



# Marketing in the New Energy Ecosystem

## 5 things to do now to improve the bottom line

by Tracy Olmstead Williams

**THE MARKETPLACE FOR CLEANTECH COMPANIES HAS CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY OVER** the last five years. Consumers want green and they want to know how much it will cost them. Government has spoken too, and the story has shifted from “if” to “when” new technologies like solar panels, electric vehicles, and smart thermostats will achieve scale. For cleantech companies, marketing strategies need to adapt and address new stakeholders: energy providers.

It’s now less about influencing public opinion or changing consumer behavior and more about strategic relationship building to make connections that move the needle for technology. What’s required is a focused strategy to establish credibility and gain the trust of potential investors, partners, affiliates, and installers throughout target markets.

Following are five marketing pillars to help own the future, stand out during this critical window, and deliver measurable results to the bottom line.

### **Engage the community**

Start with announcements to tout all accomplishments and milestones of the technology to show it is ready for prime time. Put out a press release, post on the company website and social media channels, and blast an eNewsletter to all contacts. Without this awareness of the significance of the technology, valuable contracts, partners, and investors will stay out of reach. Make connections with targeted media and influential municipal and industry groups covering the issues the product or service addresses, from carbon emissions regulations to water conservation targets. Show up at appropriate meetings, create short informative videos for online and YouTube channels to show the technology in action, join the conversation online by adding comments to relevant articles and share news/commentary via all social media channels, website, eNewsletters, blogs, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

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### **Awards and lists matter**

Seek opportunities to spotlight and gain third party endorsement for both the company's technology and intellectual capital. From high-profile national opportunities like the Inc. 5000 and Edison Awards, to more targeted industry awards, and from local business journals' annual top public and private company lists to the various age-based and other specialized list opportunities honoring the "20 Under 20," "40 Under 40," top women, and minority business owners, a spot is waiting to be claimed. To get started, request editorial calendars from the advertising departments at target publications. Build a master list of opportunities throughout the year and contact each media outlet for consideration several months in advance of their deadlines. There is a lot of block and tackling involved; however, the main cost is time.

### **Hone messaging**

To have maximum impact on the conversation, take time to prepare key messaging about the technology. Be strategic and consistent throughout the year-long marketing effort with clear takeaways on the value the technology brings to stakeholders. Speaking is a great way to hone thinking and messages. Check for presentation and panel opportunities at industry events. While many opportunities are free, some of the larger conferences are pay-to-play. Evaluate each opportunity through a cost-benefit analysis. Alumni groups host webinars and so do trade groups. Brainstorm where to be to make the right connections.

### **Become an industry expert**

Writing is a big time commitment, but getting published adds credibility and trustworthiness to a brand. Industry expertise is established through bylines, guest articles, Op-Ed pieces, and quotes in respected news, trade, and business publications. Commit to writing about something that's in the news and fresh. Don't talk about the company's technology but about issues. Follow guidelines and don't go beyond the word count. Don't sell. Give readers information they don't know and knowledge they can't buy. Have an opinion. No matter how limited the initial circulation, post the work on the company website and social media channels to broaden its reach and effectiveness. Frame the finished articles and hang them in the office. Buy digital reprint permissions and include links in eNewsletters. Source sheets are also a valuable tool to get in front of reporters who are seeking informed sources for background and commentary on issues for future articles. Separate from promoting the technology, source sheets help establish relationships that can have direct impact on the bottom line, not to mention provide confident, clear responses to questions about the technology.

### **Network at trade shows and beyond**

There's no substitute for the value of meeting people face-to-face. Take advantage of existing opportunities at trade shows where the company has purchased booth space to stand out. Apply the same strategic thinking and campaign messaging to the booth; know the goals going in to the event and keep both designs and talking points simple and clear about the unique value of the technology. Even without a booth, there's still value in attending and working the event floor. Create opportunities for educating stakeholders on the technology, confirm meetings in advance, keep them, and always follow up. The goal is conversations and relationships based on more than business and sales goals. It may come as a surprise when referrals and strategic partner opportunities come in from unexpected sources. Create a calendar of events and conferences and events associated with the lists now featuring the company. Show up to meet other honorees. Don't set limits. Key investors who can take the business to the next level might be behind that door. The author E.M. Forster famously stated the secret of all success: "Only connect."

Commit time and resources to each of these categories this year to capitalize on the new green economy and create opportunities for maximizing the potential of your technology.



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