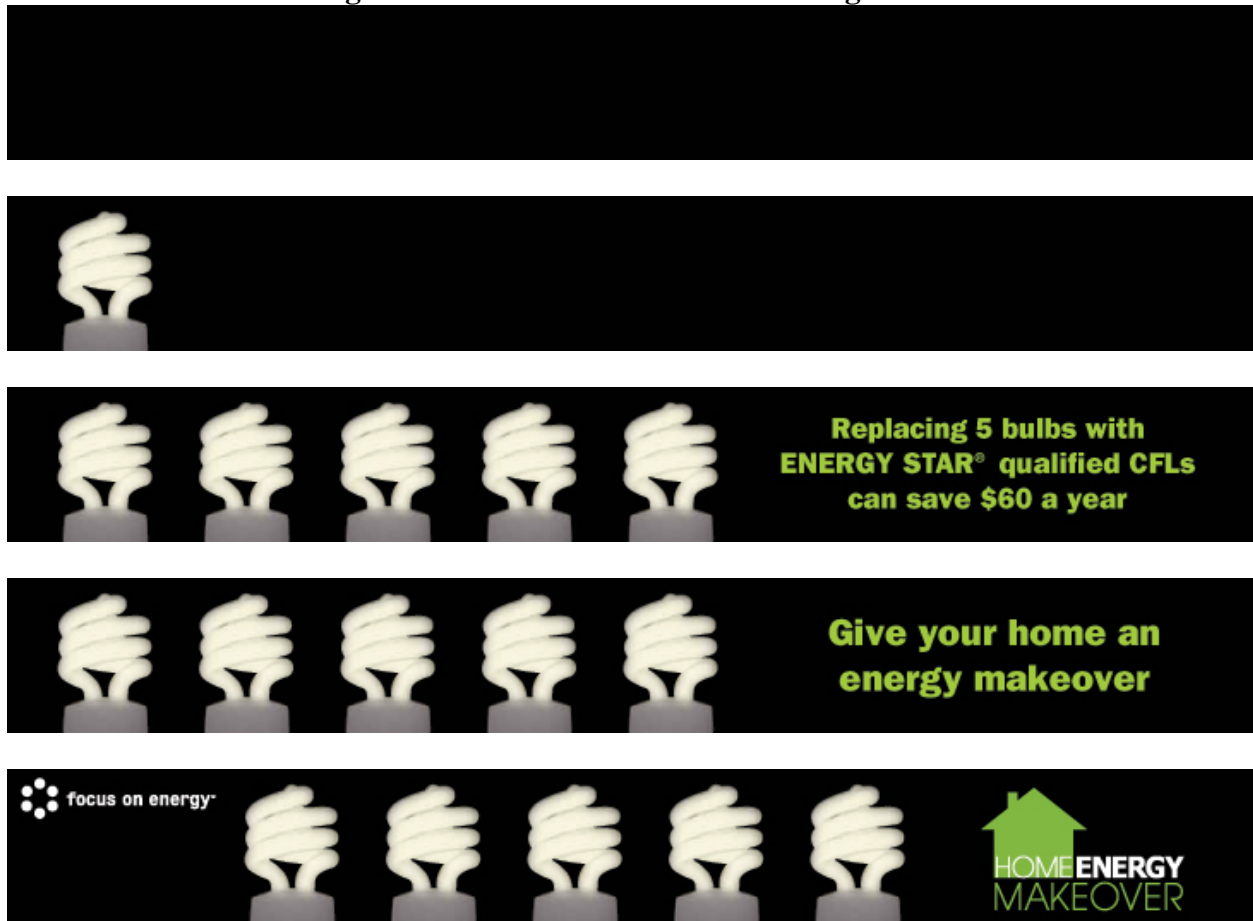


Figure 4. Internet Banner Ad Featuring Programmable Thermostats



The official entry phase of the Home Energy Makeover began December 30, 2007, and continued through January 17, 2008. A new Internet banner ad (Figure 5) and television spot encouraged the public to enter for a chance to win. The official Web site, myfocusmakeover.com, served as the primary means of entry. This automated the process of placing entries into a database and made it easier for Focus to draw semi-finalists, search entries and perform follow-up marketing. While a paper entry form was also available, driving a majority of entries through the Web site greatly decreased the time and effort required by program staff to enter data manually.

Figure 5. Internet Banner Ad: Call for Entries



The banner ad is a vertical stack of five black rectangular sections with white and blue text. The top section contains the text "Enter to win a" followed by the words "HOME ENERGY MAKEOVER" in large, bold, blue letters. The "H" in "HOME" is replaced by a red house icon, the "E" in "ENERGY" is replaced by a white refrigerator icon, and the "O" in "MAKEOVER" is replaced by a yellow lightbulb icon. The subsequent four sections list prizes in white text: "New Carrier furnace", "New Carrier air conditioner", "New GE refrigerator", "New GE dishwasher", "New GE clothes washer", "New GE dryer", "New Takagi tankless water heater", "New air sealing and insulation", and "New GE compact fluorescent lighting". The bottom section is a black rectangle containing the "FOX 6" logo (with "WITH 35.5 HD" below it) on the left, the text "Enter to win." in large white letters and "Deadline January 17, 2008" in blue text in the center, and the "HOME ENERGY MAKEOVER" logo (a green house icon with the text "HOME ENERGY MAKEOVER" to its right) on the right. The "focus on energy" logo is also present in the bottom left corner of this section.

Enter to win a HOME ENERGY MAKEOVER

New Carrier furnace
New Carrier air conditioner
New GE refrigerator
New GE dishwasher
New GE clothes washer
New GE dryer
New Takagi tankless water heater
New air sealing and insulation
New GE compact fluorescent lighting

FOX 6
WITH 35.5 HD

Enter to win.
Deadline January 17, 2008

HOME ENERGY MAKEOVER

focus on energy

The Home Energy Makeover Web site (Figure 6) featured contest information, an entry form, energy efficiency tips, a link to the Focus on Energy Web site, a summary of residential Cash-Back Rewards and a list of the contest's participating sponsor partners, including a brief description of the companies and links to more information. As the promotion continues throughout spring, the program will continue to drive people to this site for updates.

Figure 6. Home Energy Makeover Web Site

HOME ENERGY MAKEOVER
FOCUS ON ENERGY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH FOX 6

[CONTEST ENTRY](#)
[ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIPS](#)
[FOCUSONENERGY.COM](#)
[CASH-BACK REWARDS](#)
[PARTICIPATING PARTNERS](#)

THE TYPICAL HOUSEHOLD SPENDS \$2,000 ON ENERGY BILLS

Enter for a chance to win a Home Energy Makeover.

Focus on Energy and FOX 6 are sponsoring a Home Energy Makeover contest. We want to make our community more energy efficient — to help save resources, reduce your carbon footprint, save money and protect the environment.

One Grand Prize winner will receive a professional home makeover including:

- Insulation
- ENERGY STAR® Qualified Appliances
- High-Efficiency Furnace & Air Conditioner
- ENERGY STAR® Qualified Lighting
- Tankless Water Heater

Improvements to the winning home will be covered by FOX 6 and will be shown during the morning news.

Click here for a Contest Entry form.

[RETURN HOME](#)
[CONTEST RULES](#)
[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

Deciding the Winner

Due to the campaign's aggressive timeline, Focus staff had just two weeks between the close of the contest entry period and the taping of the television spot that would announce the winner. During this time, it was finalize the selection of six semi-finalists, visit their homes, complete the legal agreements and select a winner.

Focus chose the semi-finalists at random—two each week, plus one alternate. Selecting finalists while the contest was still in progress allowed marketing staff to begin contacting contestants and securing agreements. Focus based the number of semi-finalists on the number of homes its planners felt they would need to see before choosing a qualified winner, as well as on the idea that “six” might present some interesting promotional opportunities with Fox 6.

Focus technical and marketing staff visited each home to ascertain its energy needs, its presentation and durability, and to interview the homeowner. As the campaign draws to a close in June, Focus will use public relations activities such as press releases and the morning-show

television segments to keep the program in the news. For this reason, the contest winner would need an interesting story and a pleasant personality, and be willing to appear on camera.

Once Focus had visited the homes, spoken with owners and reviewed utility records, the makeover team selected a winner to be announced during the Super Bowl half-time show. Since this spot would appear alongside national advertising, Focus kept the creative presentation intentionally simple. The idea was to contrast sharply with the Super Bowl's loud and over-stimulating ads to help draw attention to this spot and its message.

Fox 6 placed the spot in the last commercial block leading up to the third quarter in an attempt to catch viewers as they settled back down in front of their televisions for the start of the game's second half.

Continuing Coverage

Even with the winner announced, the Home Energy Makeover campaign was far from over. In partnering with Fox 6, Focus negotiated 13 weekly follow-up segments to air on the station's morning show, "Wake Up," which is hosted by the same local home-improvement personality seen in the campaign's educational television spots. These segments are running from March 2008 through June 2008 and provide regular updates on the winning home's transformation as efficiency improvements are made. Wisconsin residents will be able to track the home's progress, from initial evaluation to the installation of appliances, post-improvement performance testing and homeowner interviews, all from the comfort of their living rooms. Segments are also available for viewing at the official contest Web site.

In the meantime, the Fox 6 Web site continues to deliver online impressions using the educational banner ads run at the beginning of the campaign. Clicking these ads links visitors to myfocusmakeover.com where they can watch videos detailing the progress of the makeover, obtain energy efficiency tips and more.

Follow Up

As mentioned earlier, a priority for the makeover team is to follow up with all of the leads generated by the contest. Focus sent a mass email for March 2008 that thanked participants for entering the contest, encouraged them to conduct their own home energy makeovers, provided a path to help them get started, and reminded them to tune in to Fox 6 to watch the winning home receive its makeover. The call to action promoted Focus on Energy's \$75 Cash-Back Reward for energy evaluations and provided information to help recipients contact a program consultant. Special coupons accompanying this email enabled Focus to track response rates. Based on the success of this email, a second contact is planned for June 2008 to remind residents that they have the power to perform their own home energy makeovers, and that Focus on Energy can help.

Findings

Despite targeting only five Wisconsin counties, the Home Energy Makeover contest generated 9,916 entries (excluding duplicates) and achieved 99 percent of its lead-generation goal in less than three weeks (Hutchings 2008a). During the entry period, the program recorded 11,223 visits to the Home Energy Makeover Web site, as well as 17,597 page views. The peak

traffic day, January 3, 2008, saw more than 1,500 visitors (Google Analytics 2008). From this data, program planners know that many prospects checked the Fox 6 Web site during the workday and learned of the contest through banner ads, which saw a click-through rate of 0.29 percent. (This compares to 0.30 percent for the average ad on the Fox 6 Web site and a national average of 0.25 percent [Hutchings 2008b].) Nearly 74 percent of traffic to the contest Web site came from referring sites (primarily Focus on Energy and Fox 6) and almost 24 percent was direct traffic, presumably the result of prospects visiting myfocusmakeover.com in response to a television ad (Google Analytics 2008). The click-through rate for the “Call for Entries” banner ad (Figure 5) was 0.54 percent, which again compares favorably with the Fox 6 site average of 0.30 percent and the national average of 0.25 percent (Hutchings 2008b).

More than 300 people visited the site in the days following the close of the contest entry period, prior to any follow-up promotions by Focus.

The March follow-up email was sent to 5,686 addresses. Of these, 3,215 (more than 56 percent) were opened and 371 (6.5 percent) clicked through (Hutchings 2008c).

Conclusions

With its Home Energy Makeover contest, Focus aimed to leverage the public’s growing interest in “green” living and reality television to create excitement for energy efficiency. It designed this contest-based marketing campaign to build consumer awareness and generate thousands of new leads for Focus on Energy programs.

Early data suggests that Focus has met at least some of its goals. The generation of nearly 10,000 new leads in less than three weeks suggests a high level of consumer interest. And the use of television, a medium Focus seldom employs, may have helped Focus reach new audiences. Nearly 24 percent of traffic to the official contest Web site was direct traffic resulting from prospects visiting the site after seeing an ad on television.

The campaign has generated a fair amount of media coverage outside the contest area as well. Between March 10 and April 19, the campaign produced 4,940,400 impressions (worth \$87,941 in PR value) statewide (Residential Clip Report 2008). Public relations activities will continue into June.

One of Focus on Energy’s goals for this campaign was to make energy efficiency relevant and relatable to the average person. The makeover team hopes that consumers see the efficiency ideas in the ads and watch the winning house transformed on television and say to themselves, “This doesn’t look hard. I can do those things, too.” In this way, the campaign may have both short-term and long-term effects on consumer behavior.

Focus is following up with leads via an email campaign designed to drive prospects to the Focus on Energy Web site for more information—positioning Focus as a friendly, helpful authority on energy efficiency. The hope is that by making consumers aware of Focus on Energy’s free energy efficiency tips and other educational materials, the program can create long-term behavioral changes that save energy and money.

“Reality” and Contest Marketing vs. Traditional Marketing Strategies

One of the reasons Focus chose to explore a contest-based campaign was the idea that everyone loves a winner. More importantly, everyone loves to *be* a winner.

People who enter contests such as the Home Energy Makeover are motivated by the prospect of winning prizes and publicity. Often, they tell their friends about the contest so they too can enter. Sometimes the entrants are knowledgeable about the company and have a desire for its products or services; other times, they know nothing about the company, nor do they fully understand the prizes they have entered to win.

In contrast, traditional marketing campaigns use a more focused approach to find their target markets and qualify their leads. Time is spent on education and awareness building, on leading customers through the purchase process and satisfying their expectations so they will return and refer additional new customers.

Focus believes these two approaches need not be mutually exclusive. In the Home Energy Makeover campaign, many of the entrants may have had no concept of the true scope of the prizes beyond the product giveaways. They may have had no previous exposure to Focus on Energy marketing. But by taking a risk in promotional strategy, Focus reached a group of prospects it would not have otherwise.

Not all entrants will be converted immediately into customers or energy efficiency experts. For now, Focus has simply obtained leads from a group of prospects it may not have had access to before, and perhaps interested these consumers in the benefits of energy efficiency. Now that Focus has obtained these leads, it can begin to target these consumers with more traditional marketing methods and move them through the purchase process.

For entrants already familiar with Focus programs and services, the Home Energy Makeover campaign builds on existing impressions and increases their knowledge of program offerings—similarly moving them through the process to becoming a Focus on Energy customer.

Lessons Learned and Tips for Other Marketers

With its first Home Energy Makeover, Focus on Energy learned some valuable lessons:

- Lengthen the contest entry period. Although traffic to the official contest Web site peaked early, the number of visitors grew steadily as time passed. Expanding the entry period to three full weeks—and ideally four—would have allowed the campaign to build on its growing momentum and capture significantly more leads.
- Gather more contestant information. There's a fine line between asking prospects for too much information and not enough. In this case, gathering more information about entrants' homes and energy habits would have accelerated the eligibility process and given program planners a better understanding of what each home offered prior to visiting the sites.
- Focus also identified some positive aspects it can build on for the future:
- Partners. Strong partners such as Fox 6 helped Focus make the Home Energy Makeover contest possible. The station's experience promoting similar events proved invaluable. Also key were sponsor partners willing to donate attractive prizes. Fortunately for Focus, its programs have already established many partners, which reduced the need for cold calling.
- Legal expertise. Access to sound legal advice makes all the difference in contests. Advisors helped to protect the rights of all involved—WECC, Focus on Energy, partners and contestants.

For other organizations considering a contest-driven marketing campaign of their own, Focus program planners would offer the following recommendations:

- Focus the campaign geographically. This concentrates resources, simplifies logistics and results in more a more efficient way to spend marketing dollars.
- Create a comprehensive marketing promotion plan. This helps the organization get the word out effectively and enables efficient production scheduling for the different marketing contacts, whether they be direct mail, Internet banner ads or television commercials.
- Find strong partners and compelling prizes. Cooperative partners and lucrative prizes help reduce costs and increase interest. Prizes must support the message behind the campaign.
- Set requirements for the contest winner. Carefully selecting a winner based on pre-determined criteria (such as having an interesting story, ability to articulate well, willingness to provide testimonials or appear on TV) helps maximize the contest's marketing potential and ensure that the campaign and the company are seen in the best possible light.
- Capture leads effectively and follow up with them promptly.

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