

Getting a 360° view to launch a successful new product

From idea generation to product development, SMUD's three distinct insight communities shaped the naming, development and successful launch of a new energy-saving program

Insight is critical to informing business direction and innovative product development. Susan Corbelli, the Sacramento Municipal Utility District's (SMUD's) Market Research Supervisor, understands that listening to multiple audiences, including residential and business customers, and employees can offer a 360° view that improves business outcomes and reduces risks.

From developing and testing marketing materials to launching successful new products and programs and improving customer experience, SMUD's online communities support different areas of the business.



1.4 mil

in savings and avoided costs in 2017

81%

above advertising conversion goal

18,274

items sold and over 2.3 million in sales in just over a year

Challenge

To effectively raise awareness and improve the adoption of new programs, Susan wanted to engage with customers faster than she could through traditional research. Susan and her team also wanted to involve customers in the decision-making process and fulfill the company's vision of building trust with the community it serves.

Solution

Susan and her team leverage their three insight communities to engage with residential and commercial customers, and employees.

Because SMUD is a community-owned electric utility, it needs to consider different types of customers, including commercial and residential, which are divided into eight different energy segments with differing needs and attitudes. Susan understands that having a 360° view of multiple audiences means smarter decisions and fewer misfires. Having multiple online communities allows SMUD to more easily hear from these different segments. They can test ideas and programs across different customer segments and do a deeper dive with a certain segment on a particular topic.

To help shape the development of the SMUD Energy Store, Susan involved all three insight communities. The residential community participated in a co-creation exercise to generate and refine concepts for the online marketplace. Employees tested ads and beta-tested the site before it launched. Most recently, commercial customers tested ideas for expanding products and services to SMUD's commercial segment to determine whether there was the demand to create a commercial version of the SMUD Energy Store.

Outcome

Community feedback shaped the successful launch of the SMUD Energy Store.

As of December 2018, SMUD successfully sold 18,274 items and achieved over 2.3 million in sales (after discounts) for over 175 products across 10 categories. Susan says she doesn't believe the SMUD Energy Store would have been as successful without the input of its insight communities.

The communities also helped Susan and her marketing team exceed KPIs one month early for a major campaign and shaped the naming, development and successful launch of a new energy-saving program.

In addition to the overwhelming success of the store and improved marketing effectiveness, SMUD has received industry honors. The company won Chartwell's Bronze Award for Program Marketing, won Vision Critical's Marketing Visionary Award in 2017 and was a runner-up for Vision Critical's Product Innovation Visionary Award in 2018.

Takeaways

Involve customers in the decision-making process.

Exceed marketing KPIs with high-quality, timely insights.

Get product feedback early to save time and effort.

Company Overview

SMUD, a community-owned, not-for-profit electric service provider in Sacramento, California, has been providing safe, reliable electricity at affordable rates for over 70 years. SMUD used its insight communities to develop a deeper partnership with customers, improve marketing programs and deliver high-quality insight in less time.

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Our communities have played a significant role in getting customer input and insights – critical information that guides strategic decisions at our company. ”

*Tom Jas
Manager of Marketing, Market Research and Data Analytics*

Getting early input from your customers and incorporating their feedback means you're much more likely to create a successful product! ”

*Susan Corbelli
Market Research Supervisor*