



Christine Geltz, Geltz Communications

Geltz Communications Turns Diffusion Theory Into Program Results

By Bethany Helvie

Christine Geltz chose the diffusion of innovations theory as the basis of her graduate school thesis. Now, six years later, as the principal of Geltz Communications, a full-service marketing communications firm located in Pasadena, California, she is still pleased that this theory is the basis for one of the most successful green initiative programs in California. "The work we have done serves as the catalyst for other programs and communities around the U.S.," said Geltz.

Formalized by Everett Rogers in a book called *Diffusion of Innovations*, the diffusion of innovations theory is the study of how, why and at what rate new ideas and technology spread through cultures. Rogers stated that adopters of any new innovation or idea could be categorized, depending on how quickly they adopt, as innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority or laggards. Each adopter's willingness to adopt and innovate would depend on their awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption. In the process, mass media serves to provide awareness and knowledge, but since diffusion is such a very social process, interpersonal and subjective communication channels are the most powerful.

Geltz has utilized this theory with great success in 2002 and 2004 in the Coachella Valley, replacing traditional thermostats with those that adjust set points upwards at peak times, resulting in lower electricity usage for small businesses during peak times when electricity resources are running scarce. Among Geltz's recent diffusion programs in the western U.S. is one in the city of Cloverdale, California. Its city council joined with the Chamber of Commerce to officially support the Small Business Energy Alliance (SBEA) Energy Savers Program. With the assistance of Geltz Communications, this program is designed to help small businesses in six northern California counties lower their energy bills and reduce greenhouse gas emissions with minimal effort and cost offsets. On the heels of the city's greenhouse gas reduction agreement, Geltz Communications contacted the city and the Chamber of Commerce to pitch their idea to join forces with the SBEA. "Our role," says Geltz, "is to design and roll out a recruitment strategy that uses existing communication channels to create "buzz" in the city and capitalizes on the "free marketing" impact of the city's opinion leaders. We sent letters from the mayor and the Chamber of Commerce encouraging small businesses to join the program." Business license holders, the names of whom were provided by the city, were personally contacted.

"Our representatives went door-to-door and provided small businesses with personalized assessments of what they could do to lower their energy use, overhead costs, and greenhouse gas emissions." SBEA pays the incentive funds directly to the contractor upon the completion of the project and handles all the paperwork.

"It's a no-brainer," exclaims Geltz. "For example, if the owner opts to replace lighting with high efficiency alternatives, SBEA pays up to 100% of the costs. We try to make it as easy as possible on the small business owner." The program was made possible through state public purpose funds and is administered by Pacific Gas & Electric.

Geltz says the success of this project can be attributed to the fact that "we geared the marketing messages to potential customers at every level of the innovation scale, and we made sure that the chamber board members and the city council people were the first to participate in the program. This means that they, as opinion leaders, could add to the program momentum and awareness."

With a goal of 100% participation, Geltz and her team, along with the city of Cloverdale, are working to provide a greener future for generations to come.

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