

Budgets, Gadgets & Price Increases

2015 Survey of Utility Communicators & Marketers

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Executive Summary and Key Findings

What is the optimal blend of tools and talents to accomplish your goals? This is the key question on the minds of a growing number of utility communicators and marketers who, like their colleagues in engineering, finance and operations, continually seek to refine their best practices as advancing technologies and shifting consumer behaviors make new demands on their talents and their time.

To help our readers better answer that question and position themselves favorably in a fast-changing industry, Egan Energy Communications, Inc. (EEC) recently conducted its first annual survey of utility communicators and marketers to shed light on their top concerns and identify their most effective tools and practices.

Our online survey asked:

- Where departmental budgets are going in 2015
- How the mix of high-touch and high-tech activities is shifting
- How practitioners are measuring the effectiveness of these tools and tactics
- What are the prominent issues for 2015, and
- How communicators and marketers can win, and retain, their seat at the table where strategic decisions are made at their utility

The answers to many of these questions revealed a community in transition:

- While many of those surveyed see a flat top-line departmental budget for 2015, sizable reallocations of dollars, people and priorities are planned for 2015 compared to 2014.

- Websites and social media are felt to be the most effective means of outbound communications, but a large percentage of respondents say they don't know about the effectiveness of different forms of outbound communications.
- Despite the perceived effectiveness of digital communications, many utility leaders continue to favor printed means of communicating with stakeholders.
- While some of the biggest communications and marketing challenges for 2015 involve traditional issues like customer satisfaction and price increases, emerging issues like employee engagement and payment scams also are becoming more of a priority for some respondents.
- Only 20% of those surveyed say their departments exert a significant influence in their utility's strategic decision-making process; by contrast, one in four say their departments play a minimal role.

All of this tells us that communicators and marketers are entering 2015 with **one foot on each side of a digital divide** — with a cell phone in one hand and a landline in the other, they are at Ground Zero in the digitization of our industry.

Relying upon the tried and true methods of communications and marketing, on the one hand, and the promising yet not fully proven digital tools on the other, utility communicators and marketers are increasingly looking to their peer practitioners for insights into how to select and deploy the optimal mix of high-tech and high-touch activities.