

# *Initiative EnergieEffizienz: An information campaign on energy efficiency for private households*

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## **Keywords**

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## **Abstract**

Unnecessary energy consumption can be avoided easily by making intelligent decisions when buying and using household equipment and hence cut the electricity bill and reduce carbon dioxide emissions. This is the key message imparted by the information campaign on energy efficiency for private households. The campaign addresses three main topics: the reduction or avoidance of stand by energy consumption of consumer electronics and IT-equipment, energy efficient high quality lighting and energy efficiency in the white goods sector.

Consumers are addressed via a broad range of communication measures highlighting the efficiency issue. These instruments include advertisement in nationwide print media, regular press releases, public relations activities etc. Special information material are made for young people as well as for the Turkish minority in Germany.

The main strategy of the campaign is to co-operate with retailers: consumers are to gain information on energy efficiency at the point of sale where domestic appliances and lighting equipment are sold. The campaign offers information for the point of sale including brochures for customers as well as for sales assistants. By December 2004 approximately 7 200 points of sale all over in Germany were equipped with the campaign's information.

The German national energy agency (dena) runs the information campaign in co-operation with the German asso-

ciations of power suppliers, the German foundation for environmental protection and the Federal Ministry of Economy and Labour. The campaign started in 2002. Its aims are to raise consumers' awareness, to inform consumers on energy efficient appliances and give motivation when buying and using them. Through these aims the campaign should contribute to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the private sector .

In order to measure the campaign's impact a quantitative analysis is carried out. First results show a change in public's awareness and attitude towards energy efficiency.

## **Introduction**

Between the years 1990 and 2003, power consumption of German private households increased by 17% (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Energiebilanzen 2004). This tendency is expected to persist if no countermeasures are taken. In order to contribute to a reduction of the increase of electric power consumption in the domestic sector an information campaign on energy efficiency was launched in 2002. Its aim are to raise consumers' awareness, to inform consumers on energy efficient appliances and give motivation to make an energy efficient choice when buying and using them. Through these aims the campaign should contribute to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the private sector.

The campaign addresses three main topics of domestic power consumption: the reduction or avoidance of stand by energy consumption of consumer electronics and IT-equipment, energy efficient high quality lighting and energy efficiency in the white goods sector. The aspect of buying electronic equipment and lighting with a high standard of

energy efficiency is appealed to as well as the aspect of using it in an energy saving way.

The German nationwide campaign on energy efficiency is an effort of the "Initiative EnergieEffizienz" – a cooperation between the German national energy agency (*dena*) and the national associations of power suppliers.<sup>1</sup> The campaign is supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economy and Labour and the German foundation for environment protection.

The task of the "Initiative EnergieEffizienz" is not only to provide information on energy efficiency. Its main challenge is to convince people to change their habits and attitudes: to buy electric/electronic equipment and lighting with high standards and use them accordingly. Besides, energy efficiency is a topic of general low interest and agenda setting for this issue remains difficult. One of the leading questions for the development of the campaign and the communication approach was therefore: How to communicate "energy efficiency" in order to get the message to the people and to address their behaviour?

In the run-up to the campaign, previous activities in this field were analysed like campaign's on energy saving run by power suppliers as part of the least-coast-planning approach. This includes the campaign "Kunden-Energie-Spar-Service (KesS)" by RWE Energie AG (Wuppertal Institut, 1995), "energyCity" by Stadtwerke Hannover (Stadtwerke Hannover, 1998) and "Meister Lampe" by Freiburger Energie- und Wasserversorgungs-AG (Öko-Institut, 1996). The analysis also includes information campaigns on energy efficiency like the activities by the Energiestiftung Schleswig-Holstein covering the issues stand-by and lighting (TNS Emnid, 2001/2002) as well as the "Kampagne zur Förderung von Energieeffizienz bei Unterhaltungselektronik" by the Berliner Energie-Agentur (Berliner Energieagentur, 2001). The latter focused on the cooperation with retailers in combination with advertisement and/ or public relations. The analysis of the experiences and evaluations of these campaigns was taken into account by the development of the information campaign by "Initiative EnergieEffizienz".

In the following, the approach of the "Initiative EnergieEffizienz" (how to address people's awareness, attitude and habits concerning energy efficiency in private households) is laid out, first results are shown and conclusions for forthcoming activities within this field are drawn.



Figure 1. The Logo of the "Initiative EnergieEffizienz".

## Getting the message to the people

The base line message of the campaign is: unnecessary energy consumption can be avoided easily by making intelligent decisions when buying and using household equipment. While doing so, people cut their electricity bills and at the same time help to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

The campaign uses a positive communication approach. It does not point at "misbehaviour" nor does it draw horror scenarios of the possible outcomes of climate change. Instead people are shown their personal benefits of their acting when taking energy efficiency into consideration. For example, the campaign shows how much money can be saved by using energy saving light bulbs or when using highly efficient white goods. It's a personal choice for an intelligent and modern lifestyle and helps to save money. Practical advice is given like how to recognize that the e. g. hi-fi remains in stand by even though there is no little red light shown. The campaign offers facts, figures and services like data on white goods via internet ([www.initiative-energieeffizienz.de](http://www.initiative-energieeffizienz.de)). At the same time, the intention is not to "outlaw" or "discriminate" e. g. stand by functions. Instead, the aim is to raise public awareness of useless energy consumption which can easily be avoided without loss of comfort or services – not on energy consumption or on energy using equipment and functions itself. In other words, the campaign gives incentives to use energy efficiently by providing information on how to do it (easily and without afford) while at the same time it shows people their personal advantage of doing so. Thereby, the general topic "energy efficiency" is aligned to people's everyday life.

In general, energy efficiency is a topic of low interest. In order to rise public awareness, the campaign uses a professional concept of integrated communication combining a broad range of communicative measures like advertisements in large circulation nationwide print media such as the newsmagazines "Der Spiegel" and "Focus", regular press releases, interviews and reports in nationwide broadcasted TV and radio shows, events etc.

Several communication agencies have been invited to develop a communication approach of the campaign. They were asked to base their proposal on research concerning the (media) market and consumers attitude and behaviour as well as to give a definition of the target group. The main results of their analysis were<sup>2</sup>:

- Many people in Germany are already convinced by the ideas of environment protection and energy saving in general but do not always act accordingly. At the same time, "energy" and "energy saving" are very abstract issues. Thus, precise options for action have to be made and personal advantages have to be laid out.
- In order to get people's attention and interest, an information campaign on energy efficiency has to adapt to people's customs related to advertisement and information in general. Thus, the communication approach

1. German energy suppliers have signed a self commitment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to support the targets of the German government. This self commitment addresses different measures to carbon dioxide reductions in the field of electricity production as well as in the field of electricity consumption.

2. Statements by the communication agencies "Ahrens & Behrent", "fischerAppelt" and "boy" made during oral presentations.

should not come along moralising and has to avoid an old fashion “eco-image”.

The approach chosen by communication experts of the “Initiative EnergieEffizienz” convinced by using a concept of integrated communication and at the same time focussing on public relations. This approach allows to spread information (including precise options for action) and not only a statement by advertisement. At the same time, it allows a broad distribution of information despite the fact, that the campaign’s budget of around 13 million Euro is little compared to the budgets of advertisement campaign’s by the industry. The target group was defined as “consumers from age 9 to 99” with the main focus on the younger generation up to 40. In order to optimise the communication approach, a qualitative research was carried out, testing the advertisement concept and the information brochures. As a result, design and content of the information material was revised.

Energy efficiency is given a modern image. The campaign works with an up-to-date communication approach using humour and modern language as well as life style pictures and bright colours. As for the advertisements the reader is confronted with a portrait where the person is giving a statement with humorous double meaning. Some information on energy efficiency can be found in the text below. For example the white goods contains the headline “He looked good, so I took him with me. Ever since I had to pay for him dearly.”<sup>3</sup> Below the consumer finds some information on energy efficiency in cooling equipment. Commercial postcards distributed free of charge in bars and restaurants and advertisements in public transport use the same mechanism of humorous double meanings. At first, the message seems to be about a love affair, only when reading the subtitles it becomes clear that the message is referring to the energy efficiency issue. As an example Figure 2 depicts the advertisement addressing the stand by topic.

Information brochures of the campaign contain detailed facts and comprehensive advice on how to increase energy efficiency in a private household. Still, its language is not technical but easy to read and offers high quality information. The format of the brochure is very handy, life style pictures and professional design pick up the reading habits of consumers these days. More than 5,5 million brochures were distributed since starting campaign’s activities.<sup>4</sup>

The communication strategy of the information campaign on energy efficiency focuses on public relations. This allows providing more detailed information and opens up the possibility to get people “involved” – which is necessary when the aim is to make people change their habits and attitudes. Press releases designed for publication in newspapers and popular magazines are distributed regularly covering a broad range of subjects related to energy efficiency. Examples include the outcome of an opinion poll on the divulgation of fluorescent lamps and an example calculation highlighting the energy and money savings potential when stand by functions are used only when necessary. The press releases



Figure 2. Advertisement pointing at energy consumption caused by stand by functions.

were taken up – amongst others - by key nationwide newspapers as e.g. the “Süddeutsche Zeitung” or the “Frankfurter Rundschau” as well as by the yellow press like the most popular German tabloids “Bild” and “Bild am Sonntag”. From October 2002 until end of 2004, around 3 000 articles were released in newspapers and magazines, respectively broadcasted on TV or radio. Many of those were giving detailed background information while others mainly communicated some basic energy saving advice and the contact details of “Initiative EnergieEffizienz” for further information.

Further public relation activities are organized by “Initiative EnergieEffizienz” like a design contest for luminaires using an efficient fluorescent lamp, exhibitions on energy efficiency, promotion activities etc. There have always been two basic ideas behind these activities. First of all, to make the message so attractive that even people not interested in ecological issues or energy efficiency in general get curious. Secondly, to get people involved and make them think about energy efficiency. For example, an exhibition on energy efficiency was shown in shopping malls – a place where people normally go only for shopping but not for seeking information on energy efficiency. At the same time the exhibition was made very attractive by including interactive components and a playful contest. The exhibition was shown for about five weeks in different places and within this period of time more than 3 000 people got personal consulting by the staff of the “Initiative EnergieEffizienz”.

The communication concept is completed by an internet portal providing detailed background information, and a

3. In German, the article of the word „fridge” is masculine.

4. There are continuous repeat orders for brochures from the campaign’s retailers. This might give a hint that the distribution to the private consumers works well. Furthermore the retailers reported that the brochures are very helpful to give advice for consumers. They reported about the high information level and usefulness of the materials for the point of sale.



Figure 3. Information on energy efficiency in Turkish.

free of charge consumer hotline reachable 24 hours a day. All communication activities are interconnected. The URL of the webpage and the telephone number of the consumer hotline are always mentioned on press releases as well as on advertisements or brochures. Special events like exhibitions or promotion activities were announced via press information etc.

Some information brochures and activities are developed for specific target groups like the Turkish community in Germany for whom the brochures were translated into Turkish (Fig. 3). As young people are top users of IT-equipment and consumer electronics some activities were specially made for teenagers providing information on stand by. For example, a computer game was developed presenting a boy who had to switch off all electronic devices in a minimum amount of time before leaving the house. This jump 'n run computer game takes the interests of young people into account while at the same time points to the message "stand by means energy consumption – therefore: better switch off". In order to approach the target group the game was promoted in co-operation with the internet branch of a popular teenage publication and with a computer games magazine.

For more detailed information a CD ROM with teaching materials were developed including working sheets for physics lessons, background information for the teachers, some ideas on experiments and school projects etc. This CD ROM is offered to all German schools which are very interested in the teaching material.

### Information at the point of sale

The easiest way to reduce energy consumption in private households is to buy (and use) electronic goods with a high standard of energy efficiency. Accordingly, consumers are to gain information on energy efficiency at the point of sale where domestic appliances and lighting equipment are sold. The message is to think of energy efficiency when buying a

new e.g. fridge, light bulb or hi-fi. Thus, the campaign aims at addressing people when they are about to buy new electronic devices. At this moment in time, the decision for or against an energy efficient device is made. Hence, this is the moment when it is most effective to address consumers in order to change their behaviour related to their buying decisions. Thereby, again, their personal advantage of choosing the energy efficient device is stressed.

Sales assistants are the most important source of information for consumer when buying new electronic units like TV, fridge, washing machine etc. This is the result of a survey carried out by the German opinion research institute forsa on behalf of dena (fora 2003/2004). Accordingly, if sales assistants stress the importance of the energy efficiency aspect of electronic devices or lighting, people are most likely to take these suggestions into account when choosing their products.

As for the campaign's part related to domestic lighting the message at the point of sale is to convince the consumer to replace – wherever sensible and feasible – incandescent lamps by energy efficient fluorescent lamps. As for the white goods sector the campaign aims at convincing the consumer to buy equipment qualifying for the energy efficiency class "A" even if a class "A" device is more expensive than a class "B" device since lower energy costs balance the higher initial investment or result in a personal benefit. Furthermore the consumer is encouraged to include the remaining data displayed on the EU energy label specifying the consumption of energy and other resources in the purchasing decision. Since 2004 the message for cooling equipment is extended and the advice is given to buy devices labelled with "A++" or "A+". It is most difficult to advise people on energy efficiency in the IT sector and for consumer electronics. As there is no common or at least no well known labelling it is difficult to give a clear message to the consumer. Accordingly, for the stand by topic the message points on the "using" aspect, to switch off all electronics when they are not in use. Nevertheless, the consumer is still encouraged to recognise low stand by power consumption and a genuine "off" switch as an important criterion when purchasing consumer electronics and IT equipment. To recognize consumer electronics and IT equipment on the point of sale the campaign offers special products list<sup>5</sup> and a little "pointer" for energy efficient products shown in the shops.

In order to address the "buying aspect" of energy efficiency in a most effective way the main strategy of the campaign is to co-operate with retailers of domestic appliances and lighting equipment. A network of regional project managers contacts retailers personally and encourages them to take part in the campaign. The regional managers are also available for retailers' demands and enquiries.

The campaign offers information and advertisement material for the point of sale including brochures for customers and for sales assistants (see Fig. 4). The point of sale information materials are made available to both small and large scale retailers – including nationwide acting key retailers such as the department store chain "Karstadt" or the "obi" chain selling constructing materials and do-it-yourself items

5. The product list is given by the german website [www.energiesparende-geraete.de](http://www.energiesparende-geraete.de). This list corresponds to the Paneuropean database for energy efficient appliances.

– to be displayed in showrooms. Sales assistants are encouraged to bring up the energy efficiency subject during their sales talk. The regional managers offer training for sales assistants and point out the advantages to promote energy efficiency. Taking part in the campaign allows the retailer to offer a special service for the customer including information brochures for free and of high quality. Besides, high-class white goods often have a high standard of energy efficiency, energy efficient fluorescent lamps are more expensive than incandescent lamps, and consequently retailers might even have a monetary advantage. Until end of December 2004 approximately 7 200 points of sale nationwide took part in the “Initiative EnergieEffizienz” and were given the campaign’s information brochures and advertisement material. This includes many small and medium sized retailers but also about 750 branches of nationwide acting department stores, do-it-yourself stores or discounter. The campaign’s retailers are spread all over Germany. The campaign works together with six regional project manager which are responsible for the local retailers network. In each region of Germany more than 1 000 retailers are working together with the “Initiative EnergieEffizienz”.

The importance of this co-operation is proved by the result of an opinion poll carried out by the “Initiative EnergieEffizienz”: Around 73% of the people questioned, are seeking information on electric and electronic products they attend to buy – like a TV or a fridge – at the point of sale from retailers and sales assistants.

### The campaign’s impact/ Conclusions

After more than two years of “Initiative EnergieEffizienz”, first results of the campaign’s impact and success can be proclaimed. There has been a great response to the press reports and – as a result – high press coverage of the campaign and of the issue energy efficiency in private households. Around 3 000 publications in newspapers and magazines as well as broadcastings on TV and radio show that the “Initiative EnergieEffizienz” was successful in bringing the message on the agenda. To value this result one has to consider that energy efficiency is a topic of low interest and that it delivers hardly any news in itself. The campaign has also been very successful in building up a network of retailers as multipliers of the efficiency idea.



Figure 4. Information about energy efficiency at the point of sale.

In order to measure the impact of the campaign on public awareness regarding energy efficiency in the private household representative opinion polls have been carried out in half year intervals. The analysis is done by a well known institute (“forsa”). The main characteristics of the analysis’ design are: for each of the three main topics one thousand telephone interviews (duration: approximately 20 minutes each) have been carried out. The questions cover personal views on efficiency topics, importance of energy efficiency when purchasing devices relevant for the campaign, awareness of the campaign and so on. Questions addressing people’s behaviour (e.g. whether people use switchable socketpanels) were also part of the survey. Thereby, it has to be taken into account that behaviour is far more difficult to measure with this kind of survey than knowledge or attitudes. The analysis is completed by opinion polls of retailers taking part in the campaign. The questions cover topics such as usefulness of the materials for the retailer and for advising consumers, stock of energy efficient equipment etc.

At the moment first results of the evaluation can be given. Table 1 shows some results of a representative survey of private consumers and retailers at the end of 2004 compared to the answers at the beginning of 2003<sup>6</sup>.

A final analysis of the outcome of opinion polls has still to be made. Nevertheless, it can already be said that public awareness and some attitudes towards energy efficiency in private households have changed slowly but continuously as a result of the activities of the “Initiative EnergieEffizienz”. At the same time, it has become clear that an information

Table 1. First results of the evaluation by a representative survey of private consumers and retailers (forsa, 2004).

Questionnaire for private consumers		Questionnaire for retailers	
Selected questions	Change of attitude	Selected questions	Change of attitude
Importance of a real switch-off for electronic devices:	+ 7%	Active interest of customers in the stand-by topic:	+ 11%
Use of switchable socketpanels:	+ 7%	Active interest of customers for energy saving lamps:	+ 13%
Electricity consumption of stand-by appliances can be neglected:	- 6%	Importance of the EU label for retailers:	+ 10%
Personal knowledge about energy labels for white goods:	+ 8%	Increase of energy efficient white goods/ energy saving light bulb sold	+ 2%

6. The results for the private consumers are statistical significant. Due to the small number of retailers questioned, these figures can not be classified as statistical significant.

campaign which on the one hand has a limited budget to raise public awareness and on the other hand is relying to a large extent on networking and the impact of multipliers has to continue over several years and results are not to be seen within months. The “Initiative EnergieEffizienz” had a good start and has established a solid basis for further activities within this field in Germany. A continuation of the campaign is needed – and in progress.

One main feature for forthcoming activities is the deepening of the cooperation with retailers. The aim is not only to increase the number of retailers but mostly to encourage them to play an active part in the campaign. For example, promotion activities in cooperation with retailers are planned. At the same time, the focus of the communication activities remains on public relations rather than advertisement. This includes more activities where consumers get directly involved and have the option to get face-to-face consulting on energy efficiency. Thereby, some activities will be focused in time and place (cities, regions). This strategy gives the opportunity to enlarge those actions and make them even more visible and open to the public within these regions.

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