

The power to recognize advertising is not enough

Long-time readers of this blog know that I have written before about Pepco, the Potomac Electric Power Company, which serves nearly 800,000 customers in Maryland and Washington, D.C. My posts have focused on the fact that Pepco's advertising does not match people's experiences with the power company.

Last night, viewers of Super Bowl 47 were surprised to see the lights go out during the game in the Superdome in New Orleans, where the game was being played. In fact, the power was out for about 35 minutes. Entergy, the electricity provider in New Orleans said that the issue was not with them but with the stadium. As of right now, I am not sure what caused the power failure but I do know what people in Maryland and DC thought about it by their postings on Twitter: Pepco must surely be involved.

Pepco's reliability has become a joke. It has a negative perception so deeply ingrained in customers' minds that comments like: "Who knew **Pepco** was the official energy provider for the Super Bowl" by @djrothkopf or "Talked to **Pepco** and they're confident power will be restored to all parts of the stadium by Wednesday" by @timothypmurphy were rampant (and often retweeted) on Twitter on Sunday night.

No amount of advertising will fix a real, on-the-ground problem. Other organizations, such as the Washington Metropolitan Transportation Authority (WMATA), need to learn this lesson too. When you have let your customers down repeatedly, they will no longer trust you. Your advertising and your public relations will not rehabilitate your image.

In order to change people's perceptions of your brand, you need to move beyond just communications. You need to make

positive changes and be able to provide proof that you have done so. Once you have made measurable progress and you have something tangible to report, you can move forward with a communications program. Even then, bad experiences are difficult to overcome.

It will take actual reliability and good experiences with Pepco for customers to learn to trust this company. As I have said before, you can tell me in your advertising that you are working on your reliability, but if I am sitting in the dark for days on end (like I was during last summer's Derecho storm), I am going to doubt you are doing very much at all.

What are your thoughts? If you are in Maryland or DC did you also joke that Pepco was behind the power outage at the Super Bowl?