

Eskom Western Cape DSM Rollout

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NEED/OPPORTUNITY / Eskom is South Africa's national electricity utility, supplying approximately 95 percent of the country's electricity needs and some 60 percent of that of the African continent. The majority of its power stations are concentrated in the northeastern part of the country.

The Western Cape province, well known for its beautiful capital, Cape Town, receives about 36 percent of its electricity supply from Africa's only nuclear power station, Koeberg. On Christmas Day (25 December) 2005, a major technical fault occurred at Koeberg power station, severely impacting electricity supply in the Western Cape. Through an unusual combination of events, including a prescheduled refueling of one of the Koeberg reactors, Eskom was suddenly faced with severe electricity shortages in the province for at least six months. The period included the wet and cold Cape winter during which electricity consumption traditionally increases significantly.

Although a comprehensive technical recovery plan was implemented and fast-tracked, electricity consumers' assistance was required to reduce electricity consumption in order to prevent large scale and continuous supply interruptions.

An extensive demand side management (DSM) programme, consisting of six separate projects, was rolled out: More than five million compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) and thousands of geyser insulation systems were distributed and installed door-to-door; incentives were offered to businesses to adjust their electricity consumption patterns; and a major communication campaign, incorporating advertising and public relations, was launched.

INTENDED AUDIENCES / The communication plan to persuade the public to use electricity sparingly and wisely was, in broad strokes, aimed at all electricity consumers in the Western Cape. However, the following specific target audiences were identified:

- ▶ **Residential consumers.** Early morning and early evenings mark the highest electricity consumption in a day, largely due to domestic activities that require electricity for cooking, heating and lighting.

- ▶ **Commercial consumers.** The electricity consumption in office blocks, large stores, warehouses and hotels can be reduced relatively quickly and cost-effectively by switching lights and office equipment off when they are not required, and through the installation of energy-efficient lighting systems.
- ▶ **Industrial consumers with generators.** These consumers were able to supply a portion of their electricity needs themselves and had to be encouraged to do so.

The audiences were extremely hostile toward Eskom, feeling that the company expected them to solve the problem it had created.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES / The goal of the DSM programme was simple: Reduce electricity demand in the Western Cape by 400 megawatts per day over a period of four months. Four hundred megawatts equals the electricity consumption of approximately 250,000 homes in South Africa.

The communication objectives to support the goals were:

- ▶ **Information sharing.** Stakeholders had to be informed of the situation, how Eskom was addressing it and what progress was being made.
- ▶ **Education and a direct call to action.** Residential consumers in particular had to be educated about the need for saving electricity and provided with information on how to do so.
- ▶ **Encouragement and recognition.** Through regular feedback, stakeholders had to be kept abreast of progress and thanked for their contribution.

A target of 160 megawatts was set as the communication team's contribution to the overall 400 megawatt target.

SOLUTION OVERVIEW / The nature of the situation, its potentially serious impact on consumers' lives and the dependence on concerted public action to avert disaster necessitated a veritable flood of information. In addition, Eskom was being inundated with calls and demands for information from the media, members of the public and businesses.

The underlying communication strategy was the establishment of partnerships to manage the situation. The campaign's key message, "Together we have the power to save," played on the idea that a concerted community effort was needed to steer the region through the crisis.

Media partnerships were crucial to disseminate information and to repair reputation damage. Through the media, stakeholders were demanding information, especially early on.

Radio was a very important communication channel due to its immediacy and, especially in terms of regional and community stations, its interactive nature. Live reads, sound bites during news bulletins and regular interviews with Eskom spokespeople were key components of getting the message out.

The communication plan consisted of three main aspects:

- ▶ Public relations and advertising support for the DSM projects, most notably the rollout of CFLs and geyser blankets.
- ▶ Educating consumers about the need for energy conservation, how to go about it and when their support is particularly crucial.
- ▶ The rollout of a real-time communication channel that could act as an immediate call-to-action during times of shortages.

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ADVERTISING SUPPORT FOR THE DSM PROJECTS

The media were briefed on the full recovery project, including both the technical and DSM aspects. During the briefings, and in subsequent media releases, the six DSM projects were explained. Newspaper inserts and advertorials were used to paint the overall project picture.

Given the direct impact on approximately 300,000 households, which were being visited by field-workers to install CFLs and geyser blankets, there was a focus on providing domestic consumers with information through installation notifications, product information brochures and general media releases. Examples of topics receiving attention include: the reasons for the door-to-door rollouts, selected implementation areas, how to identify the field-workers and what to do in the case of inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour. (Approximately 10 major cases of alleged theft were reported and the culprits dealt with.)

Apart from the 3.3 million CFLs distributed door-to-door, a further two million lamps were distributed through exchange points established in community nodes, such as shopping centres, schools, municipal offices and Eskom offices. Once again, print and electronic media were used to communicate the details of the programme to consumers.

As the crisis was being brought under control, the public relations focus widened to include themes, such as success stories, community investment projects and international experiences in similar circumstances. While still keeping energy efficiency top of mind, the larger variety of messages allowed a more positive environment to develop.

During the rollout, businesses that signed up to support the savings campaign were thanked through a full-page advert in the main regional newspapers. This gesture was very positively received, with some businesses going as far as framing the advert and displaying it on their premises.

At the conclusion of the programme, the results were communicated to stakeholders in the form of thank-you messages.

CONSUMER EDUCATION

A focused advertising campaign aimed at consumer education was launched in the Western Cape. Consumers had to be made aware of the need to save and provided with information on how to save. Advertising was therefore highly educational.

Public relations support reinforced and elaborated on the advertising messages. Topics covered included peak demand periods; general savings tips for residential, commercial and industrial consumers; and progress being made with the recovery plan.

During the planning and production phase of a television advertising campaign featuring a popular South African talk show host, focus group research identified a number of areas where additional consumer information was needed. These included potential damage to geysers when switching them on and off, and understanding the daily load profile and the electricity consumption of different appliances. Based on this feedback, the public relations campaign tightened its focus.

POWER ALERT

During the electricity crisis in the Western Cape, South Africa had its first taste of an organisation communicating directly with the public through real-time messaging. Conceptualised by the multi-disciplinary communication team, the Power Alert featured broadcast messages on the status of the electricity grid between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. on the three television channels of the national broadcaster.

Power Alert depicted the state of the electricity grid through four colour codes: green, orange, red and brown. Each colour was accompanied by a call-to-action, e.g., red indicated significant strain on the system and consumers were asked to switch off all appliances except for their television sets.

Two messages were broadcast per hour per station, supported by educational infomercials in the same time slot, promoting the efficient use of electricity.

The Power Alert project time lines were themselves an example of efficiency, progressing from concept to television feature in less than two months. Once the concept was given the thumbs-up, the development team had a mere three weeks to develop the operational centre and integrate it with the broadcasting corporation's systems.

Not only was its target exceeded, but Power Alert succeeded in helping customers make the link between personal electricity use and the national supply and demand situation. The success of the tool lay in empowering electricity consumers. For the first time, consumers were provided with real-time information on the electricity supply situation in their region. In addition, they were given clear, practical ways to reduce their consumption and, in so doing, influence the situation. Finally, and probably most important, the feedback loop was closed, meaning that the broadcasts only ceased once the supply situation was restored to normal. Consumers were therefore actively and intimately involved in helping to reduce demand and reduce the threat of power cuts in the region.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES / The communication programme faced two major challenges:

- ▶ The emergency nature of the situation required extremely fast implementation.
- ▶ Eskom's reputation had suffered significant damage, and consumers were antagonistic towards the company, which, in their view, was making them pay for its incompetence.

With only four months in which to achieve a 400 megawatts per day reduction in demand, reaching as many stakeholders as possible quickly was key. In meeting the first challenge, therefore, Eskom invested significant resources in the communication required to avert disaster. The total communication budget, including production, media and public relations costs, amounted to R25.5 million over six months. Producing and launching Power Alert came to an additional R23 million.

The second challenge was more onerous, given that it involved message credibility. The communication team addressed this matter by crafting relevant and useful messages, supplying consumers with information that empowered them to manage their personal situations. The trust this established was enhanced by messages that clearly illustrated the lengths Eskom was going to address the situation, e.g., the free distribution and installation of energy efficient equipment.

MEASUREMENT/EVALUATION / The results of the campaign can be measured on two levels: the actual electricity savings achieved and the recovery of Eskom's reputation.

In terms of actual savings achieved, the overall DSM programme and the communication campaign were a resounding success. The overall target of 400 megawatts per day was exceeded by 100 megawatts per day at the height of the campaign in June 2006. This was also midwinter in the cape and, due to the substantial decrease in demand, no supply interruptions occurred during this period.

The commercially-focused voluntary savings project, which was purely communication based, also exceeded its target by 10 megawatts.

Measuring the communication success of the campaign and the recovery of Eskom's reputation was done through two sets of independent research, one in August 2006 and the other in December 2006.

Both sets of research results indicated that people viewed the campaign as effective, useful, easy-to-understand, believable, informative and perception-changing. Almost 80 percent of respondents claimed their behaviour had changed in some way, with almost 75 percent limiting their use of electrical appliances during peak periods and one-half switching their geysers off during the day. Respondents' claimed change in attitude and behaviour was supported by the Eskom consumption analyses.

The integrated PR and advertising approach proved to be effective as was evident from the high levels of awareness and variety of media mentioned. The focused call-to-action approach, using a single message, created excellent recall of key messages, and was seen as useful, easy-to-understand and changed the way respondents felt about saving electricity.

An important indicator of a mind-set shift was that respondents acknowledged their role in saving electricity, and that behaviour changes, as opposed to investment in electricity saving equipment, seemed to be driving savings.