

## Public Relations Programs - Community Relations Chelan County Public Utility District's "Say Hello to Your New Roommate" campaign

### Situation

Chelan County Public Utility District is a rural, conservative electric utility with the second-cheapest power in the country. With electricity costing just 2.7 cents a kilowatt-hour, convincing customers to save energy is a challenge. Should we appeal to those with green tendencies ("help the environment")? Should we go for their wallets ("lower your electric bills")? Or should we capture their attention with a funny, arresting video followed by an easy call to action?

Yes, yes and yes.

A humorous take on a much-discussed local problem -- the high cost of housing -- anchored our 2017 campaign, "Say Hello to Your New Roommate." Launched in the spring with a [30-second video](#) on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the web, the campaign uses the Wenatchee Valley's [low vacancy rate and housing shortage](#) to place three grown men together in a triple-decker bunk bed.

The tag line is that there are "Better Ways to Save" than rooming with strangers, such as using Chelan PUD energy rebates.

This is the fourth year of a "Better Ways to Save" video theme and we are super-pleased by its success. North 40 Productions of Wenatchee deserves the credit for developing the video and helping us brainstorm concepts; the video is the springboard for the rest of our campaign.

We are on track to meet and possibly exceed conservation goals required by the state Energy Independence Act – even though targets become harder to hit each year as we reach saturation among customers who have already changed out windows, insulated homes, and purchased and installed efficient appliances. This ho-hum factor prompted us to add a little pizzazz to our home-efficiency offerings in mid-year with [rebates for smart thermostats](#) including the [Nest](#), [Ecobee4](#) and more.

### Research/Planning

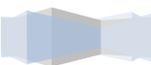
Every two years, Chelan PUD hires consultant EES of Kirkland to conduct Conservation Potential Assessments, gauging how much energy might be saved in the county. The 2016 and 2017 energy-saving targets were set based on the [2015](#) study. Next step is to determine which consumers are most receptive to our programs. The [Consumer Pulse and Market Segmentation Study](#) of the [Smart Grid Consumer Collaborative](#) places 65% of U.S. consumers in these categories: "Green Champions," "Savings Seekers" and "Movers and Shakers." Surveys show these customers are motivated by electric bill savings, convenience, control of their energy use, reliability of products and services, and environmental benefits. This is a subtle expansion from what earlier research identified as the top three motivators: lowered costs, increased comfort and reduced energy waste.

The "Say Hello to Your New Roommate" concept introduces customers first and foremost to saving money on their electric bills. But the theme is broad enough to encompass the other products and services they can invest in that serve as good "housemates."

For our print outreach, we dressed one of the actors from the video in a 100-dollar-bill costume and placed him in front of typical homes. These [ads](#) and fliers either pointed to our website or listed the rebates we provide.

We planned from the start to include our Latino population, informally testing the "Roommates" theme among Spanish-speaking staff and customers to make sure it translated well; we had overlooked this in 2016 and had to make up for it by running two separate campaigns.

Something else we did differently this year: We asked North 40 to provide three different endings to the video to direct customers to specific programs – insulation, heating and cooling, and lighting. This pointed viewers into actual programs rather than just ensuring brand awareness.



**Objective 1:** Meet Chelan PUD’s savings target of 1.78 [average megawatts](#).

**Objective 2:** Increase visits to the Conservation page of the PUD website by 10 percent.

**Objective 3: (added mid-year):** Persuade 120 customers to invest in smart thermostats June-December.

Our marketing plan incorporated the video (Facebook boosted post results [here](#)), local TV and cinema video ads, print ads, online ads, [billboards](#), social media, and point-of-purchase materials. At public events, our 100-dollar-bill man handed out gold-foil-wrapped chocolate coins bearing the slogan “Conservation Makes Cents.”

### **Implementation**

The campaign was introduced in March through social media, the web, and in our Lightly e-newsletter and direct mail newsletter. Chelan PUD’s graphic designer created the print materials. Our kickoff event was the well-attended Builders Show in early February, followed by the Home and Garden Expo in Wenatchee in March and Earth Day Fairs in Chelan and Leavenworth in April.

While surveys have told us a majority of customers prefer email communications, surveys also show many customers still like direct mail. In June, we sent a [“Say Hello to Your New Roommate” flier](#) to all 36,000 residential households. This was translated directly into Spanish – part of our expanded efforts to reach the Latino population, which make up approximately one-third of our customer base. We also placed [half-page ads](#) in the local newspaper’s Home and Garden sections in spring and fall.

Our add-on program, smart thermostats, was promoted both separately (online ad example [here](#)) and in a callout in conjunction with the “Roommates” campaign (example [here](#)).

### **Evaluation**

#### **Objective 1: Targets met**

We are on track to meet the 2017 target, saving enough energy to power approximately 709 Chelan County homes.

#### **Objective 2: Web visits are way up**

Through October, web visits to the main Conservation page were up 80% over the same period in 2016. (Note: in [this Google Analytics report](#), you’ll see “conservation home/residential” shows a 0 in 2016. That’s because some web landing pages were changed in mid-2017; there was no page with that name in 2016. However, the stats for “conservation residential” – a page we used in both 2016 and 2017 -- show an 80% increase.)

#### **Objective 3: Getting smart with thermostats**

As of Nov. 13, we had issued 108 rebates, which means we’re at 90% of our goal. We expect to be at or above 100% by the end of the year. (Google Analytics web views are [here](#); Facebook ad results [here](#).)

#### **Budget**

Our 2017 marketing budget totaled \$62,000. “Roommate” promotions and materials consumed about two-thirds.

#### **Summary**

In 2017, Chelan PUD Conservation is on track to meet state-mandated targets. We built on successful themes to maintain momentum. We smartly added a smart thermostat program to increase appeal and meet rising expectations of customers. We selected a tag line tested among Spanish speakers to make sure it translated well.

We helped consumers say hello to savings – easily, efficiently, and with triple-decker fun.

