

Nancy Drew and the Case of the Mystery Shopper...

California Baseline of the ENERGY STAR Lighting Fixtures Program

Jennifer McCormick, Pacific Consulting Services

Project Background

Pacific Consulting Services (PCS) conducted a state-wide baseline assessment and market characterization of the ENERGY STAR Residential Lighting Fixtures Program (Program) in California. This study was designed to identify and confirm market barriers and provide timely feedback to refine the programs as they are operated in California. A unique component to the assessment was the inclusion of "mystery shopper" visits to retailers throughout the state to verify stocking and advertising practices, and test overall awareness and knowledge of the Program among retailer employees.

Research Questions Asked and By Whom

This task involved benchmarking the current level of awareness among sales staff at retail outlets throughout California. Previous research had indicated that consumers rely heavily on sales staff for technical information about lighting fixtures. A literature review has indicated that poorly informed sales staff are an important obstacle to consumer purchases of energy-efficient lighting products. Thus, as part of the program baseline assessment, we determined the extent to which sales staff are able to provide shoppers with accurate information.

Research Design and Methodology

The overall strategy undertaken was to send an experienced market researcher into the field to visit a total of 20 stores, comprised of ten hardware stores, lumberyards, and home improvement centers, five lighting decor and furniture stores, and five mass merchandisers, located throughout the State of California. A Mystery Shopper Protocol was developed with the object to engage staff in conversations to determine their level of awareness of the Program and compact fluorescent technologies in general. An important component to this task was a comparison of survey data from phone interviews (usually completed by a corporate buyer or store manager) with that of the onsite visit (usually a sales clerk). For this study, there were nine retail stores that participated in the telephone survey and were chosen for a site visit.

Research Findings

Overall, there were striking differences between the program participants (4 of the 20) and non participants in terms of the way they stock and promote their fluorescent fixtures as well as the general awareness of fluorescent lighting technology. Those who participate in the Program are much more aware of the overall benefits of efficient lighting technologies.

How Results Have Been or Will be Used

Results have important implications for design and implementation of future programs targeted at increasing the market penetration of energy-efficient residential lighting fixtures. In particular, the observed lack of awareness among sales staff regarding energy-efficient lighting technologies should be considered in determining whether future program designs should emphasize a sales staff training component.