

How to  
**talk so  
farmers  
and landowners  
listen**

A guide to renewable  
energy communications



## Praise for 'How to talk so farmers and landowners listen'

“Forum for the Future shares CCgroup’s belief that renewable energy offers a fantastic opportunity for farmers and landowners - and its concern that this potential is not yet being fully realised. This is why we’ve launched “The Farm as Power Station” with Farmers Weekly and Nottingham Trent University. CCgroup’s research into the communication gap between energy companies and farmers is a hugely valuable contribution to tackling one of the critical barriers to increased uptake of renewables, and should be essential reading for technology providers.”

Iain Watt,

*Principal Sustainability Advisor at Forum for the Future*

“Business as usual for farmers simply doesn’t exist anymore. In the face of climate change and growing world population, our farming system is changing fast. To make these sustainable changes, farmers and landowners need to be given the right information. At the Soil Association we pride ourselves on providing sound advice and technical support to farms and businesses, something we see as crucial to instigating and sustaining change. Likewise, communicating the importance of renewable energy, and the opportunities it offers, is of utmost importance to the future of our countryside and those who nurture it.”

Sam Adams,

*Low Carbon Farming Project Manager at Soil Association*

# Bridging the renewables communication gap

Renewable energy offers a fantastic opportunity for country businesses to enter a new era. It's allowing farmers and landowners across the country to diversify income, cut costs, increase profits and do the right thing for the environment. A staggering 95 per cent of farmers and landowners believe renewable energy will be vital to the future of farming in the UK<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, it's proving to make real financial sense. Farmers who invest in renewables earn between £12,000 and £50,000 more than those who don't each year<sup>2</sup>. But, despite the potential, there's something crucial holding this new agricultural revolution back.

In January 2013, research revealed that 42 per cent of farmers and landowners were confused about their renewable energy options<sup>1</sup>. Fundamentally, it turns out that the information businesses are providing

farmers and landowners is actually making it difficult, rather than simple, for them to understand this new opportunity. This communications gap is standing in the way of country businesses capitalising on the benefits renewable energy offers.

As such, CCgroup has undertaken a study to help the renewable energy industry understand how effective its communication efforts are, what farmers and landowners really want to know and how to talk so they listen.

Ultimately, this report aims to tackle the current communications gap and establish how renewable energy organisations should talk to their audience. Addressing this gap will help the renewables industry thrive, grow sales and enable the countryside to enter the clean energy era Britain needs.

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## Survey sample

In April 2013, CCgroup launched a survey called 'Renewable Energy: What do you need to know?'

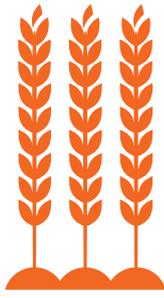
130 British farmers and landowners told us what information they needed to make it simpler to invest in renewables. In short, we were looking at what communications works and what doesn't across: messaging (what to say), content (how to say it) and delivery (where to say it).

Each respondent fell into one of three distinct groups:

- 1. Converts (47 per cent):** Those that have already invested in renewables, understand the benefits and are likely to invest again
- 2. Believers (39 per cent):** Those that are currently considering investing but haven't decided whether or not they definitely will
- 3. Latecomers (14 per cent):** Those that haven't considered investing at all

All participants took part out of their own interest and were recruited randomly from farming and landowner industry groups, forums and news websites.

# 47%



## Converts

Have already invested in renewables, understand the benefits and may invest again

# 39%



## Believers

Are currently considering investing but haven't decided whether or not they definitely will

# 14%



## Latecomers

Have not considered investing in renewables so far

Despite the sample being randomly generated, the respondent pool was dominated by Converts. This is most likely due to their existing interest in renewables, increasing the likelihood that they would participate in the survey. However, a significant number of Converts had more than one renewables investment, indicating a critical repeat purchase audience.

## What farmers & landowners want to hear

Unsurprisingly, Converts are primarily driven to invest for financial and environmental reasons. The majority of this group moved to renewables within the last two years following the introduction of the feed-in tariff (Table 1).

Those considering investment, the hot prospects for renewable energy companies, are also doing so for financial reasons. Environmental drivers are less of a consideration for this group. However, Believers explicitly stated the need for more information on the benefits of different technologies and negotiating the planning process, seeking assurance from trustworthy providers (Table 2).

Latecomers struggled to justify the financial return on investment. They also doubted the efficiency of renewable

technologies, questioning their ability to deliver. Common 'myths' also had a stronger impact on this group with many seeing renewables as 'too expensive' and 'not supported by the local community' (Table 3).

## Information sources farmers and landowners value most

When making their decision to invest in renewables, Converts most valued personal conversations with experts, statistical information, income calculators and testimonials (Table 4).

The rational business argument led by personal conversations is also valued highly by Believers. However, the need for statistics and income calculators were highlighted as the areas of most importance. Case studies, customer testimonials, 'how to' advice articles and images of existing projects were also deemed significant (Table 5).

For Latecomers personal conversations were unsurprisingly valued highest alongside income calculators. This was followed by case studies, customer testimonials and statistical evidence of renewable energy benefits and performance (Table 6).

## How farmers and landowners identify suppliers

When it came to selecting a renewables supplier, personal contact with an industry expert and services from membership groups, such as the NFU, CLA or other industry bodies, were critical for Converts. Advice from consultants, company websites and personal web research were also used as valuable tools for informing decisions (Table 7).

Believers will decide on renewables suppliers based on word of mouth, with member groups being the most respected source closely followed by consultants. However, industry news, company websites and web research were also flagged as key information points (Table 8).

Industry news was the most important source of information for Latecomers. Once again, word of mouth, member groups and advice from consultants were also valued highly (Table 9).

## Recommendations:

Overall, the research revealed a growing need for better, more targeted communications across all three audiences.

In particular, the groups want to see evidence of the financial viability of renewables, advice on how to capitalise on this opportunity and examples of the investment in practice. But they obtain their information and make decisions in subtly different ways.

The following recommendations outline how this communications 'gap' can be addressed for each of the three audiences, breaking communications down into messaging (what to say), content (how to say it) and delivery (where to say it).





# Preaching to the Converted

Converts are leading the way. They understand the business benefits of renewables and have already taken action to reap the rewards. So why is it important to talk to them so they listen? Because, if communicated with correctly, many of them will invest again. Here are some helpful hints on how to make this happen.

## Messaging:



### Be rational and Emotional

*The strongest factors convincing Converts to invest in renewables were the financial benefits, and the opportunity to do something positive for the environment. This is what has driven them to invest previously, and will drive them to invest again. So, appeal to both their rational and emotional sides. Demonstrate how they*

*can continue to lead the way, doing even more with renewables to benefit their business, environment and community alike.*

### Be challenging

*This group has already invested in renewables, but they are still the most likely to invest again and need to be nurtured to do so. Use challenging messaging to encourage them to continue to aim high by increasing investment and going further into low carbon generation. Deliver new ways of thinking about how different types of renewables can work alongside each other prompting considered action and re-investment.*

## Content:



### Define yourself as an expert

*What Converts value most is contact with experts. Set yourself apart from the crowd by providing, new, compelling*

*and insightful guidance. This should be fresh and impactful, positioning your company as an expert that can consult and support farmers through their decision making process.*

### Be clear and simple

*The next most important form of content is financial information. Use revenue statistics, income calculators and case studies to demonstrate the financial case for renewables. But keep it straightforward by ensuring they are clear, simple to understand and easy to access.*

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## Delivery:



## Partner up

*Direct conversations are how the majority of Converts get their information. But they are very specific about who they listen to, turning to trusted sources such as industry member groups for guidance. Break into these conversations by building relationships with these member groups and working together to deliver the advice they're seeking. This will help you amplify your voice and gain greater credibility with Converts.*

## Be targeted

*Consultants and other experts are the next place this group turns to when seeking advice. Directly and indirectly influence the conversations they're having with these groups by targeting farming and landowner, consultancy and green business press with news, market insight and success stories.*

## Be sustained

*As well as using third party advice, Converts are doing a lot of their own research online and visiting company websites. This means web presence and effective search engine marketing are crucial. Boost your online presence by using press releases, case studies, client testimonials and interviews to generate an on-going flow of content across paid, earned or owned media channels.*



# Turning Believers into buyers



These are the farmers and landowners who most likely fill your target customer lists already, or at least should. They're considering investing in renewables, but still need some convincing. Their understanding of renewables is not as strong as Converts, so they need more guidance and support. They outlined a much greater need for both evidence that the technology is financially viable and advice on reliable suppliers to work with. This is how you can ensure your communications activity encourages Believers from being 'interested' to 'invested'.

## Messaging:



### Be challenging

Most importantly Believers are almost ready to invest. But unlike Converts, they have not yet completely bought into the benefits of renewables. To change this, critique the status quo by injecting new, challenging ways of thinking about the role of renewables in farming. This approach will help break the current cycle of thinking for this group and prompt the next step forward.

### Be rational

*The rational, financial case for renewables is what most inspires Believers to consider investing. Drive home the short and long term business benefits. If they can smell the pounds, their appetite will grow even stronger.*

### Educate

*Believers explicitly stated a need for help in understanding the technology, benefits and process of investing. Demystify this by providing new, interesting and relevant communications that deliver insight into the technologies, financial returns and wider business benefits.*

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## Content:



### Reinforce with proof

*More than anything else Believers want evidence of the financial viability of renewables. Before investing they'll want a robust demonstration that what you're offering will definitely deliver. Make it easy for them to identify, learn about and understand the financial benefits by providing straight forward, yet robust, statistics and income calculators.*

## Show your expertise

*As with Converts, Believers value conversations and advice from experts. They want to speak with and get guidance from these contacts before investing. Provide regular, insightful content, such as industry research, case studies and 'how to' articles, that position your company as an expert and help demystify the process of investing.*

## Appear Regularly

*It's important for this group to know that your company is consistently delivering on quality and performance. Use regular news announcements, case studies, customer testimonials and third party endorsements to demonstrate credibility and boost visibility.*

## Be visual

*Don't limit content to written words on a page. Believers also value visual evidence so incorporate images, videos and infographics into your content. This will invigorate your content as well as reinforce facts and figures with visual evidence of projects.*

## **Delivery:**



## Be sustained

*This group gathers its information on renewables from multiple sources. Therefore, a regular and sustained flow of content across a variety of channels is important to building your reputation and standing out. One off splashes of news or advertising just won't do, so ensure a consistent presence across print publications, websites, blogs and social media.*

## Be targeted

*Believers garner much of their knowledge through word of mouth. This, again, means you must target the industry press with regular news, case studies and insight. This gets your success story to the consultants and peers that this group is turning to for information and advice.*

## Partner up

*Farming industry bodies are one of the main sources of advice for Believers. So, see how you can work together to provide advice and evidence. Working with these organisations offers a direct line to this audience and will help position you as a trustworthy partner.*



# Luring the Latecomers



This group needs the most work. They're not currently interested in investing in renewables and getting them to consider it requires changing their mind. But despite the effort required, the potential market should not be discounted. Challenging, evidence-based communications must be used to dispel common myths and reinforce the financial opportunity available. This may take more time, but below are some recommendations on how this can be achieved.

## Messaging:



### Be challenging and inspiring

*Unlike the Converts and the Believers, this group needs a lot of convincing. They aren't as aware of the benefits renewable energy offers and struggle to see a role for it in their business. To overcome this, companies must ruffle feathers. Challenge the viability and stability of farming businesses not investing in renewables and define the bright future that renewables investment can deliver.*

### Be rational and emotional

*What this group struggles with most*

*is justifying the financial return on investment provided by renewables. But they are also more influenced by commonly touted 'myths'. To overcome these concerns companies must continually highlight the financial returns available, reality of the technology as well as overwhelming public support.*

### Broad re-education

*Latecomers were the only group that consistently questioned the effectiveness, efficiency and cost of renewables. All renewables companies need to dispel these concerns by ensuring they educate on how the technology works as well as the business and social benefits it provides. This group should be a primary target for industry-level communications efforts directed by member groups and trade associations.*

## Content:



### Be clear and simple

*The biggest concern for Latecomers is the financial viability of renewables. To overcome this, they need information demonstrating the returns made from investing. Use income calculators and straight-forward revenue statistics to demonstrate the financial opportunities.*

## Define yourself as an expert

*As with the other groups, Latecomers value the information they get from experts. This is what will push them to change their mind and invest in renewables. Therefore, it is once again essential to position your company as an expert by providing statistics, case studies and 'how to' articles that deliver insight and guidance on the role of renewables in farming.*

## Reinforce with proof

*Finally, this group wants reassurance that renewables have already delivered impressive results for others. In-depth case studies and customer testimonials should be used to demonstrate the success of previous projects in similar areas.*

## **Delivery:**



## Be sustained

*The most important source of information for Latecomers is industry news. This is how they find out about new ideas, products and approaches for their business. This makes it essential to maintain a regular flow of farming specific news, research and insight to boost your profile and communicate your success.*

## Be targeted

*Similar to Converts, Latecomers get much of their information through word of mouth. Targeting farming, landowner and green business press will ensure you communicate with the consultants, industry bodies and peers that this group listens to.*

## Partner up

*Latecomers turn to trusted sources such as member groups and consultants for business advice. They are sceptical of renewables and will take more convincing than Converts and Believers. Join forces with member groups and consultants to capitalise on their existing credibility and deliver content that demonstrates your expertise.*

## Integrate channels

*This group also gathers information from a wider range of sources including speaker presentations, exhibitions, websites and discussion forums. This means it's important to integrate earned, paid for and owned communication channels to ensure your company has a strong and identifiable presence online and offline.*



# Conclusion

Renewable energy companies must better understand and meet the communications needs of farmers and landowners.

Today, farmers and landowners are not receiving the renewable energy information they need in the way they need it. Despite a high level of interest, many are confused about the renewable energy options available and the potential benefits for their businesses. It is this communications gap that is holding them back from investing and capitalising on the opportunity to revolutionise their businesses.

Our study has revealed that the information needs of different types of farmers and landowners vary significantly. To encourage and secure future investment, communications must strike a fine balance

between the correct messages, content and delivery. This study arms marketers and communicators with the insight they need to design sales and marketing campaigns that get this balance right. Following these steps will ensure campaigns bridge the communications gap and capitalise on the sales opportunities across each of these three groups.

Only by overcoming the current confusion around renewables will greater investment from farmers and landowners be secured. But it's now down to renewable energy businesses to release the true potential of the countryside by starting to talk so that farmers and landowners listen.



Want a simple at-a-glance guide to communicating to farmers and landowners? Download our 'How to talk so farmers and landowners listen' infographic.



# Survey Data

Below is a selection of the findings from the CCgroup survey 'Renewable energy: What do you need to know?'. These findings provide a breakdown of the responses given by each group when questioned on messaging, content and delivery.

## What farmers and landowners want to hear (messaging)

Table 1 - Converts

What was it that made you decide to install renewable energy?

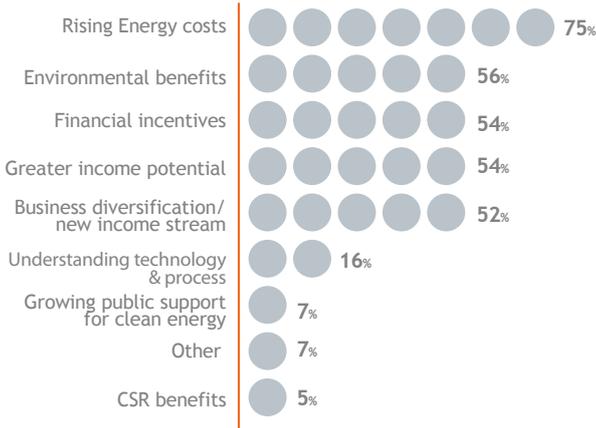


Table 2 - Believers

What will help your business decide to install renewable energy?

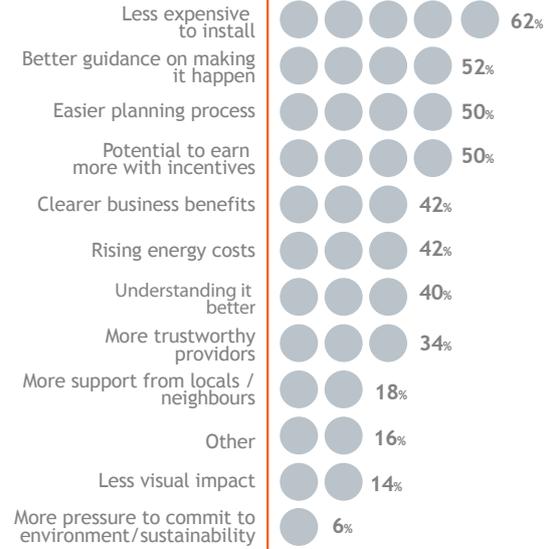
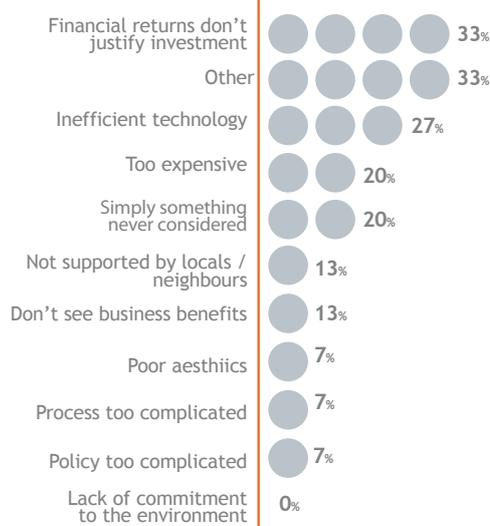


Table 3 - Latecomers

What stops your business from considering installing renewable energy?



## Information sources farmers and landowners value most (content)

Table 4 - Converts

What did you find most useful & informative when making your decision to invest in renewable energy?



Table 5 - Believers

What would you find most useful to help inform your decision on whether to install renewable energy?

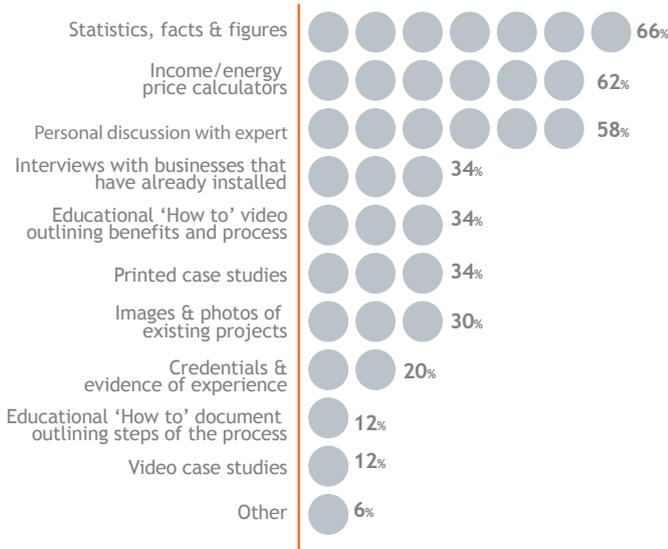
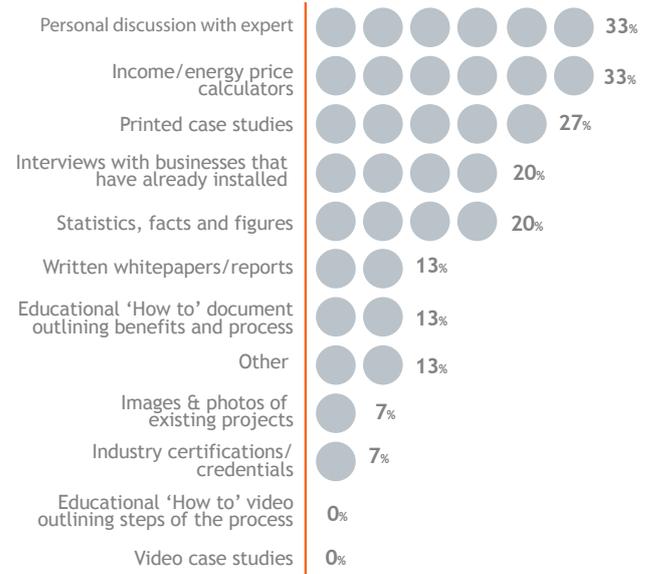


Table 6 - Latecomers

What would be your most preferred way to learn more about renewable energy, products and services?



How farmers and landowners identify suppliers (delivery)

Table 7 - Converts

Once you had decided to install renewable energy, how did you identify the businesses that you wanted to work with?

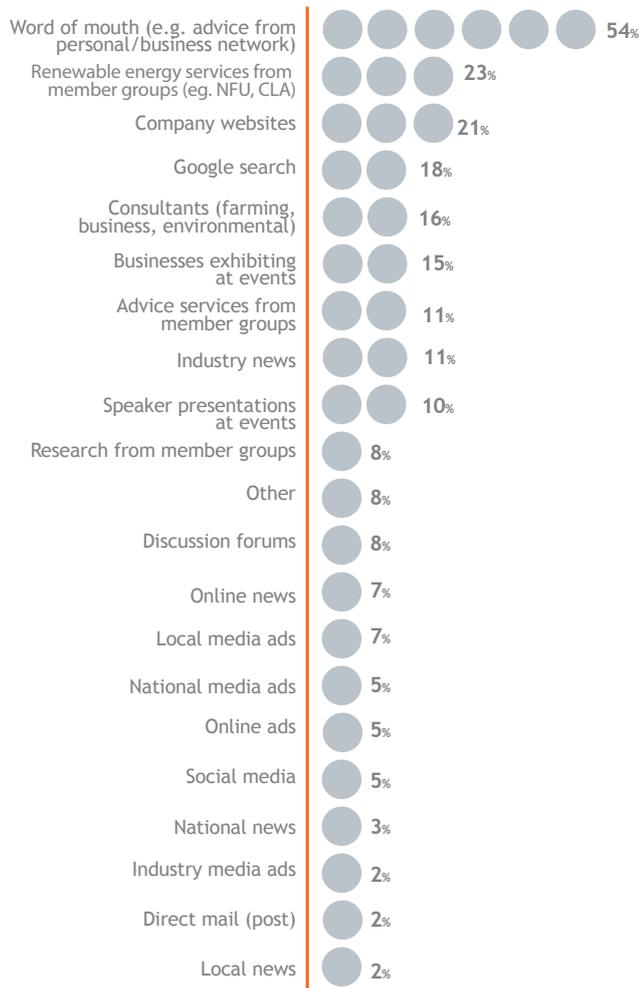


Table 8 - Believers

If you choose to install renewable energy of some kind, how will you identify the best businesses to work with?

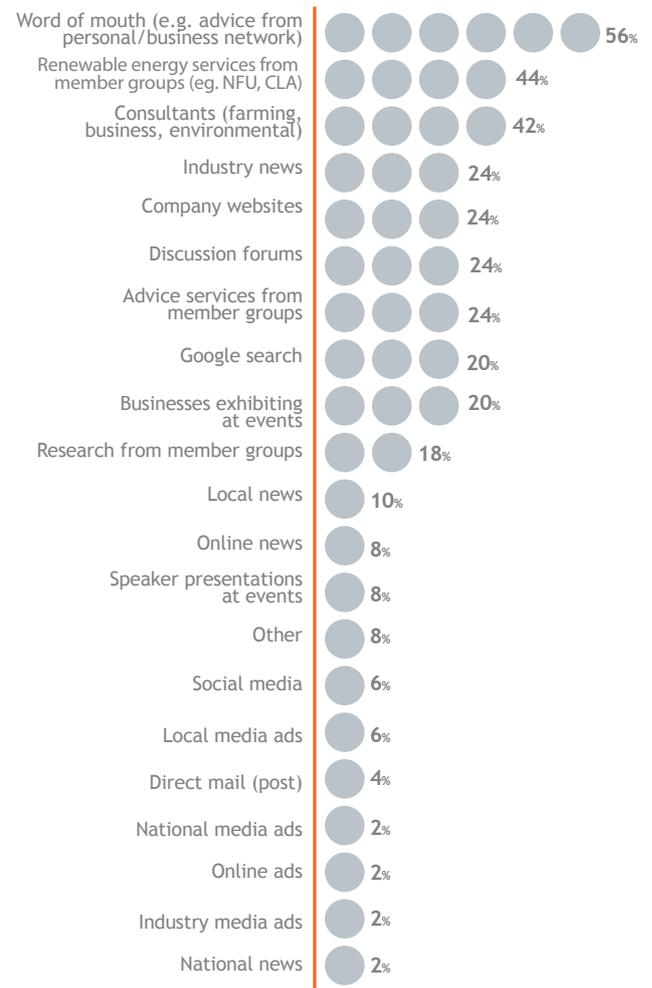
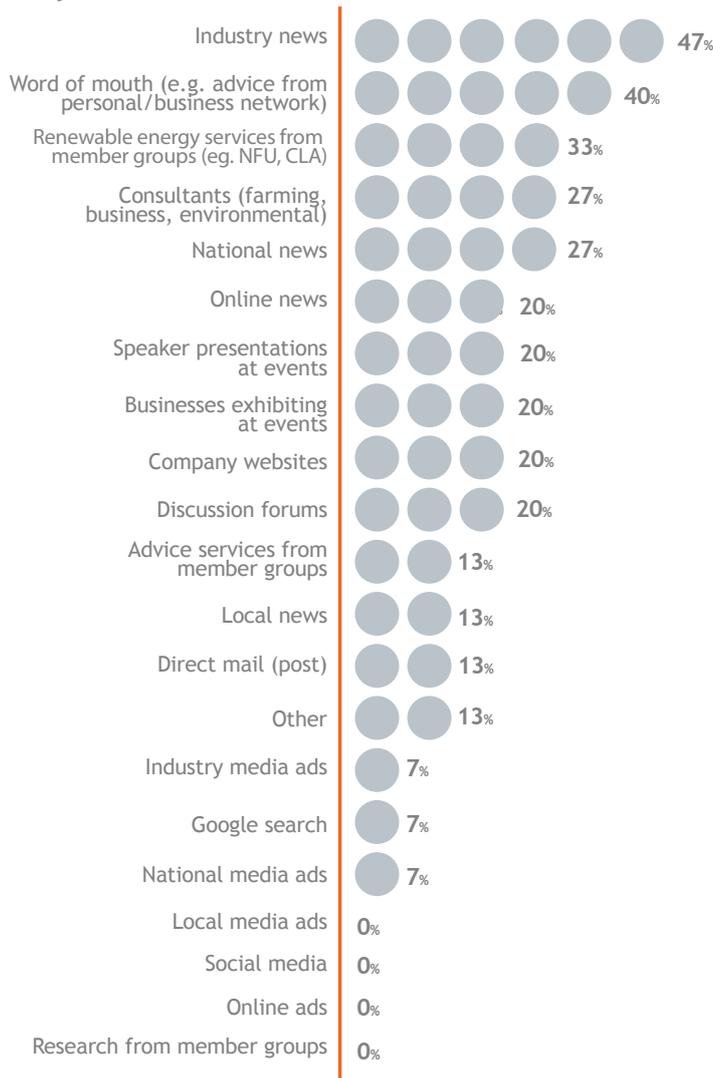


Table 9 - Latecomers

How do you get information about new ideas, approaches, products and services for your business?



## References

### 1. Title: Research highlights industry worries

Source: Energy Now via Farmers Guardian

Date: 28 January 2013

### 2. Title: Renewable energy offers financial lifeline for struggling farmers

Source: NatWest, RBS and RenewableUK via RenewableUK.com

Date: 26 February 2013

## About CCgroup

CCgroup is a PR consultancy specialising in the clean technology, mobile and financial services technology markets. The company uses messaging, insightful content and media and digital channels to drive awareness, generate sales leads, build value and, if required, position for exit.

CCgroup's clean technology division works with a range of renewable energy and sustainability organisations both in the UK and internationally. Launched in 2012, the division has been shortlisted for the BusinessGreen PR agency of the year award, 2degrees Sustainability Champions award and was the winner of a certificate of excellence for thought leadership PR in the 2013 SABRE awards.

CCgroup was founded in the late 1980s and has offices in London and Reading. It is a part of the GlobalCom PR Network. For more details, visit: [www.ccgrouppr.com](http://www.ccgrouppr.com)

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