

A lot of hard work, planning and a touch of serendipity

Toronto Hydro's TAKE A LOAD OFF TORONTO campaign coincides with government

On April 18, Toronto Hydro-Electric System Limited (THESL) was at the centre of a news event that made headlines across the country. In Toronto Hydro's lobby at 14 Carlton, which was decorated with clotheslines for the occasion, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty announced that the province was lifting the ban on outdoor clotheslines that had been in effect in many Ontario communities.

THESL's Marketing, Communications and Public Affairs (MARCUM) team orchestrated this opportunity to announce the launch of its latest energy conservation program, "TAKE A LOAD OFF TORONTO," which promoted hanging laundry on a clothesline instead of using a dryer. This kicked off an integrated multi-media campaign inviting Toronto residents to visit one of four Toronto retailers to pick up a free retractable clothesline and purchase discounted compact fluorescent bulbs and cold-water laundry detergent.

The news-making event was the culmination of a year of meticulous planning, accompanied by a touch of serendipity. The program was developed, complete with logistics, financial and analytical components associated with achieving kilowatt-hour savings, and submitted to the Ontario Power Authority, which approved it last fall.

Next a "Request for Expressions of Interest" was sent to multiple retailers, asking them how they would staff, market and support the program. Four retailers were chosen for a total of 144 events at The Home Depot, Costco Wholesale, Zellers and Wal-Mart. The events would be held over three weekends beginning April 26 and by May 11, 75,000 clotheslines would be handed out.

The clothesline would be the "hook" the MARCOM team wanted to drive customers to retailers. Once there, campaign representatives had the opportunity to meet with people face-to-face, provide education on the importance of conservation, as well as incentives and information on energy-efficient products.

"In previous years, we had provided compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs) and LED holiday lights," says Cathy Parry, Director of Marketing, Communications and Public Affairs. "No one had focused on an alternative to using the dryer, which is a big electricity user. Clothes dryers account for 15 per cent of household appliance electricity use. By hanging up just 25 per cent of their laundry on a line, customers can save about \$30, or 225 kilowatt-hours, a year on their electricity bills."

Since there was no ban on outdoor clotheslines in Toronto, the MARCOM team decided that a free retractable clothesline would be the key to weaning Torontonians off their dryers and driving them into stores.

"Our team held a brainstorming session to develop the marketing campaign and theme, and decided on the name 'TAKE A LOAD OFF TORONTO'" said Gillian Earle, Marketing Communications Consultant. The integrated marketing campaign included a flyer mailed to all Toronto households; radio ads; newspapers including Toronto Star, Metro, community and ethnic papers; CP24 TV billboards; and a prominent presence on the Toronto Hydro Web site.

As the logistics of the program were unfolding, the first piece of serendipity occurred. In January, news emerged from Queen's Park that the government was considering lifting the ban on clotheslines throughout Ontario - there was to be a 60-day consultation period, the culmination of which would coincide with the April launch of "TAKE A LOAD OFF TORONTO."

"If the ban in fact was going to be lifted, we thought it would be a great opportunity for us to springboard off this announcement to launch our clothesline giveaway," says Ms. Parry. As it became apparent that the government intended to lift the clothesline ban imminently, the MARCOM team contacted the Minister of Energy's office inviting the Minister to attend the launch of "TAKE A LOAD

created a successful campaign

announcement that ends bans on clotheslines in Ontario

OFF TORONTO." Not only did the Minister agree to attend, the Premier's Office contacted THESL to say Premier Dalton McGuinty wanted to participate as well.

At the event there would be an opportunity for the Premier and Minister to make an announcement. Although it was suspected the announcement would be the lifting of the clothesline ban, this was confirmed only the day before the event launch. "Although our program was planned months previously, it dovetailed perfectly," says Ms. Parry.

The MARCOM team did an electronic and phone blitz, contacting all major and local media outlets and just about everyone responded with interest.

At the event, Clare Copeland, Chairman of the Toronto Hydro Corporation Board, former Energy Minister Phillips and Premier McGuinty spoke, and Toronto Hydro Corporation President and CEO David O'Brien acted as Master of Ceremonies. The media loved it and portrayed the event in words and pictures, which appeared that night and the next day.

The program proved extremely popular with consumers. The first weekend saw a huge public interest with large lineups at participating stores. "We ran out of clotheslines within three hours of starting the giveaway at almost every store," said Gillian. If 75,000 Torontonians use their free clothesline, together they can save enough electricity to supply approximately 2,000 homes." ■

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Toronto Hydro-Electric System Limited is one of the largest municipal electric distribution utilities in Canada, delivering electricity to a broadly diversified, economically robust, residential, commercial and industrial customer base in the City of Toronto. The utility serves more than 676,000 customers.



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