

The Next Big Thing in Energy Efficiency

By Lisa V. Wood, executive director of IEE and vice president of The Edison Foundation.

Utilities are on the cusp of the “next big thing” in shopping. With smart meters now deployed to 46 million U.S. households, shopping for energy efficient products is undergoing a revolution.

Today, 80 percent of American consumers research energy-consuming products online before they actually buy. The opportunity to influence purchasing decisions during the online search process is an exciting new way for utilities to engage their customers.

As part of the EmPOWER Maryland initiative, the state’s five utilities offer many programs to help businesses and homes save money. But Maryland utilities now are taking the program a step further. With the approval of a statewide rollout from the Maryland Public Service Commission, Baltimore Gas & Electric, Pepco, Delmarva Power, FirstEnergy, and Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative are experimenting with a new approach. “Dreamstreet” directly engages thousands of customers as they actively search for energy efficient product information online via each utility’s website.

Innovation in Product Choices

American Efficient’s Dreamstreet software, slated to launch statewide in November, is an open platform embedded in each utility’s website that presents pricing, availability, photographs, and expert reviews for energy efficient products from local and online retailers in real-time in a visually compelling and interactive way.

Based on a customer’s ZIP code, Dreamstreet combines retail product availability data with ENERGY STAR product specs and leverages household consumption data from smart meters to provide utility customers with information on a range of individual products that meet their needs. Customers can “clip and save” the products they like, then take their “clip list” to the store or purchase the product through an online retailer discovered through Dreamstreet. Dreamstreet also helps customers discover available utility rebates and complete the application forms online.

“I think of Dreamstreet as the Kayak.com of energy efficient products,” said Ross Chanin, CEO of American Efficient.

By creating a customized energy efficiency shopping experience, Dreamstreet has the potential to expand utility energy efficiency programs in two important ways.

■ First, using Dreamstreet’s information and engagement technology platform, utilities can encourage their customers

to make efficient product purchases at the information-gathering stage—thus providing utilities with a new way to generate energy efficiency. Pamela Tate, Pepco’s and Delmarva’s coordinator for this initiative, noted that “the web-based tool will save customers time, money, and energy when they select new lighting and appliance products for their homes.”

■ Second, using the Dreamstreet platform, utilities are able to identify a clear point of influence on a specific customer product purchase before the purchase is made. Once the purchase is made and the rebate is claimed, the influence-to-purchase cycle is complete. This has a direct tie to calculating energy savings and improving net-to-gross ratios and the cost effectiveness of

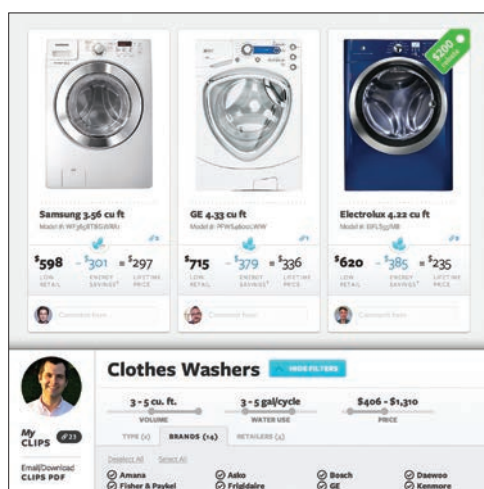
utility energy efficiency programs. In a nutshell, linking utility-provided information to actual customer purchase decisions could completely change the equation for measuring energy efficiency savings in a very positive way.

While it’s still early for Dreamstreet, it is not hard to imagine

possible next steps where utilities will be enabled by Dreamstreet to push actionable information out to customers, including energy use and maintenance tips, reminders about savings as a result of efficient product purchases, and recommendations for additional efficient products. These types

of reminders will spur customers to become even more energy efficient.

EmPOWER Maryland started as a major collaborative stakeholder process to reduce the state’s energy consumption by 15 percent by 2015. It might now lead to the next generation of energy efficiency innovation. Stay tuned. ♦



Using Dreamstreet to find efficient appliances.

Today, 80 percent of American consumers research energy-consuming products online before they actually buy.

ELECTRIC PERSPECTIVES

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2013

Duke Energy's
Lynn Good:

Leading in a Complex New Era

When Rates
Take off

Quantifying
Electricity's Value

