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Abstract Title: An Unlikely Match: What Behavior Programs Can Learn from Online Dating

Abstract Text:

A podcast from Radiolab entitled “The Trust Engineers” recently called to attention Facebook’s massive social experiments and how they have disrupted the study of human behavior. The social network industry boasts strong user engagement and robust data on human behavior. With more and more behavior programs integrating web experience and smart technologies to nudge behavior change among residential utility customers, tapping into the social network industry and its research has the potential to improve and broaden behavior programs. One surprising area of potential is online dating, a social network analogous to behavior programs. Online dating sites and behavior program administrators run social experiments—providing personalized analytics, tweaking content and messaging, etc.—all to motivate users toward particular behaviors. Our presentation will highlight online dating research and debut new and applicable behavior program solutions to concerns about low online user engagement with the program-affiliated web portal and more effective ways to incorporate cross-program marketing. Online dating sites continually make improvements to user engagement and access to promotions. We will describe their strategies and present ways to encourage more user visits and establish broader web portal usage. We will also discuss solutions for cross-program marketing that aim for deeper savings within the behavior program and across the portfolio of energy efficiency programs. Although the end goals in behavior programs and online dating are different, the parallels open up the possibilities to learn and borrow from unlikely areas of research to improve behavior programs.