



Adieus to the Energy Guys, Propane and Electricity

The propane industry pays a fond farewell to the Energy Guys at midnight, Dec. 31. Because of the recent restriction of the activities of the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) by the U.S. Commerce Department, Propane, and his jittery, apprehensive roommate, Electricity, will be departing the stage—at least for now. The industry will no longer hold the rights to use Energy Guys images. They may not be used in ads or other items after the cut-off date. How sad.

The Energy Guys, portrayed by industry hero Dan Warner as Propane and John Hemphill as Electricity, are two guys who reside and discharge their duties in the same middle-class American home. They entertained audiences in a series of situations where Propane proves to be the better energy choice for many of the most important home tasks. Electricity, however, isn't inclined to share "power." Although humorous, the television spots served a serious purpose—to position propane as a better alternative to electricity in numerous applications.

"Industry knowledge and surveys demonstrated that electricity was propane's most serious and most vulnerable competitor," notes Daryl McClendon of Ferrellgas, former chairman of PERC's Consumer Education Advisory Committee (CEAC). "CEAC wanted to present propane in a more favorable manner when compared to electricity. Porter Novelli and [its] subcontractors went to work and came up with the Energy Guys. They were a hit from the start. They made a great and lasting, positive impression with consumers, and also served to resonate very favorably within the propane industry itself."

McClendon observes that much of the success for the Energy Guys was that the Electricity character was treated in a humorous, but genteel, manner. The Propane character was clearly the good guy and the hero, but the

Electricity character wasn't hammered mercilessly in the process. "This strategy was due to early media testing that proved that his more genteel approach resonated the best with the test audiences. The interaction between the two characters became a lot of fun to watch, and obviously, this brought more attention to the advantages that propane had over electricity."

McClendon adds that "advertising professionals will tell you that even the most successful campaigns, after a period of time, grow weary and stale. The Energy Guys had a great run, but they were nearing the end of their usefulness. But thanks to the Energy Guys, propane is now known in many, many more households as a very favorable energy source."

Kate Caskin, senior vice president and chief marketing officer of PERC, comments that the Energy Guys "impacted the marketplace and grabbed the attention of homeowners." She also observes that "the overall Energy Guys campaign created a great deal of pride in the industry, in addition to reaching consumers with the great story about propane." And in communicating propane's advantages to homeowners, "it was important to make sure not to diminish electricity, but to highlight that propane can do things just a little bit better in many instances."

Ms. Caskin acknowledges that losing the rights to Energy Guys images isn't popular with many industry members. Companies and state associations have incorporated many of the print ads, store displays, and radio and TV spots into their advertising campaigns for years now. "Legally, our rights will expire, and we are unable to move ahead because of the restrictions," she says. "I have heard from quite a few marketers, and the last thing anyone wants to do is upset people in the industry." Nevertheless, at least for now, the Energy Guys are exiting stage left. —John Needham