

VIEWPOINT

The Business Journal welcomes letters to the editor

Send letters to the Puget Sound Business Journal
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EDITORIAL

REI BANKS ON 'BLACK SATURDAY' INSTEAD



You can't fault outdoor retailer REI for shutting down on Black Friday. Let's, however, dish out praise for the right reasons.

Kent-based REI garnered national attention this week when it announced that it would close its 143 stores, its e-commerce site and give all 12,000 employees the day off with pay while encouraging them and customers to spend the day in the outdoors.

It's a bold move. Let's remember, though, that this is more a savvy, forward-thinking PR play rooted in reality than any kind of social statement. REI won't lose a penny – the company has effectively turned Black Friday into "Black Saturday" for itself – and will gain an incredible amount of goodwill from both company loyalists and non-customers.

Traditionally the busiest shopping day of the year, Black Friday – the day after Thanksgiving – generated almost \$51 billion in sales last year. Yet even that was off 12 percent from the year before, leading Business Insider to say that "Black Friday sales actually reveal next to nothing" about holiday shopping trends.

By tapping into growing resentment over the crass materialism that's come to define the day, REI executives are capturing the adoring attention of consumers across the country. The company's #OptOutside social media campaign received 18,000 favorites and had 15,000 retweets in the first 48 hours alone.

As one woman said on REI's Twitter feed: This "is some of the most brilliant marketing I've seen." And the fact that REI is receiving nationwide kudos for its bold leadership makes the company seem even more fascinating and cool.

This is PR at its best.

MY OPINION



THINKSTOCK

Update law to ensure solar power future

Demand for solar from homeowners and businesses in Washington state has skyrocketed over the last decade.

Thanks to lower material costs, increased competition among installers and manufacturers, and state and federal incentives, the solar industry has burgeoned. This has resulted in more solar jobs, more business startups, and more energy choices for consumers.

Now momentum for a renewable energy choice for consumers could be slowed, even stopped. State production incentives that bring the only cost of solar within reach for more people are slated to end in 2020. In reality, the current program is already reaching the end of its effective life.

Utility companies, governments and the solar industry have been working together to support a diversified portfolio of energy sources for future generations. But retirement of the current incentive program doesn't support the growing demand of consumers for a solar alternative or the long-term stability of the solar sector. We're facing a solar cliff. It is imperative that a new incentive program be adopted during the short legislative



Lori Christian is president of Solar Installers of Washington.

session in 2016.

Renewable energy is an economic issue as much as an environmental one. We can invest now or later, but the need for a diversified portfolio of energy sources for the future is inevitable. State incentive dollars, coupled with a federal tax credit, make solar cost competitive in the energy market.

Unlike other energy subsidies that go to corporations, Washington's solar production incentives return to the home and business owners who have purchased solar systems. Additionally, the Washington solar industry puts significant money into local economies throughout the state by creating family-wage jobs and purchasing from local suppliers.

Solar Installers of Washington, a

trade association, is spearheading legislation to ensure solar's continued availability. Local utilities, manufacturers and environmental advocacy organizations are working together in this effort. The primary goal is to rebalance the incentive system to increase funding for solar projects by reducing the overall incentive rate paid to each new solar customer. Of equal importance will be to increase access for commercial customers, expand popular community solar opportunities, increase program transparency, and streamline program administration.

Given recent improvements in solar costs and efficiencies, it is time to reassess the outdated incentive structure currently in place. Updating the solar incentive program will maximize the amount of solar deployment per state dollar, ensure availability of this popular renewable energy source and support a robust competitive marketplace for the industry that will benefit consumers. Washington state innovators have been breaking ground as industry leaders in everything from aerospace to software to biotech and we have the opportunity to continue this pioneering spirit in the solar industry as well.

▶ WHAT DO YOU THINK

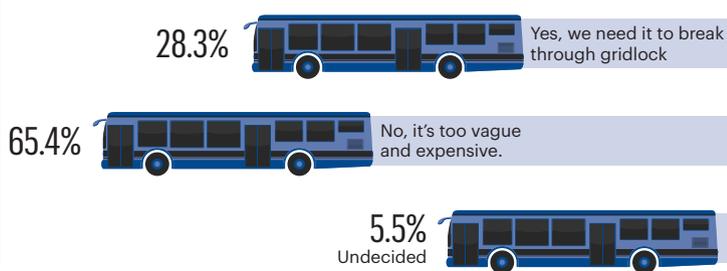
We want to hear your opinion on the issues you read about in the Business Journal. Submit letters to the editor to rsmith@bizjournals.com or call Editor Rob Smith at 206-876-5431 with questions.

A few guidelines: Keep it brief and civil and remember to mention which news story you're writing about. No anonymous letters will be printed. All submissions become the property of the Puget Sound Business Journal and will not be returned. Submissions may be edited and may be published or otherwise used in any medium.

BUSINESS PULSE SURVEY

WE ASKED:

HOW WILL YOU VOTE ON THE MOVE SEATTLE TRANSPORTATION LEVY?



TOTAL VOTES: 890

*0.8% answered "other."

THIS WEEK'S QUESTION:

WILL REI'S SALES SUFFER FROM CLOSING ON BLACK FRIDAY?

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