

Top ten tips on promoting open home events in rural areas

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Out here in rural Herefordshire, where your nearest neighbour is a tree, and giving directions to your house depend on the listener's knowledge of particular bends in the road, it can be tough to get people along to eco open home events. After four years of, here's some things we've learned:



1. Give as much detail as you can get away with in the allotted brochure/ leaflet space. Give the spec of your biomass boiler. Say how much money you've saved on hot water. Wax lyrical about your LEDs and gush forth about your insulation. Your entry may be edited by the organisers, but that is a risk worth taking.
2. Besides the event leaflet or brochure itself, word of mouth is far and away the most important form of marketing for your event. If you are an event host, tell people about your event until you are blue in the face. When people start to cross the road when they see you coming, you have done enough marketing.
3. Even if you have told everyone within a 100 mile radius, don't worry if only two people turn up. Anyone who has made the effort to come along to an open home event in a rural area is going to be a very high quality visitor, so take the time to have a proper conversation with everyone who arrives. The visit might be enough to help them decide where they build their house.
4. One reason why not many people turn up is because they can't find you. Make sure your postcode bears some correlation to your property. Almost every visitor will drive to get to you, and almost all of them will use Satnav to find you.
5. If the company that installed your kit is friendly and local, invite one of their people along to be on hand to answer technical questions.
6. Be a bit flexible with timing. Some people are really, really interested in this stuff and will keep asking you questions until you raise your hands in surrender. Say 'booking preferred' in the leaflet / brochure so that people know to come at a particular time, but without putting off speculative drop-ins.
7. Know where the other open home events are in your area, and what they offer that you don't, so that you can signpost visitors.
8. Be part of a local tour of open homes. You may have, in your midst, a dynamic local person willing to lead a bike tour of properties. A local renewable energy installation company may even be persuaded to lay on a minibus to take visitors around the properties, so you will have a guaranteed audience.
9. Allow for the fact that there is a direct correlation between the weather and visitor numbers.
10. Make loads of cake. That way, you will have something to offer visitors during an awkward pause in conversation, and if no one turns up, you will be able to console yourself by eating loads of cake.