



Detroit Edison CEO Steve Kurmas, left, answers a question following his talk at the University of Detroit Mercy about where the utility is headed going into 2012.

Detroit Edison Is Busy On a Variety of Fronts

by Gerald Scott
News Dept.

Serving as an electric utility involves much more than just turning on the juice for customers and calling it a day.

Rather, Detroit Edison and DTE Energy are the entities that every business in southeast Michigan draws on for their success – no electricity, no cars come off the assembly, no software programs from Compuware, like that.

Steve Kurmas, president and COO of Detroit Edison and Group President, DTE Energy, gave a talk about the electric utility's broader role at the University of Detroit Mercy recently.

Detroit Edison does more than just provide basic electric service. It's involved in a wide range of renewable energy development projects, it helps the Big Three automakers to bring their electric vehicles onto the grid and much, much more.

"We also contribute significant amounts of money to fund the state's low-income, energy efficiency fund, provide targeted energy optimization opportunities for our low-income customers," he said.

"We also provide customized energy solutions – more broadly and deeply than any other utility in the nation.

"We provide case management for our low-income customers, we provide one-on-one case managers, just like the Dept. of Human Services does, to connect them with assistance to pay their bills."

If you've heard about the city of Detroit and its 50,000 or more vacant houses and businesses. Well, for most of them, Edison had to absorb an unpaid final electric bill – if somebody abandons their house, paying off the electric bill isn't high on their list of priorities.

Just getting customers to pay their regular bills for services rendered and electricity consumed takes up plenty of time, effort and resources on the utility's behalf, he said.

"We have a number of programs to gather donations for energy assistance – one called Cents for Energy, in

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Volt Draws 70 Percent Conquest Buyers

by Gerald Scott
News Dept.

Cristi Landy, product marketing manager for the Chevrolet Volt, was a keynote speaker at Oakland University's big auto conference last week and she offered some interesting insights on selling new technology like the Volt to the public.

Landy's theme was specifically about how to sell these new cars, with exotic powertrains like the plug-in, extended range Volt, beyond just that first wave of "early adopters."

"Volt's early customers, who are they? What Volt is doing right now, is we're really attracting buyers from the luxury segment," Landy said.

"We're also attracting a new customer to Chevrolet, we're seeing a lot of people coming through the showroom doors who've never bought a Chevrolet before, who've never bought a GM product before.

"About 70 percent are 'conquest buyers,' who don't necessarily meet the demographic of a typical Chevrolet buyer.

"The makes they are replacing are Toyota, Honda, Mercedes-Benz, Ford, Cadillac, Volkswagen and BMW, so quite an eclectic group of people coming together (to buy the Volt instead)."

Oakland University hosted the auto conference together with the University of Michigan's Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI), around the event theme of "Marketing New Powertrain Technologies: Strategies in Transition."

Speakers from GM, Ford, Polk, Ricardo and other auto suppliers discussed the challenges the auto industry faces in meeting the 2016 - 2025 EPA target of 54.5 mpg for the car and light truck fleet over the next 12-13 years.

This conference focused more on marketing, on how automakers can convince the public to embrace new technologies such as Chevy's Volt.

"When you drill down to why do you want a car like this? Why do you want a car that ran on electricity? The

buyers of the Volt today are not just trying to save \$50 a month on gas, they are passionate about reducing dependence on foreign oil and that's what motivates a lot of them," Landy said.

Indeed, some visible Volt owners, such as TV's Jay Leno, has put 10,000 miles on his Volt during his first year of ownership and virtually all of those are "EV miles."

That is to say, Leno uses his Volt as a local runabout, charges it up at both work and home, and reportedly still has his original tank of gas available from when he first bought the car a year ago.

Overall, Chevy has sold about 10,000 Volts in the first 14 months that it has been available to the public and those buyers have now put about 13 million "EV miles" on that growing fleet of Volts.

"Our early buyers are all about the technology, much more than 'green,'" she said.

"While they like that it's an environmentally friendly (car), they like that it's new technology. These early tech adopters driving this vehicle that has the latest technology, it's part of their persona and how they want to express themselves.

"Remember, we're talking about a car and not a \$500 phone. These buyers are making a significant purchase,

they are going to live with it for two-to-five to 10 years.

"Part of their personality is they love new technology and they are a person of tech expertise within their peer circle."

Currently, Volt sales skew to 85 percent male, which Landy says isn't unusual because it includes so much of the early adopters and technical "geeks" who tend to be male. She reports that female customers and male-female couples who have bought Volts are all very satisfied with the purchase and with the product overall.

"Our average age is around 55 or so, we've got a broad span of age groups buying the Volt and a lot of them are working full-time, so it's not a bunch of older retirees who are tinkerers – we have 25-year-olds and younger buying the Volt, as well as older people," she said. "The Volt buyers today are going to serve as 'influencers' for the future."

"As we move from early adopters to fast followers, to general market, they're going to rely on the experiences and recommendations of the previous buyers.

"We believe our early buyers will serve as advocates and influencers (of later consumers shopping the Volt or other hybrids or EVs).

"Consumer Reports just



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

Cristi Landy, product marketing manager for the Chevrolet Volt, said that 70 percent of all Volt buyers are "conquest sales" – consumers who turn in competing brand cars on their trade-in for a Volt purchase.

named Volt No. 1 in its consumer satisfaction survey of all makes and models. . . .Porsche 911, you name it, Volt came out No. 1."

Landy says it remains her team's job to continue to educate the public about how these high tech vehicles work. Some in the public still think that a Volt can drive only 40 miles and stops dead and aren't aware that the gas-engine-driven, range extension actually gives the Volt the same relative range as mainstream vehicles.

But so far, so good, she says.

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