

Time to turn-off

With the recession biting you'd think everyone would be watching the pennies but surprisingly we are wasting a lot of money needlessly consuming energy.

According to Ofcom, British households are wasting the annual output of a large power station by failing to switch off their flatscreen televisions, set-top boxes, and wireless routers when they are not being used.

The equivalent output of the 1,500MW Didcot B power station in Oxfordshire could be saved each year if every home with a set-top box switched it off at night. That would conserve enough electricity to make 80 billion cups of tea.

Consumer electronics account for about a third of home energy use, according to the Energy Saving Trust, but that use is forecast to balloon to 45% by 2020 as more people buy more gadgets.

The rise in average residential energy bills to just over £1,000 a year has made people more energy aware, but only when it comes to buying obviously power-hungry devices such as fridges and freezers, according to Ofcom.

Almost three quarters of Britons, when quizzed by the regulator, classed themselves as caring about the environment, and more than half said they had compared the green credentials of white goods before making a purchase. But only 39% of people think about the environmental impact of a new TV, DVD player or computer.

When they get it home, most people leave their new kit switched on all the time, unnecessarily wasting electricity.

Three quarters of people rarely switch off their set-top box, according to Ofcom, and that figure jumps to 83% for owners of a wireless home network.



Plasma screens are particularly power hungry, according to the regulator, with the average set using three times the power of a normal TV when in use, and twice the power when left on standby.

The average satellite set-top box gobbles up four and a half times the power of a flatscreen LCD television in the same state. Even a Freeview box uses twice the power of a flatscreen TV when left on standby.

Almost half the country's mobile phone users, meanwhile, waste electricity by charging their handsets overnight, when in fact most models only need to be plugged in for about two hours. People aged between 16 to 24 are particularly guilty of this, with 80% doing it at least some of the time.

Not only is this a terrible waste of money, it's also an environmental scandal. In our experience there are few set top boxes with an off button. Manufacturers are now required by law to provide appliances with plugs already fitted, surely there's a case for a legal requirement to provide an off button.

Blind drunk to an opportunity

Wine is officially the UK's favourite tippie, according to new research from NOP looking at the drinking habits of almost 18,000 people in 17 countries.

When asked to name their favourite alcoholic drink, 38% of UK respondents opted for wine/ sparkling wine, while just 27% went for beer or lager. 14% chose spirits, ten% cocktails/'alcopops' and 5% chose liqueurs and fortified wines.

Across Western Europe, 43% of people identified wine as their favourite drink, with 34% favouring beer or lager. Globally, the Italians and Swiss are most partial to wine – with 62% of respondents in each country making it number one – while those in Turkey (65%), Poland (51%), the Czech Republic (51%), Spain (49%) and Germany (48%) tend to favour beer.

The research also revealed that one in three Europeans do not drink alcohol at all. Turkey tops the list, with 80% of respondents claiming to be teetotal – in line with being a majority Muslim population. Four in ten Americans do not touch alcohol, while half of those in Portugal and Italy say the same. The UK comes in at just over a quarter (26%) staying away from alcohol entirely – well ahead of Germany, where just 18% abstain, the Netherlands (15%) and Greece and Sweden (14%).

Whilst many of us lament the fact that we are no longer a nation of beer drinkers the research does raise two major questions. Firstly, why with so many people wanting to drink wine, have the major pub operators failed to respond with varied and interesting wine lists that go beyond Chardonnay and Merlot? Surely there's a great opportunity for the revival of the wine bar? Secondly Why have no brands come forward to fill a glaring gap in the market, namely providing a non-alcoholic drink that appeals to adults tastes rather than the sugary drinks offered in most pubs? Surely this is another great opportunity for an enterprising brand?



A diet of restraint pays dividends

The New Year sees many of us resolving to get fit and lose weight. The papers are full of new miracle diets and the TV ad breaks awash with campaigns for weight loss groups.

Against this background the Department of Health's Change4Life anti-obesity campaign has got into full swing with an impressive TV ad campaign.

This is all good news for those of us 'battling the bulge', however unlike many New Year dieters the Government is going to have to recognise that it's in for a long haul if it hopes to change the nation's eating habits.

According to a new American report one thing many of us are going to have to learn is self restraint. In this sense at least maybe the economic downturn will encourage us to cut down on excessive eating.

The study shows that practising restraint becomes more important with age.

Women who participated in the study had more than twice the risk of substantial weight gain if they did not become more restrained in their eating.

Surprisingly many experts disagree over the seemingly obvious notion of keeping weight off by trying to eat less – a debate that centres on whether the practice backfires, leading to bingeing and weight gain.

"Some suggest that restrained eating is not a good practice," said Brigham Young University professor Larry Tucker, the study's lead author.

The study followed 192 middle-aged women for three years and tracked information on lifestyle, health and eating habits. Their analysis revealed that women who did not become more restrained with eating were 138% more likely to put on 6.6 pounds or more.



Columbia University researcher Lance Davidson, who was not involved with the analysis, said the findings highlight an important principle of weight management.

"Because the body's energy requirements progressively decline with age, energy intake must mirror that decrease or weight gain occurs," said Davidson, a research fellow at Columbia's Obesity Research Center. "Dr. Tucker's observation that women who practice eating restraint avoid the significant weight gain commonly observed in middle age is an important health message."

Tucker says watching what you eat is not about physical appearance – it's a direct investment in your health.

"Weight gain and obesity bring a greater risk of diabetes and a number of other chronic diseases," Tucker said. "Eating properly is a skill that needs to be practised."

As with anti-smoking and drink driving it's going to take a long-term communications strategy to change our eating habits. This is a great opportunity for the food industry to take a lead in educating consumers and secure their long-term brand loyalty.

Grand Prix win for Pelican

We are delighted to say we have scooped a national award for our campaign to promote recycling – Recycle Now Week.

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations President's Grand Prix recognises the Week as the best 'Not for Profit' campaign undertaken by a UK agency in 2007 and 2008.

The campaign titled 'Green Goes Glam' featured TV personality and West End star Denise Van Outen. She was pictured (right) in a dress made from items typically found in a household recycling bin. The dress was specially created for the week by leading ethical fashion designer Gary Harvey.

The judges commented: "Pelican's Green Goes Glam campaign provided a carefully coordinated and fresh-faced approach to the national Recycle Now Week.

"In doing so it integrated a range of communications initiatives and support including celebrity and ambassador endorsement; sponsorship; great imagery and photo opportunities; high profile merchandising

and promotional material and carefully focused and high impact media relations."

CIPR President Kevin Taylor said: "Winning a Grand Prix Award is a fantastic achievement. At times of economic and business uncertainty, winning an award helps you to stand out from the crowd and gives a great boost to your staff, your market recognition and your over-all business confidence. The winners have all demonstrated their work is among the best in the country, but also the value that PR can deliver to a business. They should be proud of their achievements."



Seen and Heard

"Be fearful when others are greedy; be greedy when others are fearful."

Warren Buffett reminding us of his guiding principle when investing in Goldman Sachs

"If I was down to my last dollar, I'd spend it on public relations."

Bill Gates of Microsoft fame.

"It can be summed up in one word: it's an awful mess."

The BBC's inimitable Robert Peston, never one to use one word when four will do. Let's hope the bankers and Treasury officials can count better than he can.



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