



Spotlight on: Electric Vehicle Infrastructure PR and Content Marketing



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Marketing an electric future How electric vehicle infrastructure providers can build a competitive advantage

If the UK is to meet its ambitious aim to be carbon zero by 2050, transport habits need to change. This is why the UK Government has announced a ban on fossil-fuelled cars from 2030 - far sooner than any European country, other than Norway.

Yet, while three in every 100 cars sold next year will be electric or a plug-in hybrid¹, barriers to wider adoption remain. Consumers are concerned about battery range and access to charging: nearly two out of three (62%) of Europeans cite the limited availability of charging points as a reason to not buy an electric car.²

In October 2020, the number of publicly accessible electric vehicle (EV) chargers in the UK passed 20,000, but there are still 46 local authority areas in the UK with fewer than 10 public charging points per 100,000 residents. In London, there are 63 public chargers per 100,000 people; in Northern Ireland, only 16.³

Importantly, even in London, six out of ten residents lack a drive or off street parking, so the UK will require some 1.7 million on-street EV charging points by the

end of the decade, with a further 1.1 million by 2035, according to the UK's motor trade body, the SMMT.⁴

Public car-charging infrastructure is a key part of the UK Government's recently announced Green Industrial Revolution, which includes £950 million to support the roll-out of rapid EV charging hubs at every service station on England's motorways and major A-roads, as well as £90 million to fund local EV charging infrastructure to support the roll out of larger on-street charging schemes.

The challenge for EV network and infrastructure providers now lies in differentiating their brands, scaling up their networks, and building a base of satisfied users.

In turn, this requires deft handling of a diverse range of decision makers, influencers and users, all of whom have to be targeted correctly. This spotlight considers how PRs and marketers can rise to this challenge.

Defining the audience

For most EV infrastructure providers, a convoluted route to market means they must work with a diverse group of different public bodies, commercial organisations, technology partners, associations and, of course, consumers.

Drivers lie at the end of this journey but, for most providers, the path to installing charging points in public spaces starts with close liaison with the decision makers and influencers that work within the national, regional and local government bodies that should be driving the roll-out of points. Even then, providers may have multiple points of contact within councils, such as those with transport, environmental, planning, parking and financial responsibilities.

Similarly, EV infrastructure providers working with commercial organisations must also target a wide range of roles, including CSR, Finance and Operations.

It's vital that marketers define and segment the various audiences with whom they must engage. Compelling messages that support the business case for charging points must be developed and refined as necessary to resonate with the often different and sometimes conflicting needs of those with regulatory, operational, environmental, commercial or end user requirements in mind.

Developing the channels

Targeting such diverse audiences with key messages requires EV infrastructure marketers to employ a range of communication channels, participate in different forums and be very active across a number of PR and marketing platforms.

The need to build and nurture relationships with national, regional and local government requires engagement with the associations, steering groups and development committees involved in EV charging station deployment. Developing opportunities with commercial organisations such as hotel chains, retailers and property developers, for example, requires EV

infrastructure marketers to engage with very senior management, so PR activity to address these hard-to-reach individuals is essential.

Of course, drivers of electric vehicles have the not unrealistic expectation of reliable and cost-effective charging. Charging points that are out of action or unavailable therefore provide a source of considerable frustration. These drivers will turn to social media to vent their anger, so it is vital that EV charging providers establish a strong and engaging presence on social media - where customer issues can be quickly identified and addressed.

Targeting the audience

The investment announced by Government provides a shot in the arm for the adoption of EV technology in the UK, and a boost for providers in a market where no firm has more than 13%.⁵ So too does increasing public and corporate concern for climate change; when the UK hosts the COP 26 climate meeting in 2021, it is anticipated that concern will be turned into action.

The time, therefore, is ripe for infrastructure providers to better leverage interest in EV technology. To take advantage of existing initiatives such as awards that recognise success in deploying EV charging stations at scale. To capture and demonstrate what each audience along the customer journey gains from wider access to EV charging: how it helps the Government meet the UK's climate commitments; how it helps commercial operators burnish their ESG credentials and attract customers; and how it shows that end users can live lower carbon lifestyles, without reducing their mobility.

These challenges require marketers to employ different types of PR and marketing tactics. Crucially, these must fit within a coherent and integrated campaign that supports EV charging providers' business objectives. Campaigns must be sufficiently high-level to target senior decision makers in Government and business. Yet they must also have the agility necessary to address consumers and their concerns.

¹ "Who will rule the Teslaverse?", *The Economist*, 17 Sept 2020

² The European Electric Car Market 2020, *YouGov*, 14 Sept 2020

³ "Regional disparities in charging points", *The Guardian*, 23 Nov 2020

⁴ "Billions invested in electric vehicle range", *SMMT*, 4 Sept 2020

⁵ *The Guardian*, 23 Nov 2020.

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