USING CONSUMER RESEARCH TO DEVELOP CONSERVATION PROGRAMS AND MEET GOALS

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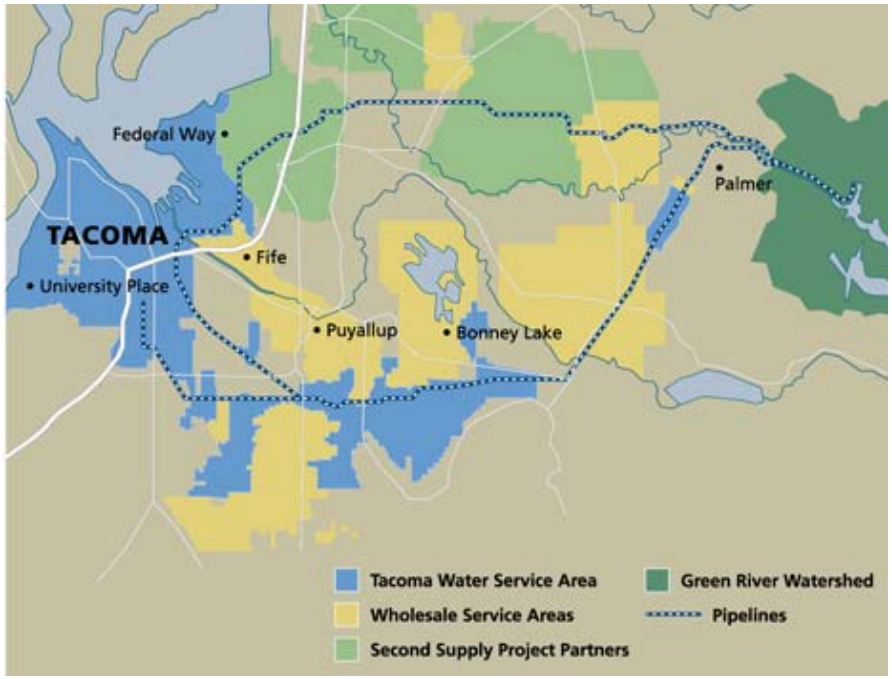
Tacoma Water

Service Area

- Approx 89,000 residential connections
- Approx 6,000 commercial, industrial, and institutional customers



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Tacoma Water's Conservation Program

Conservation Goal

- Reduce per capita water consumption 10% from 2000 to 2010

Conservation Program

- Activities began in 1987
- Offer residential customers fixture/appliance rebates; free water-saving devices; education/training
- Education and outreach programs
  - Summer ad campaign
  - Brochures, posters, and website
  - Workshops
  - Public events

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Tacoma Water's Consumer Research

Consumer Research

- Conservation program assessment in 2006
- Conducted residential consumer research in 2008
  - Contracted with Dethman & Associates, a market research firm
  - Benchmarking Survey
    - Examined customer awareness, attitudes, and behaviors
    - 600 customers
  - Ad awareness survey
    - Studied customers' response to and the effects of the 2008 six-week summer ad campaign
    - 400 customers

Research Findings

Key Findings

- Limited program awareness
- Significant differences between customers in Tacoma and outside the city
- Benchmarking data on indoor and outdoor water use habits
- Preferences for how to receive information
- Limited response to ad campaign

Program Awareness and Participation

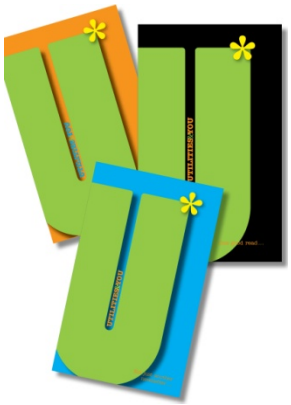
Research Findings

- 52% were aware that Tacoma Water provides water conservation information, services, and rebates
- Of those who were aware of programs:
  - 58% who lived in Tacoma & 45% who lived outside the city had used brochures or website
  - 28% who lived in Tacoma & 15% who lived outside the city had talked with staff or visited a booth
  - 9% who lived in Tacoma & 3% who lived outside the city had attended a workshop

Program Awareness and Participation

Conservation Programming

- Raise awareness of conservation program using awareness ad campaign, events, articles
- Provide workshops and events outside Tacoma



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Inside vs. Outside Tacoma Differences

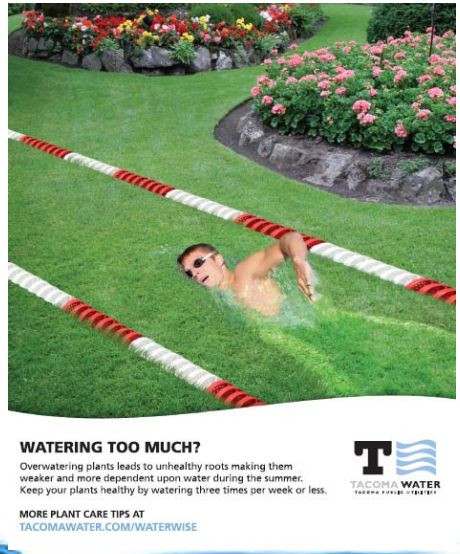
Research Findings

- Fewer customers outside Tacoma were aware of and used programs
- Customers outside Tacoma were more likely to live in newer homes
- Customers outside Tacoma were less likely to have seen 2008 ads
- Customers outside Tacoma were more likely to:
    - See a green lawn as very important
    - Water more frequently
    - Use automatic sprinklers
- In follow-up research, customers outside Tacoma were much more likely to be high summer water users

Inside vs. Outside Tacoma Differences

Conservation Programming

- Raise awareness of conservation program outside city (awareness campaign, etc)
- Provide more workshops and events outside Tacoma
- Use partnerships and targeted efforts to reach different customer groups



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Outdoor Water Use Habits

Research Findings

- 52% of households had someone extremely or very interested in gardening; 32% had someone with some interest
- Green lawns (71% very or somewhat) and well-maintained garden areas (90% very or somewhat) were very important
- Many have taken steps in the last 5 years to water less (73%), add mulch (64%), and add soil amendments (58%)

Reasons to Conserve

- Customers made changes to gardening habits to:
  - Save water, not waste water, or protect the environment
  - Reduce yard maintenance
  - Improve landscape health
  - Reduce water bills

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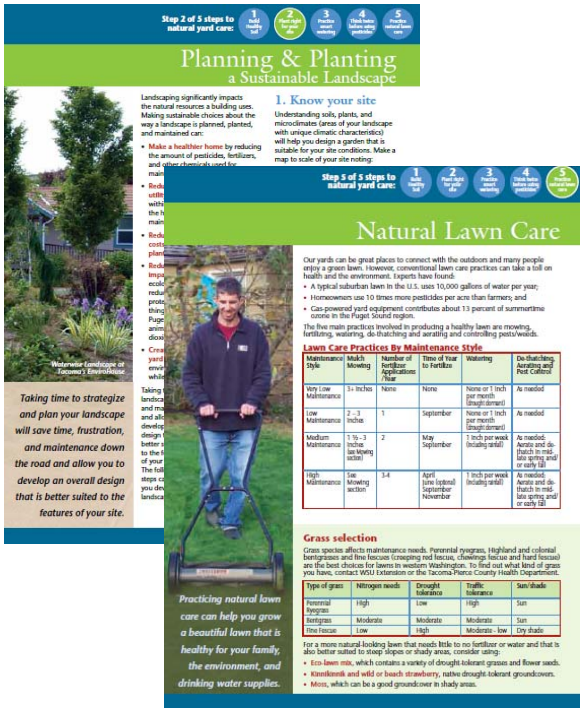
Outdoor Water Use Habits

Conservation Programming

- Use natural yard care concept and adapt design of program
- Tailor marketing of natural yard care and watering messages



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Preferences for Receiving Information

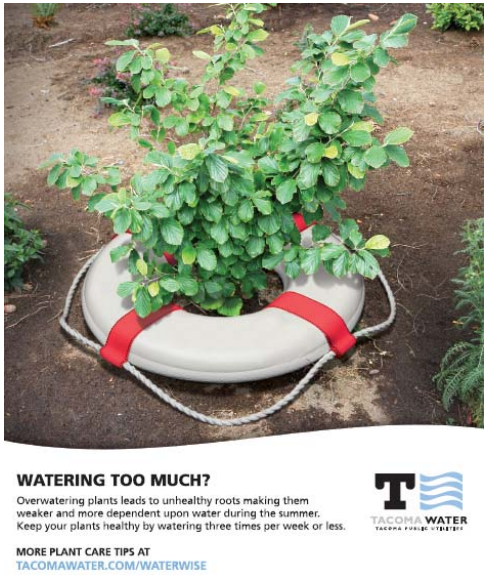
Research Findings

- Preferred information sources
  - Home improvement, hardware, appliance , and garden stores
  - Friends, family, and co-workers
  - The utility company
  - The internet
- Recalled seeing 2008 campaign ads on bill inserts, TV Tacoma, and the local newspaper

Preferences for Receiving Information

Conservation Programming

- Increase use of media our customers prefer and recall (e.g., internet and bill inserts)
- Working to provide more information in home improvement, appliance, and garden stores



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Response to Advertising Campaign

Research Findings

- 38% specifically recalled seeing 2008 campaign ads
- Customers who saw ads were more aware of conservation services
- 40% of customers who saw ads changed their watering
    - 20% were paying more attention to their watering
    - 17% watered more in the morning
    - 2% did the tuna can test
- 57% of customers who saw ads didn't know who sponsored them

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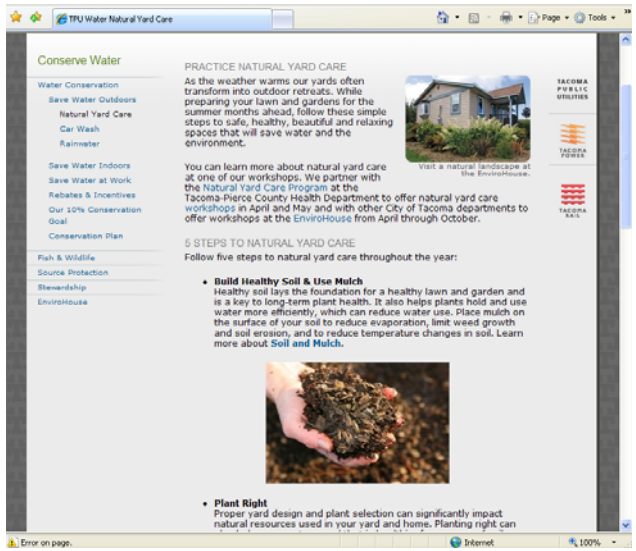
Response to Advertising Campaign

Conservation Programming

- Adapt media approach for those preferred and recalled by customers
- Focus 2010 campaign on building awareness of Tacoma Water's conservation program, not specific behaviors



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Using The Results

Program Development

- Program changes during 2000 – 2010 goal period
  - Refining awareness-building efforts with campaign & events
  - Fostering education and behavioral change with workshops, prompts, and information
  - Increasing outreach and education outside Tacoma
  - Adapting program marketing and information dispersal
- Informed follow-up analysis of customer water use patterns

Effects of Programming Changes

- Increased customer contacts and participation

Conducting Consumer Research

Conducting Your Own Research

- Quantitative/survey research can shed light on customers
- Research needs to be well planned, designed, and focused
- Large, statistically valid and un-biased studies take time and can be expensive

Research From Others

- Using quantitative and qualitative research from other agencies
- Our research helps us understand applicability of other research
- Qualitative research provides insights we cannot accurately obtain from survey research

Resources

- AWWA Waterwiser
- Water Research Foundation studies
  - *Customer Attitudes, Behavior and the Impact of Communication Efforts*
  - *Tools and Methods to Effectively Measure Customer Perceptions*
- Fostering Sustainable Behavior website and listserv
  - www.cbsm.com
- Tools of Change
  - www.toolsofchange.com
- Survey research books (Don Dillman)

Thanks!

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