

DOE Zero Energy Ready Home

Innovation Partner Marketing Expert Meeting Summary

September 2018



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**DOE Zero Energy Ready Home
Innovation Partner Marketing Expert Meeting Summary**

June, 6th 2018

Washington, D.C.

Prepared for

DOE Zero Energy Ready Home Program

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1 Meeting Information

1.1 Attendees

Participants	Zero Energy Ready Home Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Andreas Kuhlman, iShow • Camilo Cuba, NAHB • Dave Bell, TopBuild • George Phelps, Knauf Insulation • Megan Carroll, NAHB • Mike Smith, Mitsubishi Electric • Nancy Bakeman, EEBA • Nikki Kruger, Ultra-Aire • Patrick Kiker, NAIMA • Rob Howard, Mitsubishi • Shaun Taylor, Lutron Electronics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sam Rashkin, U.S. Department of Energy • Jamie Lyons, Newport Partners • Joe Nebbia, Newport Partners • Sam Bowles, Newport Partners • Alex Krowka, Energetics

1.2 Purpose

Zero Energy Ready Homes (ZERH) can deliver a superior consumer experience for high-performance products and services because the program requirements ensure they are properly installed and part of a complete system. Thus, U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has concomitant interests with high-performance product manufacturers and associations to increase consumer interest in ZERHs. DOE has initiated the Innovation Partnership to synergistically increase consumer interest in ZERH. One of the most significant actions recommended at the initial Innovation Partner Roundtable held at the 2018 International Builder Show was to organize a meeting with a group of marketing experts from participating manufacturers and associations to plan a communication strategy.

1.3 Desired Outcomes

- Identify the most compelling consumer core message for ZERH
- Identify best strategies for communicating core message to consumers
- Create a framework for a plan moving forward communicating ZERH to consumers

1.4 Meeting Agenda

Time	What	What/How
9:00 – 10:00 am	Breakfast	Lutron Host
10:00 – 11:00 am	Welcome, Introductions, Agenda Review, Zero Energy Ready Home Communication Strategy	Around-the-Room Sam Rashkin
11:00 – 12:00 pm	What is the most effective Zero Energy Ready Home ‘power message’?	Cards/Sorting/ Brainstorming/Voting
12:00 – 1:00 pm	Lunch	Lutron Host
1:00 – 1:45 pm	Best strategies to collaboratively communicate power message to consumers	Cards/Sorting
1:45 – 2:30 pm	Plan for collaborative ‘Power Message’ campaign (key steps, responsibilities, funding)	Brainstorming
2:30 – 3:00 pm	Wrap-up/Summary	Sam Rashkin

2 Summary

The Zero Energy Ready Home (ZERH) team convened its first Innovation Partner Roundtable at the International Builders Show in Orlando, Florida in January 2018. The purpose of that meeting was to identify priority actions for engaging consumers on the value of Zero Energy Ready Homes. The energy, enthusiasm, and feedback were outstanding with clear marching orders to develop a ‘Zero’ power message and a strategy for disseminating it.

To start that process, the roundtable participants suggested that DOE work with a group of marketing experts from Innovation Partners and other organizations to develop a Zero Energy Ready Home (ZERH) Consumer Engagement Plan. That meeting was held on June 6, 2018 in Washington, D.C. with a group of marketing and management experts from a diverse group of manufacturers and associations. The resulting guidance from this group exceeded our expectations and has been compiled into this report.

We started with a clean slate on the most compelling consumer messages for Zero Energy Ready Homes and let the group brainstorm on numerous concepts. When we moved to developing an implementation strategy, their expert backgrounds were evident as the group identified clear priority tasks that are mission critical. Finally, the discussion concluded by laying out critical steps and responsibilities for an effective national campaign. The group accomplished a great deal within the half-day meeting. ***Now it's time to vet the results with all ZERH Innovation Partners.***

One key recommendation from the group is to ensure the process does not stop with the development of this meeting summary. The marketing experts were in consensus that a ‘Marketing Committee’ needs to be created to help shape and launch the ZERH Consumer Engagement Plan. This committee will not only help develop the plan, but see that it is carried out by engaging stakeholders to work together in implementing the plan and disseminating the final ‘Zero’ message to consumers. At the end of the day, we are truly just educating consumers about how they can act in their own self-interest with Zero Energy Ready Homes that can cost much less to own while providing a whole new level of healthy living, comfort, durability, and enhanced future value. Sounds simple, but we know better.

3 Introduction- What's Your Company's Consumer Message

To begin the meeting, we wanted to get the attendees in a marketing/messaging frame of mind. We asked each participant to give the current consumer-facing marketing message or tagline for their company or organization. While a diverse range of building industry products and services were represented, they all had a common interest in promoting the high-performance concept to American homebuyers or homeowners.

There was a wide range of messages, but most focused on making an emotional connection typically by highlighting a positive impact, experience, or overall quality of life in the home and larger community. The specific messages/taglines provided by the meeting participants are provided below.

- It's time to save energy!
- Showcasing better homes for better living
- Building homes, enriching communities, changing lives
- Knowledge, leadership, confidence
- Helping builders get to Zero Energy Ready Homes
- Local relationships, national resources
- Comfort, health, and efficiency
- Rethink indoor air quality
- Make comfort personal
- Experience the space between on and off

4 What is the most effective Zero Energy Ready Home ‘Power Message’

The first module of the meeting focused on what would be the most effective ‘power message’ for Zero Energy Ready Home. For this exercise, the basic building blocks of a Zero Energy Ready Home were presented to establish a common understanding of the six complete systems included in each certified home. Then we asked participants to write short message ‘concepts’ they thought would be the most unique and impactful in conveying the value of those six systems. In other words, what would be their focus for a ZERH power message? The ZERH team ensured a clean slate by not sharing the program’s current core message.

While the specific terminology varied, the message concepts recommended from participants broadly fit into three main categories. The first category receiving the highest number of votes was a “**Total Package**” concept. This focused on going beyond energy efficiency, with ZERH also providing comfort, health, sustainability, and durability. And this in turn allows homeowners to have a better, healthier home experience. Two other categories received significant votes. One, “**Independence and Freedom**,” focused on how ZERH provides homeowners more peace of mind by enhancing control and reducing worry. And this in turn results in more freedom to do the things people want to pursue in life. The other category, “**Home of the Future**,” conveys a powerful opportunity to optimize what is often the largest purchase of a lifetime. This message concept has been used for several years in ZERH marketing and communications.

Participants then voted on which message concepts they thought were most effective. After voting, there was significant group discussion to refine these concepts and to develop specific wording and phrasing for each category. Table 1 on the next page highlights the suggested core message concepts along with the underlying messages which fit under the concept. Additional discussion resulted in draft power messages, shown below the table. As this report is vetted to all Innovation Partners, the ZERH team will be looking for feedback to iterate towards a singular ‘best’ power message.

Table 1: Zero Energy Ready Home Power Message Concepts	
Core Message	Message Concept
Total Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ZERH delivers more than low energy bills (2 votes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Comfort, health, durability • ZERO (use # 0) (5 votes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Energy Bills – Comfort problems – Water leaks – Health concerns • Everything you would want in your home • Live better • Live in a healthy, comfortable, efficient home • A superior homeowner experience (3 votes) • Comfort plus. Worry less. Net zero.
Independence and Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take control of your home (7 votes) • Worry less, play more (2 votes) • Flexibility to do more of what you want (3 votes) • More of what life should be • Better Homes for Better Living
Home of the Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live now in a home designed for the future (6 votes) • Living in the home of the future • A home that grows with you
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceeding the everyday expectations • Put your money where it matters. Build it right the first time • Sustainability (general) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Received 3 votes and clear indication that sustainability and leaving the world a better place is impactful for consumers

Top Power Messages:

“ZERO...energy bills, comfort problems, water leaks, and health concerns!”

- “The Power of Zero”
- “High-tech, Healthy Home.”
- “A home that works for you...No electric bills, better air quality, less environmental impact.”

“Take Control of your home.”

- “Take control of the future today.”
- “Your life made better.”
- “Better Living. Control your future.”
- “Flexibility to live your values.”
- “Choices matter....choose better living.”

“Live now in a home designed for the future.”

- “Visionary homes today.”
- “Home of the future...now!”

5 Best Strategies to Collaboratively Communicate Power Message to Consumers

After honing in on suggested categories and language for a power message, the next part of the meeting focused on how to effectively reach consumers. Participants were asked what they felt were the best communication strategies. These strategies were then categorized, followed by participant voting to identify those with the most impactful. Final discussions focused on how each of these strategies would work together.

It became clear that the first and most important step after deciding on messaging, would be to develop the content, tools, and resources that would be used by various outreach channels. This content must be developed and available to Innovation Partners before any outreach can be done. Specific content identified included branding toolkits that could be downloaded and edited (ads, brochure, signage, plaques, etc.) as well as feature articles, blogs, newsletters, and consumer-facing educational resources.

After the creation of branding tools and content, the group suggested various communication channels that would have the greatest impact for outreach and marketing. As might be expected, social media was at the top of almost everyone's list with various options for using it effectively. This included creating more shareable social content, campaigns and contests that would inspire partners and current ZERH homeowners to participate and spread the word about the program, and the use feather ads. Other outreach suggestions included having booths and representation at consumer facing events, educating real estate professionals, recruiting champion builders and/or a celebrity spokesperson, home improvement television shows, and getting signage/handouts into big box retailers.

Table 2 on the next page highlights the various categories and strategy recommendations for communicating the ZERH power message to consumers.

Table 2: Zero Energy Ready Home Communication Strategies	
Category	Strategies
Branding Tools to Share	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single message all companies can include on websites, social media, etc. • Public Service Announcement • Branding/logo that can be used universally • Downloadable. Editable toolkit • Branding toolkit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ads, Tri-folds, plaques, signage, logos, shareable content • Logo and label icon- sticker on electrical box in homes! • 30/60 second video with customized back end “brought to you by...” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 24/7 availability
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print feature articles • Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Blogs - SMEs - Newsletters - CEUs/ Courses on ZERH
Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness- social, shareable content • Hashtag campaign/ selfie competition • #ZERO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Zero = better choice - Zero = better home - Zero = better living • Website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TV, social media would feed to content on website • Feather ads • PESO- Paid, Earned, Social, Owned • Video testimonials from current homeowners
Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pop-up home shows • Greenbuild • Traveling demo • Booth to showcase current homes that would travel to conferences/meeting with local champions to speak
Champion/Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrity spokesperson • Partner with popular home shows • YouTube show • PBS/PBS Digital Show • Follow a builder/owner for a video series • Podcasts of family experiences
Real Estate Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign for realtor and builder education. • Get in MLS, Zillow, and RedFin
Retail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Booths/educational resources at big box retailers

6 Plan for Collaborative ‘Power Message’ Campaign

The last part of the meeting focused on activities to launch a campaign showcasing the Zero Energy Ready Home power message that will be developed. Those activities are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3: ZERH ‘Power Message’ Campaign Plan	
Activity	Responsibilities
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DOE ZERH team prepare project brief • DOE ZERH team prepare project strategy document
Marketing Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form sub-committee(s) • Meet at industry conferences on annual or semi-annual basis • Help define/decipher umbrella message • Identify and develop branding and content needs • Develop social media strategy • Identify important events to target
Marketing Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lock in timeline with action items • Communicate plan with all partners
Marketing Campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise funding • Develop high-resolution videos and content • Disseminate content to Innovation partners
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase value proposition for partners- How will this help me sell more product? • Form a partnership with DELOS/USGBC/NAHB, etc. for "crosswalk." If you do ‘X,’ it counts towards ‘Y’ • Hire a consumer PR firm funded jointly with stakeholders • Find experts about topics ZERH team is not as familiar with • Look into finding a champion/spokesperson

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