

www.topten.info goes European

How to get Mr. Smith hooked to energy efficient appliances

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Abstract

Topten is a consumer-oriented online search tool first created in Switzerland, which presents the “best appliances” in various categories of products (white and brown goods, ITC, cars, lighting...). Energy efficiency is the key criteria. But Topten is more than an internet platform. It is a communication tool which helps to show how our energy consumption causes climate change and what we can do personally to reduce our impact. It is also a powerful instrument to influence manufacturers.

Topten is independent of producers and retailers and relies on neutral tests and analyses of independent institutions and standardized declarations of manufacturers.

The paper presents:

- The tool itself: what can be seen on www.topten.ch, why it has been developed in this way, how it is constantly updated, who is behind it with which goals...
- The results in Switzerland after five years of growing success, the media's central role in rising awareness, Topten's role as a reference for energy efficiency policies, manufacturers' reactions,...
- The new policy orientation taken by Topten with the support of WWF Europe: the extension to other coun-

tries through a Topten.info platform – in order to create multinational pressure at the European level to influence manufacturers while working specifically on national markets and adapting the concept to the specific needs of each country.

Topten: the history behind the concept

Switzerland is traditionally one of the few countries chosen by manufacturers to launch new equipment as a test for the European market because the Swiss are always interested in new technologies and devices. For example, one of the results is that the Swiss population spent 2 675 Euro per capita in 2003 on information and communication technologies, against 1 517 Euro for the European average (USA: 2 328, Denmark: 2 277, Netherlands: 1 930, Germany: 1 530, France: 1 482, Greece: 701).

Given this situation of growing specific electricity consumption in the residential and commercial sectors, S.A.F.E., the Swiss Agency for Efficient Energy Use¹, decided to create a tool to inform directly the consumer who is also in many cases the end-user about:

- The importance of choosing the good product (at the time of purchase) for the consumer's electricity bill and overall expenditure, and for the environment in general;
- The importance of using electricity consuming devices correctly – for the same reasons.

1. www.energy-efficiency.ch

Switzerland has a high rate of domestic internet connections (nearly 65% of the population has access to internet); At the beginning financial resources were limited; S.A.F.E. wanted to build a flexible tool, something to help consumers but that would not need the design and implementation of a complex infrastructure across the country. Given these elements, the “Topten concept” developed according to seven key points:

1. **An internet tool...** www.topten.ch has been on-line since the year 2000.
2. **...Targeting the average consumer...** Green consumers can find information by themselves as they are ready to spend time looking for the greenest possible products. On the contrary, a large number of consumers may be resistant to, frightened or even upset by “green” information accused of promoting “expensive non functioning devices”. Even though the whole purpose of Topten is to promote the most energy efficient products, this is not the message put forward here. The environmental rationale is not the first information even though it is explained – in detail – on specific pages of the web site.
3. **...Centred on products...** The main information (home page and second and third levels) focuses on products, almost as if the web site was a retailer’s site that a consumer would visit before buying in order to compare products and prices.
4. **...Presenting appliances...** all the product characteristics that may interest a consumer are presented: the brand, the commercial reference, the dimensions, the different services (for example for white goods: no frost function, 0°C compartment, built in), the picture, links to manufacturers’ site for more information...
5. **...But only the “best appliances”...** from the energy efficiency point of view. Appliances are presented in a table: the most energy efficient is the first one to be seen. They are ranked according to energy efficiency but visi-

tors can click on any information in the table to change the ranking criteria. Around a maximum of ten appliances (topten) are presented in a category of products or a sub category (e.g. white goods / freezers / upright freezers / above a given volume).

6. **...Emphasising the total cost over the life time...** For each product, Topten provides the purchase price and the electricity cost over the life time of the appliance so that there is a full awareness of the total cost. Advice is also given on how to use and maintain the various products.
7. **...And comparing these best appliances to an inefficient model available on the market.** The total cost difference with the efficient models is almost always obvious. The “bad model” is a real model but its brand is not given.

Topten has also adopted four basic rules:

- **Independence:** Topten is fully independent of appliance manufacturers, importers or retailers.
- **Partnership:** Topten does not spend money on publicity but has grown thanks to the development of partnerships which have multiplied the occasions to make Topten known. The main partnership began with WWF Switzerland and SALDO consumer magazine, then with the ministry in charge of energy (Swiss energy) and other partners. A lot of effort has been made to find media support: if Topten is known, more consumers will visit the site and choose to buy efficient appliances and more manufacturers will be willing to collaborate and hopefully develop energy efficient products.
- **Transparency:** the whole approach is published on the website: manufacturers and consumers know, for each product category, the criteria for selecting “best appliances”, even if these criteria may vary in the long run. The products lists are updated regularly, at least twice a year.

The screenshot shows the homepage of www.topten.ch. At the top left is the logo 'topten.ch' with the tagline 'Le clic pour le meilleur produit !'. To the right are language options 'Deutsch Italiano'. Below the logo is a table with three columns: 'Domaine', 'Catégorie', and 'Sous-catégorie'. The 'Domaine' column lists various areas like 'Bureau', 'Divertissement', 'Eclairage', etc. The 'Catégorie' column lists products like 'Aspirateur', 'Congélateur-bahut', 'Cuisinier vapeur', etc. The 'Sous-catégorie' column lists specific models like 'Lave-vaisselle 45 cm', 'Lave-vaisselle 55 cm', etc. To the right of the table is a 'Concours' section with the title 'L'autre forme de mobilité: Concours' and a 'News' section with the title 'Electronics Summit 04'. At the bottom right is a vertical stack of partner logos including 'energieschweiz', 'EnFK', 'ewz', 'WWF for a living planet', 'S.A.F.E.', and 'saldo'. At the bottom of the page are navigation buttons for 'Nos buts', 'Dialogue', 'Newsletter', 'Sitemap', and 'Chercher'.

Figure 1. View of www.topten.ch showing partners, and the various categories and sub-categories of products.



Figure 2. View of www.topten.ch showing comparative table for a category of dish washers.

- **Simplicity:** priority is given to existing classifications and criteria. Where the European energy label exist, it is used to determine the best appliances (A class for washing machines, A+ and A++ classes for cold appliances, etc.). Where it does not exist, national labels are used (such as the blue angel for faxes or vehicles). When there is a lack of harmonised norms to measure energy efficiency, Topten may carry out tests and in this case justifies its methodology (copiers).

Today, Topten Switzerland presents 120 lists of products, in 40 categories of products and 8 fields of consumption: domestic appliances (12 categories), office equipment(6), consumer electronics (3), building technology (6), illumination (3), mobility (6), green electricity (2) and leisure (2).

Domains and categories of Topten

Today, Topten Switzerland presents 120 lists of products, in 40 categories of products and 8 fields of consumption: domestic appliances (12 categories), office equipment (6), consumer electronics (3), building technology (6), illumination (3), mobility (6), green electricity (2) and leisure (2).

For example, the domestic appliance field has 44 lists of products. See Table 1.

Impact on the supply and demand sides

Attempting to strictly quantify the impact of Topten would be too speculative. However the following figures and examples show how Topten is effective. Furthermore, Topten aims to be a platform and to merge various initiatives from diverse actors – it is not a mechanism with one cause and one effect.

Table 1.

| 12 categories | 44 Lists |
|-----------------|----------|
| Refrigerator | 13 |
| Freezer | 9 |
| Oven | 7 |
| Induction Hob | 1 |
| Dishwasher | 4 |
| Washing Machine | 4 |
| Drier | 3 |
| Coffee Machine | 1 |
| Humidifier | 1 |
| Vacuum Cleaner | 1 |

VISITORS AND HITS

A very important indicator is the number of visitors and hits. They have been steadily growing and have reached over 550 000 in 2004 (for a 7.5 million population). Obviously this illustrates a great demand.

This high attention is surely thanks to the many partners of Topten: institutions, consumer associations, environmental associations, utilities and magazines, but also thanks to a lot of work with the media. Without buying any publicity but only by supplying information, in 2004, 8 million readers have been able to read about Topten products and project (media support multiplied by numbers of copies). The most important publications are SALDO (consumer magazine), the WWF journal and Tages-Anzeiger, landlord magazine.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE MARKET

A good indicator is the development of market data. There are no sales data available but there are reports on the supply of models. It is known from earlier studies (Evaluation der Verbrauchs-Zielwerte für Elektrogeräte, Bundesamt für En-

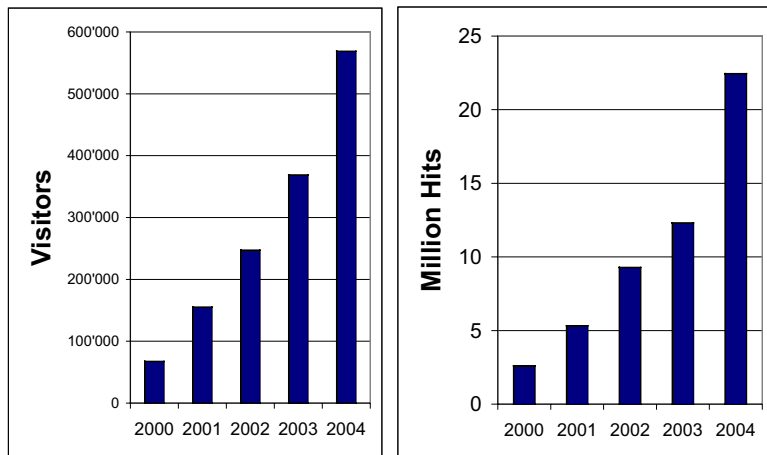


Figure 3. Number of visitors and hits on www.topten.ch

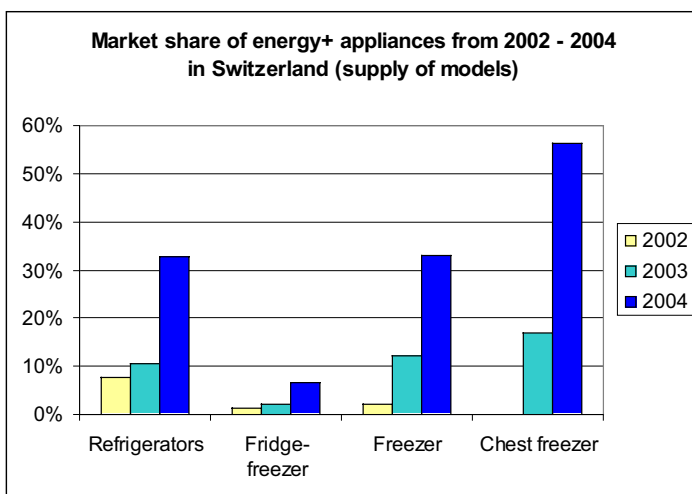


Figure 4. Cold appliances

ergie, 1996), that in Switzerland there is a good correlation between sales figures and the supply of models.

Cold appliances, for example, were in the focus of interest of Topten, the European project energy+, the municipal utilities of the city of Zurich and the retailer Migros. All these organisations cooperated. In the year 2000 there were no energy+ appliances available in Switzerland (although there were in Europe).

In 2001 the first energy+ models were introduced on the Swiss market: 10 refrigerators, 3 2-door-refrigerator-freezers, 3 up-right freezers. Topten continued to put forward energy+ appliances but the majority of products didn't meet the criteria.

In 2004 energy+ succeeded in winning enormous market shares. The figures were 103 refrigerator models, 15 2-door-refrigerator-freezers, 50 up-right freezers and 32 chest freezers. An increasing part of them even reached the level of A++: 3 refrigerators, 1 2-door-refrigerator-freezer, 3 up-right freezers and 7 chest freezers. Topten exclusively presented appliances which met the energy+ criteria.

Topten has started cooperation with SALT, the Swiss Alpine Laboratories for Energy Efficiency Testing, in order to gain strength when speaking to manufacturers. For example, the SALT field measurement identified a very large difference between the consumption declared and the actual consumption of multi function copiers (430 kWh/year measured compared to 70 kWh/year declared). Thanks to these results, the Ministry of Energy has started discussions with the manufacturers.

PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

In addition, Topten is used for public procurement purposes. The city of Zurich officially favours Topten appliances: 41% of their newly bought appliances were chosen on the Topten lists and 98% of them were at least A class thanks to the information provided by Topten. Zurich is the largest Swiss city with 360 000 inhabitants and 340 000 working places.

PUBLIC CAMPAIGNS

Topten is also used as a basis for various energy efficiency policies. For example, ewz, Zurich city electricity utility, has organised a rebate programme for energy efficient cold appliances based on the Topten list; an internet link is available from the Topten website, and events to announce the campaign have been organised in common. The budget for rebates, consulting, information and press releases amounts to 1 million Swiss francs (650 000 Euro). With this, ewz supports their customers. The rebate amounts to 200 Swiss francs (130 Euro) when an A++ and 100 Swiss francs (65 Euro) when an A+-cold appliance is purchased. The direct impact of the ewz-campaign will be the support of about 6 000 cold appliances.

NEW RANGE DESIGN FOR RETAILERS

In spring 2003 Migros, a large Swiss retailer, revised and re-designed the whole range of refrigerators and freezers. Appliances with efficiency class C were removed from the range while those with efficiency class A were highlighted. As the foremost retail trading enterprise in Switzerland, Migros added two appliances with efficiency class A+ to the range. Migros was very active to promote efficient refrigerators on the market.

The chart shows the development of efficiency classes for Miostar-refrigerators (Migros own brand). In 2004, over 30% of refrigerators sold are of class A+. The efficiency of refrigerators sold in Migros stores has greatly increased in the last four years. The y-axis shows the percentages of efficiency classes of the numbers of units sold.

MAIN ADVANTAGES OF TOPTEN

After five years of operation, from a policy point of view, the main advantages of such a tool are that:

- Topten reaches directly consumers: the number of visitors has been constantly growing.
- Topten acts as a resource centre for many articles in newspapers, consumer and environmental magazines.
- Topten is flexible: compared to a label, there is no additional information stuck on the product itself; the criteria



Figure 5. Advertisement for Topten-cold-appliances.

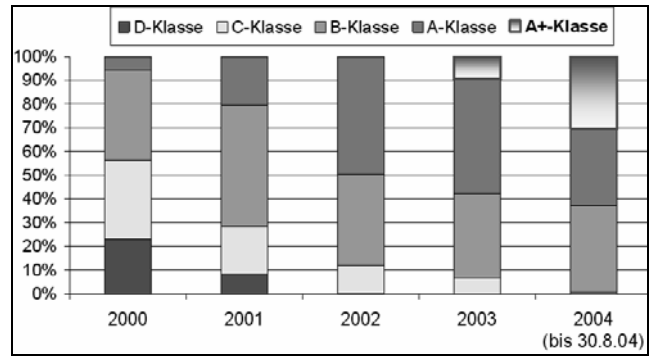


Figure 6. Cold appliances at Migros.

Figure 7. View of <http://www.wwf.fr/topten/> the section “how does it work” on the French website.

- are easy to revise and strengthen according to the markets progress.
- Topten stimulates competition: as detailed data is published, manufacturers can compete to be “at the top” of the Toptenlist (no threshold effect). As the website is very often updated, the competition on the energy efficiency criteria is continuous.
- Topten is also a platform for dialogue with manufacturers: even though some manufacturers were reluctant at

the beginning, they now cooperate, answer questions about appliances (e.g. when Topten recalculates the energy efficiency index of a model and find different numbers than the ones declared) and discuss problematic test results.

Topten goes European

Since the beginning of 2004, the Swiss Topten team has been in contact with their international colleagues to en-

courage them to develop the same kind of approach in their respective country.

- Growing electricity demand is unfortunately a phenomena with touches all Western country.
- Manufacturers are thinking at least European-wide: any tool aiming at market transformation should integrate a European dimension in order to be able to discuss with the manufacturers' head offices with one united voice asking for concerted improvements.
- The WWF plays a central role in Topten as it has been a founding partner in Switzerland and has been funding the website. This NGO has national offices across Europe and can help launching national Topten websites, using its own notoriety.

The general idea is that each country uses the same Topten concept (7 points and four rules) but is free to adapt the web site design and the working methodology according to national preferences. For example, the French web site is more colourful than the Swiss one because French web-users are used to so-called "Latin" design. Likewise, the French team decided to buy product data from GfK and concentrate the dialogue with manufacturers on presenting the concept and discussing possible problematic appliances (rather than using catalogue data which is not reliable in France because there are too many manufacturers publishing catalogues at different times of the year). All web-sites can be visited from www.topten.info.

Topten was launched in France on November 30th, 2004 for cold appliances, as a part of the start of the WWF campaign "PowerSwitch". Partners were WWF France, the consultant sowatt, and SAFE. Recently, CLCV, a major consumer organisation, has joined and will participate in the work for 2005 with the objective of adding more products categories on the web site.

Topten Austria will be launched in May 2005 in the framework of the "klima:aktiv programme" directed by the Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water management. The Austrian Energy Agency (AEA, formerly E.V.A.) will coordinate Topten activities in partnership with WWF Austria, Topten Switzerland and VKI, a consumer organisation which has a magazine. In a first phase main emphasis will be placed on appliances (household, office equipment and consumer electronics) and cars. Topten shall be designed in such a way, that it is a good tool for end-consumers as well as for large professional buyers.

Other countries are now in a feasibility study phase (Belgium, Spain, Germany, etc.). Many partners are thinking of developing a EU SAVE proposal in order to consolidate the European dimension of Topten.