

Title

EcoTopTen

Short description

EcoTopTen is an initiative and public awareness campaign developed by the Oeko-Institut in 2005 which seeks to inform private home owners and the general public about the most ecologically sustainable products available on the market. The goal of this intervention was to streamline the availability of appliance and sustainability indicators based on what the public identified as critical information necessary to make smart purchasing choices with regards to energy efficient appliances. The initiative based its information off of existing energy standards in Germany, but combined them with market availability and pricing in the form of an innovative market survey available online to the German public. The presentation of economic information on the EcoTopTen products in the market survey is supplemented by information on “typical products on the market”. This way, consumers get the opportunity to compare the “real” costs of environmental sound EcoTopTen products with typical products. The main product of the intervention was the creation of the online platform, which between 2005 and 2007, the site covered 25 different product groups. The homepage of EcoTopTen got constant or growing numbers of visits over the two years of the campaign, reaching its first peak in January 2006 with 25.000 Visits and 500.000 hits.

Topic

Living – Energy Efficient Housing

Characteristics (type, level)

National- Intervention

Country/Countries of implementation

Germany

Aims and Objectives

EcoTopTen delivers information on the purchase prices and on further annual costs, such as for electricity or water needed for using the products. In view of comparison possibility, typical products failing to meet the EcoTopTen criteria are also presented. These market overviews should put consumers in a position to take quick decisions in favor of sustainable products. The campaign also provides tips on how to use these products in a way that saves money and is less environmentally harmful.

EcoTopTen goes far beyond existing labels and consumer information schemes: it integrates environmental and quality aspects as well as annual life cycle costs. In doing so, Oeko-Institut promotes the further development from environment labels towards sustainability labels.

Most of the analyzed product groups deal with energy using products (EuP): refrigerators, freezers, washing machines, tumble-driers, notebooks, flat panel displays, printers, boilers and lighting equipment. For each product group, Oeko-Institut develops minimum criteria relating to environment, quality and costs. The criteria are based, as far as possible, on existing labels and product tests, like the European energy label, the German eco-label, as well as labels for green electricity or product tests published in recognized journals.

Target Group

Private homeowners in Germany

Status

Implemented on a continuous basis

Start and Completion dates

2005-2007

Lifestyle and Behavior Change

By logging on to and purchasing products analyzed by the EcoTopTen project, consumers can actively choose products that are more ecofriendly and economically sustainable, thus increasingly the individual’s capacity to become a more responsible citizen with regards to energy consumption in their homes.

Effects on:

Health and Wellbeing	This program does not specifically target health and wellbeing. However, the use of energy-efficient appliances could have the positive benefit of ensuring safer energy practices in the home and ensure greater well-being
Vulnerable populations	Economically vulnerable groups who would benefit from reduced energy consumption could use the EcoTopTen database to find the most affordable means to both reduce energy and save more money in monthly costs.
Environment	The informed purchasing of ecofriendly electrodomestic appliances and other home technologies reduces the consumption of energy within the household, both saving money for the consumer and promoting energy efficiency.

Initiated and/or implemented by

EcoTopTen is a major initiative for sustainable consumption and product innovations in mass markets initiated by Öko-Institut in Freiburg, Germany. In its first phase the EcoTopTen research project, was sponsored by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The consumer information campaign was sponsored by the German Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection and the Legacy for the Future Foundation. The EcoTopTen sustainable consumption campaign: current phase of the EcoTopTen campaign is sponsored by the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU), one of Europe’s largest foundations promoting innovative and exemplary environmental projects.

Stakeholders and sectors involved

The German Ministries of Research and Consumer Protection (funding), Institute for Applied Ecology (project management), Institute for Social-Ecological Research (consumer research), companies (products) and several media (information campaign)

Financial support

The German Ministries of Research and Consumer Protection

Evidence-base

EcoTopTen builds upon many of the energy standards already existing in Germany, and has mainly streamlined the availability of this information to consumers.

Main activities

EcoTopTen produces market surveys of the most energy efficient products available to private households in Germany.

In the case of desktop PCs, notebooks and printers recommendations were given on how to choose a suitable product with low environmental impacts and low annual costs.

Additional information was given on where to get information concerning quality aspects

The EcoTopTen market survey contains information on the Producer/Brand. Besides the name a link to the website of the particular producer or brand is set. In order that consumers can base their buying decision on the market survey the names of the models are shown in the table.

Specific product features are mentioned additionally. Depending on the particular product this can be size, performance, available extra functions. In the product group efficient fridges, fridge-freezers and freezers for example these special functions encompass energy saving holiday programs, automatic defrosting and temperature warning systems. Features relevant for environmental performance like electricity consumption, mercury emission (for energy saving bulbs or aggregated evaluations, purchase price, recommended retail price as told by the producer, annual costs, calculated on the basis of the typical product life time and typical usage behavior.

A flyer campaign was also implemented in which advertisements of the intervention were handed out

Evaluation

No evaluation noted

Main results

The main product of the intervention was the creation of the online platform, which between 2005 and 2007, covered 25 different product groups. The homepage of EcoTopTen got constant or growing numbers of visits over the two years of the campaign, reaching its first peak was in January 2006 with 25.000 Visits and 500.000 hits. In September and October 2006, the number of visits increased from 15.-20.000 to over 30.000; the number of hits multiplied from 200.-400.000 to almost 850.000 hits in October. Over the whole period of the campaign www.ecotopten.de reached a total of 413.000 visits and 8,4 million hits.

Key success factors and barriers

The success of the EcoTopTen program was dependent on the novelty of the way in which it provided the information to consumers, in great part because of their consultation of their target audience in the original formatting of the market surveys. They did not reinvent the wheel but instead built upon existing information regarding appliance energy standards but streamlined the information available and included price and market availability in accordance with consumer requests. Retailer inclusion and acceptability

Gathering information for the products to review presented an initial challenge. There is little product specific information available at present, especially not for complex technical products like computers, cars or domestic household appliances. Furthermore, this little available information could not be evaluated and certified so far. This is especially due to the vast supply chains, which often cover more than 1,000 individual parts per product and nearly as much suppliers.

INHERIT Perspective

This program has been chosen for inclusion because its low cost of implementation, can be easily replicated, and high focus on individual behavioral change towards sustainability. The EcoTopTen program is egalitarian in that all eco-friendly consumer information is available to all private homeowners who wish to improve their environmental standards. This intervention is consumer friendly and involved its target audience to cater to their needs, improving usage outcomes. Providing the average consumer with tailored sustainability information allows users to become autonomous in their energy consumption and improves use of efficient and safe appliances.

More information

<http://www.ecotopten.de/>

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/pdf/report_22082012.pdf

Quack, D. (2008, February). EcoTopTen sustainable consumption campaign: Achievements and new challenges. In *Sustainable consumption and production: Framework for action. Conference of the Sustainable Consumption Research Exchange (SCORE)* (pp. 109-120).

Salzmann, O., Fecht, H. L., Steger, U., & Ionescu-Somers, A. (2006). The challenge of sustainable consumption and the role of business as a solution.

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