

Marketing your event

You may think it's important for people to retrofit their homes, but for others your community this may not be a priority.

So to get people through the doors of your open homes event, you'll need to think carefully about the messaging you use, and draw up a marketing plan.

Before you start on your marketing plan, you should be clear about the overall aim or purpose of running an open homes event. What are your specific objectives, and what steps will you take to achieve this aim? For example, are you hoping to get as many people as possible through the doors, or are you going to target a specific group, those most likely to install measures, for example, or those living in homes that most need updating?

Who is your main target audience?

Don't forget that although you have spent a lot of time thinking about energy efficiency, the people you are trying to reach may not.

So messages that emphasise energy efficiency might miss their target. One of the biggest attractions of open homes events is that most people really enjoy looking around other people's homes. If some homes in your event have a 'wow factor' then it might be worth using them to promote the event. But remember that people may be equally curious about seeing normal homes that are similar to their own but warmer and cheaper to run.

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So ask yourself about your target audience:

- What age are they? Do they lead busy lives, or do they have time for retrofitting their home?
- What are their needs and priorities? Is caring for the environment a priority or are they more motivated by saving money on energy bills? How much do they know about energy efficiency?
- What types of property are they likely to live in and how do they heat them?

Think about their social networks. Do they know their neighbours? Do they use the internet or social media? Are they likely to be aware of your group and its activities in the community?

And ask yourself, will they know what an open homes event entails and what might stop them from coming along?

Thinking about your target audience in this way will help inform what you tell them, and how.

What to say

Given the profile of your audience that you've built up, what are the one or two most important messages to get across that would inspire them to come along? Think about what *they would be interested to hear*, rather than what you want to tell them!

In brief: be very clear, and keep it simple, use the right language (energy jargon), and make it sound as easy as possible for people to get involved.

Being sociable:

"Come and meet your neighbours, have tea and cake, and hear about how they've improved their homes."

Saving money

"Do you think you're paying too much for gas and electricity? Some people in this neighbourhood have made home improvements that have brought down their bills; come and ask them how."

Being warmer

"Houses around here are hard to keep warm, but some people in this neighbourhood have made home improvements that have made their houses much cosier. Come and see how."

See homes with 'wow factor'

"Here's a chance to see inside an eco-home" or "Check out a home built to passivhaus standards."

Find out about the improvements ...

"We will have a wide range of home improvements on show including solar panels, underfloor heating, LED lighting ... etc."

... and learn how they work

"Come and see energy saving technologies in action, and have an opportunity to speak to experts and householders about them."

Save energy

"Our area has saved X units of electricity through energy saving improvements so far. Want to join in?"

You could also entice with a home with a special architectural feature, an interesting history (maybe someone famous once lived there) or something to appeal to kids, like chickens in the garden.

Finding your audience

Once you've decided what to say, you need to decide *where* to say it. Don't stick to one communication channel. A message that is reinforced across different platforms (in a leaflet and then on a poster, say) is more powerful, and you will attract more people if you use several different channels.

Consider what each communication is for. What does the recipient *need to know at that stage*? You don't *have* include all the information at once.

A printed **leaflet** is a standard marketing tool and can be put through doors, handed out at e.g. shopping centres, or left in e.g. libraries, community centres, GP surgeries etc.

Leaflet drops much more effective if you (or others involved in your event) deliver them personally and chat to people face-to-face.

A **poster** can be put up in peoples windows, shops, pubs, public buildings etc. Keep them quite small – A3 is probably too big for many noticeboards.

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Local newspapers or local **radio stations** are interested things going on locally and may publish a supportive story or give you a slot on air. You might also buy an **advert** in a local newspaper or on the radio, but these can be expensive.

Local newsletters are often hungry for content, but you may have to write the article yourself.

Give out leaflets and chat to people **face-to-face** at local events, e.g. a weekly farmers market, or one-off community event.

Social media is a great publicity tool. Getting on **Facebook** and **Twitter** is free and is a great way to connect with individuals and organisations who will help you promote your event. Setting up a website from scratch is a more serious undertaking. Is there a supportive organisation that would give you a page on their site? Or why not set one up on www.greenopenhomes.net

Become an enthusiastic **networker!** Other community organisations in the area may be happy to promote the event through their newsletters, meetings and events

And don't forget good old **word-of-mouth** – ask the open homes hosts to tell their friends and neighbours and spread the word.

What resources do you need?

It is important to be aware that different types of marketing require different amounts of time, money and people. Think about:

- Finance - What's your publicity budget? What will be the best use of your money?
- Time - How much time do you have for publicity? Do you have volunteers who can go door knocking? How long will this take?
- People – How many people can help with the project? How could you increase this number and encourage people to volunteer?
- Skills - Whose expertise can you use? Do you know someone who can build a (simple) website, who is good at graphic design, who is great at talking to people?

When do I start?

In most cases, the sooner the better. An early start will mean you can do more and so maximise your reach.

But don't front-load your campaign, i.e. if you start advertising early, people can forget about it by the time the event comes round. Consider drawing up a calendar of publicity actions taking you right up to the event day/s. This will build up momentum and excitement about the event and stop people forgetting about it.

The **Green Open Homes** network supports low carbon retrofit by promoting existing open homes events and helping new initiatives get going with resources, practical support and funding.

We've produced lots of other information sheets like this one covering legal and insurance issues, volunteers and marketing.

See www.greenopenhomes.net



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