Because we like working for the good guys.

(Even More)

Shared iD!z 3

• (EVEN MORE)

Shared iDiz

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Contents

Foreword

One of the greatest things about the credit union ethos is the atmosphere of mutual support and sharing. Credit union people have an almost overwhelming enthusiasm – they truly want their colleagues to succeed. It's contagious, and it's a joy.

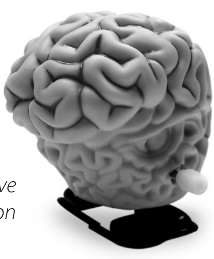
In the same spirit of sharing, we started SharediDiz.com back in the fall of 2007. Our goal was to provide a unique voice and real value for credit union marketers, while keeping it interesting and fun to read.

In early 2010, we put together a book of our favorite articles from the first two years. The book proved to be such a big hit we did it again *(More Shared iDiz)* two years later. *Even More Shared iDiz* is our third edition, and is, well, even more of the same.

Over the years SharediDiz has grown to include 1000 posts, covering CU marketing, branding, creativity, business, culture and more.

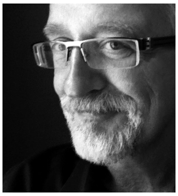
As always, we hope you'll enjoy reading and thinking with us. If you haven't already signed up, we invite you to visit SharediDiz.com and sign up for our email list. Your thoughts, feedback, and comments are always welcome, and if you've got something to say, please contact us about writing a guest column.

(And if your marketing, branding or web site needs a few new iDiz, we'd love to help.)



We've never given our walking mascot a name, but people seem to love him. After giving away several hundred of these little critters, credit union marketers all over the country now remember us as "the brain people".

Contributors



Kent Dicken
Kent started a marketing business in 1988 with his designer wife Janet, which has since evolved into iDiz, with a national reputation and a focused expertise in credit union marketing. As a designer, Kent's award-winning logos and creative work have appeared in multiple books and national publications. As El Queso Grande/CEO, he is proud of the continued growth of the credit unions that iDiz has helped – not to mention all of the marketing awards that they have won together. In his spare time Kent can be found walking the Monon Trail, renovating the 110-year old Broad Ripple bungalow that iDiz calls home, trying to grow hops and other plants, or brewing craft beer.

Brian Wringer
One of iDiz Incorporated's first staff members, Brian was part of the marketing team at Purdue Employees Federal Credit Union, and was actually a client prior to joining iDiz. A graduate of Purdue University in Professional Writing, Brian acts as the agency's Wordsmith and Big Idea Guy, but wears the IT hat when necessary. A former bassist in a classic rock band, Brian now spends almost all his free time riding, upgrading, or repairing one of his motorcycles, and dreads winter because he sometimes has to drive a car.

CREATIVITY

How ideas happen

Brainstorming brainstorming

by Kent Dicken

It's time for yet another loan promo and you're stuck looking at a blank piece of paper. You've got nothing. Nada. Zilch. Zip. You could really use the collective input of multiple minds, riffing on anything that pops in their heads, all focused on a single subject.

You really need a brainstorming session.

But everyone else around the office seems to be an accountant, and they aren't exactly paid to try new approaches in their line of work. How can you brainstorm with your co-workers if they aren't "Creatives"?

By realizing that you don't have to be a Creative to think like one. Brainstorming is a group activity for almost everyone when you approach it the right way.

So go ask for their help. You might be surprised how many accountants would love to take a break from their usual work. Gather as many volunteers as you can, and remember to share these four guidelines at the beginning of the session in order to help put everyone at ease:

1. No judgements.
Criticism is not allowed. No sniggers or snide comments, no laughing at someone's idea (unless the idea really is funny). Comments are only allowed if they extend or add to the idea.

2. Focus on quantity.
Your focus should be to get as many ideas flowing as possible, helping participants get over their shyness or reluctance to share, and creating a creative atmosphere. The greater the number of ideas generated, the greater chance of developing something unusual and unexpected.

3. Every idea counts.
No idea is out of bounds, and unusual ideas are even better. Make no assumptions and try new perspectives.

4. Combos can count even more.
Good ideas are sometimes even better when combined. Be sure to write them down where everyone can see.

Got it? Good. Now give them the parameters of the problem and keep them talking while you take notes on the white board.

Of course, every once in a while the traditional group ideation process can grow stale or simply not work if there are too many people reluctant to share their ideas out loud. That's when it may help to try a new approach to brainstorming. Here are a few I've had success with:

1. Passing notes.
Each person writes down one idea then passes it to the next person, who adds their thoughts. The process continues until everyone get their original paper back, at which time the paper is read to the group. An option to this is to have one person swap the ideas randomly.

2. Idea cloud.
This process starts with defining one topic, then having each person list as many related ideas/words as they can come up with individually. All those ideas are then merged into one large idea cloud to see what new associations can be made by the group.

3. Questions first.
When the participants are having troubles coming up with solutions, try brainstorming the questions. Then prioritize the questions in order to find a solution.

Are you telling stories or storytelling?

by Kent Dicken

My brother-in-law tended to exaggerate things a bit when he was a kid. From what I hear, there was always some truth behind his tales, but it was the embellishments that made everyone grin and shake their head. His family knew he wasn't lying, he was "telling stories" – which, of course, isn't the same thing as storytelling.

Sounds the same to you? Maybe it will help to explain the difference.

Storytelling has been with us, since before the written word, as a way to transfer knowledge. Every culture has passed along its history, ethics and values through spoken words, using plots, characters, even a point of view, in order to involve listeners of all age groups. (And because this education takes place in a social setting, with cues as to how to use the information, teachers will tell you it is a very effective way to learn.) Sure, there's embellishments, and because it is usually live, the stories do change a bit over time, but storytellers generally stick to the plot and keep everything moving to a satisfying conclusion.

"Telling stories," on the other hand, is more about the embellishments than the story. As long as the facts don't get in the way, they're included, but the point is to entertain, not educate.

So what does all this have to do with Marketing?

Great marketing uses stories, because they are emotional, and easy-to-remember.

According to Annette Simmons, author of *Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins*, "your facts aren't as powerful as human emotions. Rational thinking is a tool of analysis that stops at the frontal lobes. Stories communicate directly with the old brain, the limbic system, the amygdala, and the other core parts of the brain,…the "feeling" parts of the brain are designed to fast-track responses."

So the next time you want to "teach" your members, try being a storyteller instead. Stories are a powerful way to create stronger emotional bonds between your credit union and its members, and pass along information about how you can help.

Just don't start "telling stories" like my brother-in-law.

Killing the funny frog

by Brian Wringer

Which kind of marketing might actually get you to pay attention — a monkey driving a banana car, or fourteen paragraphs of features and benefits?

Yeah, I thought so.

> *"Explaining humor is a lot like dissecting a frog,*
> *you learn a lot in the process, but in the end you kill it."*
> – Mark Twain

I've always thought of advertising in any form as a trade. You're asking the reader or listener for something extremely valuable — a slice of their attention. So what are you going to offer in return?

Sometimes the exchange is tangible. For example, I give you a pen, and now you know the credit union exists. But most of the time, the exchange is intangible.

In order of least to most effective, people might read your ad because it offers:

- useful information (Meh. Easiest, most common, and least effective.)
- something interesting, (Hmm…)
- something entertaining (Ooh!)
- something funny (HA!)
- something personal (I'm my own favorite person.)

"Funny" is the most accessible to advertisers — "personal" usually comes off insincere or just creepy unless it's from one actual live human being to another.

Of course, you have to get it exactly right — a very small change can make a great joke go flat in an instant. Good comedy is very hard to write consistently. But a sense of humor can work wonders for getting attention, making a pitch memorable, and humanizing a brand. Whether you're making friends or building member loyalty, humor is one of the most powerful ways to build emotional connections.

> *"Dying is easy – comedy is difficult."*
> – actor Edward Kean on his death bed

So now that this frog is thoroughly dead, dissected, and desiccated, what am I getting at?

Credit unions are perfectly positioned to bring the funny. Use more humor. Lighten up. You know your members better than any bank — so goof around with them. Have some fun. The huge corporations can't do that. It's fine, really — there's no NCUA requirement for serious.

We're living in a world where you can order a box of a dozen high-quality rubber chickens for twenty bucks and have them on your desk in a few days. There's just no excuse for staying serious.

How ideas happen

by Kent Dicken

At iDiz, we're all about, well, ideas. So it should be no surprise that we are also interested in finding out where great ideas come from. Interestingly, it seems everyone has their own idea how ideas happen.

People love to tell stories, so it's no wonder that most describe the advent of an idea as an epiphany, a brainstorm, that "Eureka!" moment, a brilliant flash of insight that seems like a bolt from above. Even the famous scientist Charles Darwin attributes his theory of natural selection to one such moment, and even described the moment in his autobiography.

Unfortunately, that wasn't actually the case. Another scientist reviewed Darwin's massive collection of notebooks that he kept through all of his studies, and found that Darwin had developed the idea of natural selection several months prior to his epiphany moment. He just had not combined all those ideas into his theory until then.

That shows, according to Steven Johnson in his TED talk, how ideas come more from a network than a spark. He even refers to it more as "The Slow Hunch" than a brainstorm. Your ideas come from a lifetime of experiences, so let them take the time to stew in the back of your mind, and wait for a new configuration of neurons flowing in your brain to make the connection.

He also said that if you want the ideal environment for idea incubation, then look to the coffee and tea houses of 1650's England. Here was a culture that drank alcohol with every meal because the water was bad, so when the tea and coffee houses sprung up people started switching from a depressant to a stimulant, and the conversations sparked amid the chaos. That era is now referred to as the Age of Enlightenment.

(Coincidence? Perhaps. There were many other societal changes occurring at the same time. But it certainly may have been the beginning of our cultural addiction to caffeine.)

In a more recent example, Johnson talked about how scientists who spent all day in a lab actually made more mental connections at the weekly meeting with other scientists. If they had not had time to discuss their problems and observations with colleagues, they would not have made as many discoveries.

So, the next time you have the glimmerings of an idea, let your brain neurons munch on it for awhile. Share your thoughts with someone else and see if they can add something to it. Even trying to say it out loud can help you organize your thoughts.

Besides, bolts from above can be dangerous.

Ideas are a dime a dozen

by Kent Dicken

Of course that's not a nice thing to hear, especially if your job is coming up with ideas. And maybe even more so when your agency is named iDiz.

But it's true. Ideas are cheap.

All I have to do is look back on all my brainstorming session notes to see the remnants of good ideas that just weren't good enough, or didn't click with the client and therefore got left behind in pursuit of some other idea that had more spark.

And I can't remember all the conversations I've heard that started out something like "wouldn't it be great if we could…" or "I have this great idea for a business…" or "I've been thinking that we should…"

People get ideas all the time. It's what you do with an idea that makes it valuable. That's why an idea can't be copyrighted or trademarked, but the actual product or application can.

It's the doing that counts.

BRANDING

No more lousy CU names

Credit unions: not for everybody

by Brian Wringer

There, I said it. And it's true. Credit unions aren't for everyone.

The latest numbers bear this out — according to Callahan, credit unions hold 6.6% of assets and 8.7% of deposits nationally. That's a niche group if I ever saw one.

Logically, a whole lot of people — the majority of consumers, really — could benefit from switching to a credit union. If you look at it one way, this is an exasperating failure. A huge mountain we've failed to climb. Why, oh why, do all those people insist on throwing their money away with banks?

But I prefer to look at it another way — CUs appeal to an elite, exclusive group of people. Overall, I'd say it's a group of people who are paying attention. That doesn't sound like much, but it's a huge difference. I've seen stats indicating that CU members on average are a little healthier, wealthier, and even better drivers than the average. CU members seem to make slightly better decisions in life.

You can narrow your CU's niche down even further — instead of "Everyone in Podunk, Squeehawk, and Gribling Counties", what if you refined your marketing to appeal to "People who drive hybrid cars, recycle, and frequent farm markets"? Suddenly, you have a much better understanding of the psychology involved, and can design your messages to have a specific appeal. It's basic target marketing — the more you focus, the better it gets.

Leave the mass marketing to the mass brands. Let go of the lowest common denominator. Be proud of the fact that your CU is more like a fine, locally produced organic white wine than the gallon jug on the bottom shelf. You're not bigger, you're better. There are lots of people who don't care about the difference and never will. Your job as a CU marketer is to target the few who do care and make sure they understand.

No more lousy CU names

by Brian Wringer

Too many credit union names sound like they were decided by a committee of accountants a long, long, long time ago. In fact, that's exactly how most of them got their names. Add in the fact that every credit union name has to drag along the words "Credit Union" or "Federal Credit Union", and you'll start to see why picking a non-lousy CU name is so difficult.

How do you come up with a great new name? There are a few types of names you can skip right away:

1. Terminally Generic *(First, Community, Prime, Trust, Members, One, New, Plus, a direction [North, South, East, West], or any state name)*

These are the names that blend seamlessly into the crowd of other financial institutions. Keep looking.

2. Awkward Alphabet Soup

Bear in mind that staff and members will always try to shortcut your name by using acronyms or leaving out words. Mull over the worst that can happen, and eliminate anything awkward, or that would make an average 12 year old snicker. (We found several examples, but we'll leave them to your imagination.)

3. Names related to a long-dead SEG

Sorry, but "Buggy Whip Employees Federal Credit Union" has got to go. Time to get with the times. Then again, if you're going for a totally retro-hip feel, it could be weird enough to work.

The "new" trends in renaming produce some interesting options, but each comes with a few pitfalls:

1. Faux Pharmaceutical *(Altier, Inova, Viriva, Ascentra, Interra, Altana, Aventa, Solarity, Abri, Everence, Axxess, Astera and Envista)*

Made-up names that sound vaguely Latin-like may actually be a good choice if a trademarkable name is important to you. But if it's hard to pronounce, or sounds like a prescription medication for pimples, you might want to think twice. Inspect names like this carefully for unintended double meanings in other languages. And do a very thorough trademark search to help ensure you're not going to overlap with the next big treatment for itchy nostrils.

2. Word Mashups *(NuPath, Red Canoe, BluCurrent, Riverset)*

Take one word or a portion of it, smash it together with a second, mix in random misspellings with a pinch of InterCaps, and voila! This approach often combines a descriptive word and an object or place concept. Mashups can be very interesting or just lame, but they're a great way to start thinking more conceptually.

3. Motivational *(Go, Grow, Magnify, Aspire, Amplify, Max, Via, Smart)*

Action obviously speaks louder than words, so why not use an adjective or verb that is short and powerful at the same time? Random tech companies have glommed on to much of the thesaurus, so be extra-vigilant about overlaps and potential misunderstandings.

In the end, there's a lot more to naming than it appears. It pays to get experienced professionals to help dig in to your brand, generate names, check for problems, and help build consensus around the best possibilities.Before Credit Unions try to reinvent themselves, they need to first find out what value they have with their members, their market, and their staff and reconnect to that equity.

These core values not only become the baseline for looking at all branding and marketing, they provide an opportunity to obtain buy-in from all levels, including management, and gives credibility to everything you do in growing your brand.

Name Change Step #1: Getting the CEO on Board

by Kent Dicken

Whenever an organization thinks about a name change, there are lots of emotions and memories that surface. Sometimes those emotions and memories can even become obstacles. Some are relatively minor and are easy to get around, but others can turn out to be insurmountable — especially when they occur at the highest levels.

That's why one of the first questions we ask our clients that contact us for rebranding is: **"What does your CEO think of the idea?"**

If the CEO isn't willing to champion the idea it won't go very far. His/Her leadership is absolutely critical to the process — because no one else has the same clout.

Most Board of Directors are made of long-time members that have certain qualities in common: they are older, generally more conservative in their outlook on life, and somewhat resistant to change. In particular, they want to be good stewards of shared history, they want to keep the legacy alive, and they certainly aren't going to change names just because the AVP Marketing says they should. But the CEO has the stature to get them to listen. That's why the CEO has to explain why they need to change.

Once the Board is on board, then the CEO has to make sure the Executive Team is on the same team. Management needs to hear the same strategy that the Board hears, understand the end goal, and work together as a team to reach it.

Bringing in an outside consultant can be a tremendous help in the process. They can advise how to communicate to and involve the members, give suggestions and build a strategy, even provide an amazing new brand identity at the end. What an outsider cannot do, however, is lead like a CEO. Get the CEO to commit, to convince everyone that it is the right thing to do, and now is the right time to do it, and things will change.

Build a Brand Strategy before a list of new names

by Kent Dicken

When a Board and/or Executive Team decides that it is FINALLY time for a name change, too often they make a major mistake:

They start coming up with names.

That's a natural reaction, to be sure. After all, the people around the table certainly know the history of the credit union and have a strong interest in its future. They have first-hand knowledge of the credit union's capabilities. Plus, they have been the guiding hands that have built the credit union to its current status.

But there are two problems with that approach.

First, these ideas are only coming from those in power. This means that no matter how appropriate the names, they will be seen as an edict from above; something in which the average peon (staff) or member will not have had any input, and therefore, not anything that the staff and members will truly take to heart.

Second, these names are based on the experiences of a few. They are based on what has happened in the past, as experienced by a limited number of people, without looking at the potential and possibilities of the future.

You can solve both of these problems by getting others involved – from including the staff and members to hiring a third party to provide some needed impartiality and outside experience – and taking these three steps:

1. Ask for input.
If you want buy-in from the rest of the credit union, first you need to hear what they think. Let them tell you what the credit union means to them. Hear their stories about how the credit union was able to help fix a problem for a member. Open up the floor to suggestions and give them an anonymous way to complain if there are problems. You may not always like what they say, but you may uncover a few areas to improve, along with a trove of stories and information you did not previously know.

2. Do your research.
Find your most profitable members and ask them why they use the credit union. Compare their demographics to those of both your entire membership and your field of membership. Pay attention to the ages and life stages of all three in order to uncover the strongest possibilities for growth in the future.

3. Build a Brand Strategy before you build a list of new names.
Before you build a list of possible names, use the information you've discovered to articulate in simple, direct terms the central message at the core of your brand. Make sure your message is authentic, emotional, and utterly unique.

Then outline the ways this central message can help your credit union find new members and deepen connections to current members. This Brand Strategy will help clarify your opportunities for growth and make it much easier to generate/select names that help in that effort.

Brand Loyalists are wimps. Build a Legion of Brand Fanatics.

by Kent Dicken

Sure, Brand Loyalists boost your bottom line, talk about your brand, recommend it to their friends, use it on a daily basis, even teach their kids how to use it. And most companies would be happy to have them.

Not me. I think you can do better. I think you can create your own legion of Brand Fanatics. What's a Brand Fanatic? They're the ones that have your brand tattooed on their body.

Well, maybe they don't have to be that crazy. But Brand Fanatics are the ones that not only have the Harley, they also wear the belt buckle every day and have the weekend wardrobe to match. They not only have an iPhone, they also have an iPad, iPod, iMac, Apple TV — and that doesn't even include the gear that the rest of the family uses, or all the earlier versions collecting dust in the basement. So, at the very least, you are looking for the mostly-crazy, but not tattoo-crazy, people who want to live and breathe your brand.

But how do you find that type of Brand Fanatics? You don't. You have to build them.

Here are three, not-for-the-faint-of-heart steps to start building your own Legion:

1. Get picky about who you target.
Abercrombie and Fitch has always targeted teens that are young, good-looking and popular. That's why, whether you agree with the move or not, last year's controversial comments by Mike Jeffries, A&F's CEO, have been touted as a form of "perverse brilliance" when it came to targeting a select group. Here's what he said: "Candidly, we go after the cool kids…A lot of people don't belong [in our clothes], and they can't belong. Are we exclusionary? Absolutely." By saying he doesn't want customers who don't fit that "cool kids" image, Jeffries is making his current and future customers feel exceptional.

You may not have to be exclusionary as A&F, but you do want your Brand Fanatics to feel like they belong, so start getting picky about who you want to include in your Legion. Remember, you can't be everything to everyone and be unique. You want to be everything to a few, instead.

2. Create an Insider's Club, and make them work to be included.
The Marines only want those that want to be a Marine. They put recruits through one of the toughest boot camps possible, trying to wash out those that don't belong. Those that pass the test are then put through the training required to become part of the group. They learn the language, know the right passwords, and when they belong they also get to wear the uniform and insignia that marks them as a Marine.

Okay, so running a Boot Camp may be a bit extreme. But if you tell people that what you offer is a little different and that they will have to work at it a little in order to benefit, then it becomes something truly unique. Once they make the effort, and feel like they belong, they become invested in your program and eager to spread the word.

3. Create an Insiders-Only Event.
Three Floyds Brewing Company is a craft brewery that not only created a true insiders event, it has apparently become The Event in the brewing world. I found out how well the event was known in global beer-brewing circles after three London barkeeps nearly swooned when I mentioned it.

First, Three Floyds created a beer that could only be purchased at the event, a beer so well-known that people willingly buy tickets just to stand in line for the right to pay more good cash for a limited number of bottles. Of course the beer's reputation might also be because of good copywriting:

> *"Dark Lord is a gargantuan Russian Style Imperial Stout, with a reverse cascading head that starts out billowing the color of burnt oil like the Dark Lord rising from the black primordial beginnings. Its resonant vinous aroma has been described as cherries, sweet malt, molasses, burnt currants, plums with a port wine alcohol undertow. Mochachino notes buried within. Motor oil consistency, hellishly smooth yet divinely burnt and vinous. The first sip coats your palate with a palatial*

> *charred fruit and chocolate blanket. Alcohol burn wiggles its way down your throat with a thick body."*

Then they built the event: Dark Lord Day. Only those that know about it have the opportunity to buy tickets, which sell out quickly. There are rules on how to enter the grounds, specific hours when your specific group can line up, plus golden tickets that allow you to buy additional special bottles if you scratch-off and uncover the special symbol (and have even more cash.) Every year, the lore of the event grows.

Granted, you aren't selling beer. But if you started an Insiders-Only Event, think about the connections you could make with your biggest fans. Earn new business by giving them the inside track on a new product. Help them connect with other fans, and let them help you build an more-amazing event next year.

Bonus: Encourage tattoos.
Why not? Tattoos are popular today (1 in 4 people between 18-50 have at least one somewhere). Besides, how cool would it be to see your logo on someone else's body?

Taglines are like short stories that no one understands

by Kent Dicken

Taglines may be the most difficult part of branding. And provide the least value.

Why? Because a tagline has to convey as much meaning as possible in as few words as possible. Brevity usually trumps content, turning what was once a meaningful thought into corporate jargon.

Don't believe me? Take a look at any list of taglines — most don't even seem connected to the names listed next to it. You could pretty much toss all the taglines in one box, names in another, and draw out random pairs.

So if a tagline is difficult to create, hard to connect to a specific name, and often so generic that no one remembers it — is it really necessary in branding?

Probably not.

The most important thing to remember about branding is that you want to make people care. You want to make a strong, emotional connection to your potential members/customers, since that is the most effective way to create loyalty and spur action.

The best way to create that strong emotional connection is to tell stories. Stories are what people remember. Stories are what connects one human to another.

Keep them simple, keep them short (just not as short as a tagline), and don't be afraid to make them personal: how you helped these people, how you connected those people, how you have made the world a little better place.

Once you have your stories, go back and look at your tagline.

If your tagline helps to tell those stories, keep it. If it doesn't, or seems too vague, dump it. If you've dumped the old one but still think you need a tagline, try creating a series of them that work with your stories and can be used as needed.

But by all means, if you are going to use a tagline, at least make it something people can understand.

The Rule of Three Rules

by Kent Dicken

Your focus group and creative team has come up with 47 different ways why your your credit union/your product is superior to the competition. Your eyes glaze over at all the possibilities, that by using this amazing list in your marketing, you will astound the world with its obviousness, bring in monster results, and probably get a major promotion for your awesome brilliance.

But it won't work. Because your audience's brains don't work that way.

You see, the human brain is a funny thing. Capable of amazing mental feats, it can also lose track when there are way too many things to remember, thanks to the limits of short-term memory. Point out too many points and it will be pointless — the brain won't remember any of it.

Actually, the brain seems to work best thinking in threes. Sometimes twos or fours or fives, but mostly threes.

It's a technique/theory that dates at least back to ancient Greece. According to Wikipedia: the Latin phrase "omne trium perfectum" (everything that comes in threes is perfect, or, every set of three is complete) basically conveys the same idea as the Rule of Three.

Of course the Greeks were't the only ones to use it. The Rule of Three has been used in everything from the ancient German symbol of The Dragon's Eye (which stands for the balance of love, power and wisdom) to historical documents (Thomas Jefferson used "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" in the US Declaration of Independence) to literary works (Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol, highlighting visits to Scrooge by three spirits). Folklore and stories (Three Musketeers, Three Little Pigs), religion (Three Wise Men, the Holy Trinity, the Three Jewels of Buddhism), counter-culture (sex, drugs and rock & roll) and even Superman ("Truth, Justice and the American Way") have all used the same basic device to connect to their audiences.

More recently (and definitely more relevant to the topic of this blog), some of the best-known brands and marketing campaigns have been based on three thoughts or words. Regardless of whether you like the product, consider what these phrases did for their company:

> We try harder.
>
> Real. Comfortable. Jeans.
>
> Just do it!
>
> Life is good.
>
> Finger Lickin' Good

So why does three of something work? Well, besides being easier for your audience to remember, three words or three thoughts are:

- **Easier to understand.** Fewer words make it easier to follow the logic.
- **Quicker to make an emotional connection.** Life is Good was able to share their optimistic approach in three little words, and the world has responded.
- **Easily quotable.** A simple phrase makes it easier for people to spread the word — a great quality to have in our current social-media focused world.

Unfortunately, communicating your brand / your best qualities in as little as three words or three benefits is hard to do. It's a lot easier to prattle on and on, and hope to convince your audience by the sheer volume of your words.

What about your brand? Can you put it into just three words?

Your brand – relabel or repackage?

by Kent Dicken

You've seen products on store shelves that look like they have for the last 20, 30, even 50 years. They're dusty, and a bit worn around the edges or label because they keep getting shoved around the shelves instead of taken home.

Unfortunately, your credit union's brand may be looking a lot like that dusty, battered box. Because a credit union's brand — both the visual appearance and the emotional connections that people have with you — can get old and stale, especially if it's never been updated. The audience that first connected to the brand when it started all those years ago isn't the same audience the brand needs to attract now in order to grow.

Some brands just need a makeover, a new look, and a relaunch campaign to be successful once again. But others are so far past their expiration date that the best thing to do is to start over. So how do you know whether a brand needs a new label, or a full repackaging?

You should certainly relabel when:

- Your image looks and feels dated, compared to your competition
- Your staff likes their job but has no real emotional connection to your brand
- Most of your Field of Membership is only vaguely aware that you offer more than car loans and Christmas Clubs

You should definitely repackage when:

- Potential members confuse your name with another financial institution or business
- It takes more than 5 seconds to explain who you are.
- People still think you have to work at the original SEG in order to join

Still aren't sure? Here are three more questions to ponder:

Who is your competition in your market, and how do you stack up? Analysts are predicting that future growth will only happen through taking market share away from your competition. Make a list of all of the banks and credit unions in your area that are bigger or close to your size. Include their asset size and share of market (your local Chamber of Commerce might be able to help) and compare it to yours. Are you the 800# gorilla with 30%+ of your market, or the mouse in the bushes with less than 3%? Gorillas still need to be freshened up once in awhile. Mice generally need to think bigger.

Has your field of membership grown beyond your name? If your CU is still strongly connected to the original Select Employer Group, there's a natural reluctance to move away from the name. But if your Field of Membership has moved beyond the original SEG to the community, and less than 5% of the FOM is actually employed by that SEG, it's time to pick potential over history. Repackage. Quickly.

Market research firm Neilsen predicts that by 2030 the majority of workers will be free agents, as companies start hiring more teams for projects rather than employees for careers. Community credit unions have an advantage here, since your future members will come from people with similar addresses, interests and activities rather than by similar vocations.

Dig deep and ask yourself which is more important: keeping today's long-time members and their deposits, or bringing in tomorrow's new members with more borrowing potential?

Take a look at the profitability of your membership by age and product use. Sure, your long-time members got you here, but how many of those use the credit union as their PFI? How many of them have anything more than certificates? Are your prime borrowing members (in their 40s and 50s) pulling their weight to offset all those deposits? If not, then a new label could work wonders to boost your image with today's borrowers.

Now think ahead. Neilsen also predicts that by 2030 one-third of all households will be headed by a person over 65. So the odds are that you won't have to worry about deposits for a long, long time. But you will always need loans. And those prime borrowing members in their 40s and 50s are currently in their 20s and 30s today. If you plan to move your product off the shelves in the future, you may need to repackage in order to attract those younger members.

Mission Statements are boring. What's your Manifesto?

by Brian Wringer

When we start on a branding project, one of the first things we usually see is the credit union's "Mission Statement". About 99.999% of the time, a committee has very carefully stripped it of any concrete meaning or use and it says the exact same things as every other mission statement.

What I'm more interested in is your Manifesto — what will you fight for?

What will you refuse to do, no matter what? What will you always do, no matter what? What are your principles? What do you care about most? What are the individual manifestos of everyone in the credit union? How do they combine to create the credit union's culture? What's in the shared manifesto? What's written and unwritten?

Of course, credit union people are generally pretty peaceful, so we tend to use the word "risk" instead of "fight" — when's the last time you took a risk to help a member? Have you ever bent the rules? If you make a bad decision, what happens to you? What happens if you disagree with a decision or policy? Can you change things if they need to be changed? What makes you mad? What makes you joyful?

This is all much more interesting and worthwhile information — in order to discover, define, and amplify those unique, emotional, and true differences (all the components of a great brand) you have to uncover the manifestos. And you have to distill them into a shared manifesto — something everyone can agree they truly care about.

MEMBERSHIP

Never stop telling your story

If it's your member's problem, it's your problem

by Brian Wringer

A little while back, I noticed an interesting article from the folks over at Callahan about Manatee Community CU in Florida that put together a unique program to help people who needed reliable transportation. The credit union provides the loans (at risk-appropriate rates), Enterprise supplies low-cost used cars with warrantees, and United Way supplies people who need help but have jobs. Everyone works together to ensure the member is educated on both finances and car maintenance.

I love this sort of practical, real-world, problem-solving. Does anyone wake up in the morning and say "I need a car loan"? Of course not. People need transportation to get to work and school. Very few places in the US have adequate public transportation. Help people succeed at owning and maintaining a car, you'll help them keep their jobs, work better jobs, and succeed. Plus, you've just created a fiercely loyal new member who's doing better in life.

What other problems are your members and potential members having? How could the credit union be part of a responsible, sustainable, long-term solution for struggling members? How might you help your members knock a few chips off these Big Problems?

- Lack of child care keeps millions of people from working. What could a CU do to help parents re-enter the workforce or find trustworthy, affordable child care?
- Even more people have insurance, medical costs are still the biggest driver of bankruptcy. What if members had help understanding their medical bills, budgeting, and negotiating payment plans?
- Student loans — what could you do to help make sure students and their families don't take on too much debt?

80% of your credit union's members are blood-sucking parasites

by Kent Dicken

Okay, that may be worded just a bit strong, but it's certainly one way to look at the idea that the vast majority of your profits (80%) come from a minority of your members (20%).

Obviously this isn't a new idea. Most CEOs & CFOs are well aware of the 80/20 Rule, and are the first to remind you that "not-for-profit" does not mean "for-loss."

So what can you do about it?

First, start with the idea that every member can be profitable if you capture more (or all) of their financial business with the right products and the right message.

Then consider which of these strategies fits your credit union best:

1. Move to Relationship Pricing. This has been the go-to plan for many credit unions over the last several years, but unfortunately, this "pay-to-play" strategy works better intellectually than emotionally. For every CFO who sees it as a fair way to encourage members to participate more, you have a long-time Board Member who sees it as an infringement on their rights to a high certificate rate if that is all they want. Relationship pricing can work, but you have to be prepared for grumbling and lower member counts.

That's why, if you proceed in this direction, a strong marketing program needs to be in place before the rollout. Members have to understand why you are making these changes, so allow plenty of time to explain it to each of them.

TIP: If you feature a loan refinance campaign as part of the communication process, it can help make the transitions easier for some of your members, save them potential fees, and turn more of them into profitable members at the same time.

The other two options are more difficult, perhaps, but may actually better fit your credit union's culture:

2. Talk to the 20% to find out why they like your credit union. Then do more of that. Don't ask your entire membership what they think or you will get 80% of your answers from unprofitable members. Ask the 20% what they like about you and what they don't like. Ask them if they use another financial institution and if they do, what they like and don't like about it. Talk to them about their future plans and dreams and discover what their next financial need is likely to be. Ask them to recommend someone else whom they think would benefit from joining the credit union.

TIP: Use this information to update current products and develop new ones to further cement that relationship. Then tweak your marketing strategies to reach more people like them.

3. Do more marketing to the 80% in order to move them to the 20%. Your 80% members may not know that only having a checking account costs the credit union money. They may not know that they can refinance their car loan with you and make lower payments each month. They may even have other members in their family who need loans, which would make the clan profitable. They may not know that there is a benefit to moving their money to one place instead of spreading it around.

If they don't, it's because you haven't been telling them.

TIP: Look into ordering a Member Benefits Report from CUNA. For a nominal fee and a few answers, CUNA will compare what you offer your members to that of your competition, then give you the $$ amounts you save your members. Using that information in a well-planned, high-quality marketing campaign may be all the push they need to move to the profitable side of the ledger.

United by a single shared interest

by Kent Dicken

I admit it, we always encouraged our boys to be true to their inner nerd. Why? Because nerds rule the world. More importantly, nerds also use their imagination in creative ways, often becoming absorbed in thoroughly exploring one interest after another.

Growing up, my boys went through multiple phases where they were obsessed with one thing or another, from collecting Beanie Babies, to Pokemon cards and the linkable Game boy games, to Magic trading cards that started multiplying in binders and late night competitions with their friends. Sure, they both played sports, but gravitated more towards Terry Pratchett's books and the Lord of the Rings. They were never Trekkies because their Mom was a Star Wars fan instead, which also may explain why they became fans of Dr. Who in college. At every step they seemed to connect with other fans of the genre, and became part of that special community.

Often these communities self-identify themselves with a name or acronym. For example, Dr. Who fans are Whovians. Those people that make armor and weapons out of foam and fight in troll/orc/warrior costumes out in some field? They are sometimes referred to as LARPers (Live Action Role Players). I just recently found out that fans still exist for My Little Pony — a Brony is a male (but sometimes female) fan, while a Pegasister seems to always be female — and, perhaps scarily, even have their own dating site. Mystery Science Theatre fans seem to be called a MSTie, while TVDFans refer to those that follow The Vampire Diaries.

Both none of these fans compare to a certain type of Korean Pop fan called a *Sasaeng*. These fans are known for obsessively stalking their K-Pop idols to where it seems to be better if what they do is illegal (breaking into their homes, stealing things, etc.) There are even businesses that have been started to appeal to these fans, including special taxi services that have formed in order to help these fans stalk their idols. (I only hope that these specific nerds won't rule the world some day.)

But what I find most interesting about all these groups is how people will form communities based upon what they share in common. Economic backgrounds, education levels, even the color of their hair do not keep them out of the group. They are united by a single, shared interest.

You know, that sounds a lot like how credit unions were formed, doesn't it?

Never stop telling your story

by Kent Dicken

Just last week my niece posted this message on Facebook:

> *"Now that so many credit unions offer shared ATMs and shared branching (so you can do your business at any credit union, regardless of where your accounts are) I cannot think of a single reason to use a for-profit bank."*

And before you ask, no I did not prompt her to post that. In fact, I'm not even positive she knows that my job is connected with credit unions because she has never seemed to show a lot of interest in what I do. She's always lived in towns too far away for us to see each other very often, and thanks to both of her parents, has always had a double dose of both independence and strong opinions. But thanks to FB I've gotten to know and love her even more by seeing how she cares about the world and people around her — she truly wants the world to become a better place — which is also why I would like her even if she wasn't family.

But I was surprised, that among her many causes, she included a shout-out for credit unions. Not that credit unions don't deserve to be lauded, but that the CU message continues to break through, one person at a time.

And that's why you should **never stop telling your story.**

Never trust someone that bends the truth like a pretzel.

by Kent Dicken

My Mother-in-Law's mail is being delivered to our home and it makes me sick.

Don't get me wrong, my Mother-in-Law is a wonderful person. You see, she recently selected and moved into a long-term care facility, and she loves it there. She's made plenty of friends, takes part in more activities than ever before, and her kids can now have some confidence she is eating regular meals and is well cared-for. A definite win-win.

But receiving her mail is another story.

I'm not sure how many lists she must have been on, but we must get close to a half-dozen pieces addressed to her every day, and I have never before seen more emotional tripe in my life. Misleading, shamelessly biased, with half-truths (or half-lies if you will) being touted as facts, preying on emotions and trying to build anger, all culminating in appeals for donations. The conservative Republican PACs are the worst of the bunch, closely followed by the Animal Rights people and Native American tribes. Every night, as I sort the mail over the recycling bin, I think about how they must be making a fund-raising fortune off of older people in order to afford all of that printing/mailing.

Obviously direct marketers aren't the only ones that like to stretch the truth to make a point, because all you have to do is turn on the TV commentators to hear something else ludicrous. In fact, sometimes all you have to do is read a PDF.

I recently saw a piece by the American Bankers Association that uses similar tactics to fight against the CU tax exemption. You can pretty much imagine how the copy goes. By cherry-picking examples and leading the reader by the nose as to what and how to think, their "CU14 Field Guide" makes a big deal out of how many $1B+ Credit Unions exist, how they have focused on loans for the rich to get jumbo mortgages, private boats and aircraft, financing large commercial real estate ventures, buying naming rights for sports arenas, and aggressively growing membership through community charters and financial clubs, etc, etc.

I'm not a fan of buying arena naming rights either (fans simply see it for the advertising opportunity it is), and I'm not crazy about seeing all the smaller CUs get swallowed up by their larger brothers, but the copy on this brochure is so twisted it will make your head spin.

Of course there is no mention as to how Credit Unions also finance the loans for the other 99% of the population, or how they provide a multitude of financial services for people the banks don't really want. There is no comparable list of how many banks are over $1 billion in assets, or how many multi-million dollar headquarters banks have built, nor any mention of how much profit the banks crank out each year for their CEOs and stockholders.

Perhaps the ABA is simply running scared, since some Credit Unions are actually getting big enough to give them some competition? Perhaps – I don't claim to know what they are thinking.

As a marketer, I'm no stranger to embellishment. But I'd never trust someone that bends the truth like a pretzel.

Go find some weirdos

by Brian Wringer

Quick, tell me about your members.

No, not the average members. They're boring. And you already know plenty about them. And so does everyone else.

Find some weirdos. People out on the fringe. The ones who were in New Guinea last week, and are currently somewhere in Kazakhstan. The family thinking seriously about what kinds of goats and equipment they'll need to make 50 gallons of gourmet yogurt every week. What about the 85 year old woman who gets a nice check from Youtube every month from cat videos, or the quiet college professor in ratty jeans who holds over 300 patents?

The point is, anyone and everyone can provide a plain old ordinary checking account or car loan for plain old ordinary average people. What can you do that's different and amazing and delightful for the people out at the edges of ordinary?

And what can you learn there out there on the fringes that you can bring back to all those "regular" people?

Perhaps a special concierge account monitoring and management service would appeal to a lot of frequent world travelers. Maybe there's a crying need for small business financing flexible enough to handle unusual or smaller financing needs. Lots of members would welcome accounts optimized to work best with PayPal, Square, Google Wallet, and other internet payment systems. And there's probably more than one invisible genius in your midst who would love to find a wealth management service they can trust so they can get back to the lab.

The future of credit union web site design

The future of credit union web site design

by Brian Wringer

Credit union web sites are a breed apart. You're not selling widgets, you're not providing entertainment or news, and you're not collecting clicks for cash. Your site is a place busy members go to get things done. So how do the latest trends in web site design and technology affect credit union web sites in particular?

Touch devices make scrolling easier than ever

One of the biggest recent shifts visually is sites where there's one "big idea" front and center, and you scroll for more content. Mobile and tablet devices make it so easy to scroll with the flick of a finger that this technique has become pretty common. As with everything else, there are right and wrong ways to go about it. The main thing to remember is that the additional content has to be obvious and rewarding — there has to be a reason to scroll (a story, an answer, something interesting, interaction), and you have to be able to tell there's more waiting just off the screen. Apple's iPhone site does a great job with this, and more credit union sites are starting to follow suit.

Focus and de-clutterfication

This is Marketing 101 — focus. It's far more effective to say one thing clearly rather than screaming fourteen different messages at once. What is the one main thing you want the user to understand or see on your home page? The more you strip out, the more you can focus. We may even see sites do away with the standard "rotating billboard" banners. And some sites may start to forego large photos in favor of more pared-down, simplified layouts.

Professional Photography

Today's consumers are pretty marketing-savvy — they know a stock photo when they see one. At the same time, everyone's got an insanely high-quality camera in their phone, and they know a snapshot when they see one. I think (and hope) we'll see a resurgence of the local pro photographer who can help you tell your story with compelling, unique, and real images. Credit unions are uniquely local, so local landscapes, people, and events are important elements of your identity.

Touch-first design

Responsive design (where the site adapts to suit the user's device) is nothing new. The huge increase in mobile usage is old news, too. But this does mean that the focus has flip-flopped — the latest and greatest sites are designed from the start around touch interfaces rather than dependent on a mouse. That means bigger, finger-friendly buttons, menus and other elements that react correctly when swiped or tapped, and even more subtle things like parallax animation effects when scrolling.

Tighter experience integration

Frustrating interfaces are rapidly disappearing everywhere else. I predict credit unions will be doing a lot more work on smoothing out the seams between services. Even if your online banking, bill pay, e-deposit, loan apps, and web site all come from different vendors, they should all be able to work together to look and feel like consistent parts of the same credit union on all devices.

177 Minutes a Day

by Kent Dicken

177 minutes a day. That's almost three hours of every day. That's how much time the average American spends on their mobile device each day.

Yet I still think that number is low. I still see families looking at multiple little screens instead of talking to each other at a restaurant, and people catching up on Facebook instead of spending actual face time with friends. Plus it looks like mobile will continue to grow at this pace for quite awhile.

We now spend more time looking at tiny screens than we spend watching our big screen TVs. Instead of being a second screen to look at during commercial breaks, phones and tablets have surpassed televisions for our attention. (Maybe that's why phones are getting so darn big?)

Of course, those three hours a day are only for the average American, which apparently doesn't include college students. Baylor University polled 164 students and found men spent 8 hours and women spent 10 hours on their phones. Doesn't sound like a lot of time left over for classes though.

Yet with all of this shift toward mobile, it's surprising to me how many web sites are not built to be mobile-friendly. Heck, there are still a great many company and credit union sites that are almost impossible to navigate on a phone and still look as rigid and move about as slow as they did 10 years ago.

Sound too familiar? Then it's probably time to update yours. When starting your search for web site vendors we recommend you ask these two questions:

- Are your sites built using responsive design?
- Do you use a mobile-first strategy when designing sites?

That should help to cut your list in half.

Take an active role in member security

by Brian Wringer

When we build a credit union web site, we get a lot of questions related to compatibility with older browsers. Depending on who you ask and what numbers you believe, somewhere between 2% to 8% of the general public is still using very old versions (version 8 or older) of Microsoft Internet Explorer. (IE is currently at version 11.)

Naturally, credit unions don't want to leave anyone out. And gosh, isn't it sort of mean to make Grandpa buy a new computer? This one's only ten years old…

The problem is that this concern is grasping the wrong end of the wrong problem. If someone visiting your credit union web site is using a ten year old browser on a machine running Windows 98 or Windows XP, they have far more serious problems than whether your web site looks funny.

Old computers run a very high risk of serious issues with malware — there is simply no way to adequately secure older browsers and old versions of Windows (other than disconnecting them from the internet). It's quite likely people with old computers already have several assorted pieces of malware (adware, spyware, ransomware, etc.) active in their systems. Do you really want someone logging in to your online banking system with a keylogger peering over their shoulder?

And the risks these folks are taking are not limited to their credit union accounts — every time they log in to another site, make a purchase, pay a bill, or send an email from an unsecured system, they could be exposing sensitive personal information. The problem is basic security and safety.

The good news is that credit unions are in a unique position to take action and help their members stay safe. There are lots of ways credit unions could take a more active role in online safety and security for their members.

1) Detect, Divert, and Explain
Add code to your web site to detect users with ancient browsers and divert them to a page explaining that the browser they are using is not safe. Consider excluding insecure browsers from your online banking systems with a similar message.

2) Provide Basic Content
You can still provide the most-needed content to these users — a simple page with your phone number, locations and hours, routing number, and other commonly needed info. In other words, provide the things they're most likely to need so the site is still somewhat useful.

3) Offer Assistance
What if you offered some sort of upgrade assistance or incentive to members running old browsers? A halfway decent laptop is under $300 these days — what if you offered members a computer upgrade loan package or credit card? Perhaps you could team up with a local computer shop to offer discounts on computers and support services. Or perhaps work with a local school's computer science club to help people upgrade and secure their computers.

Five uncommon reasons to rebuild your web site

by Brian Wringer

It's sad to say, but nothing lasts forever — especially not web sites. Even if nothing is particularly wrong or broken, changes in technology and usage make it worthwhile to revisit your online "front door" every few years. In our experience, web sites need to be refreshed every three to five years.

You can probably think of the most common signs that it's time to rebuild a web site. We'd like to share a few of the lesser-known (but no less important) reasons.

1) Maximum Mobility

Plain and simple, everyone is mobile nowadays. The shift to mobile just in the last year or two has been massive, and now you simply can't ignore the mobile experience. Even if you spend most of the day in front of a big desktop monitor, does your old site work at all on mobile devices? Does the site just sort of work on mobile widgets? Or worse, do mobile visitors get shuffled off to a threadbare mobile site, with no way back to something that sort of works? The new standard is "responsive" — sites that automagically rework themselves to look great on whatever device they're being viewed on. The same site can take advantage of the space available on huge desktop screens or morph into a finger-friendly mobile layout.

2) Increased Importance

Up until recently, there were still a few holdouts who still weren't sure this whole internet fad was here to stay. Maybe your boss was one of them, and the penny-pinching on your old site is now painfully obvious. Time marches on, CEOs fall in love with their smart phones, and Board members become attached to their iPads. Suddenly the web site is a real priority now, and not just an extra expense. It's still a bargain — you can build a killer web site for less than it costs to remodel the restrooms in a branch — but it might be easier to get the budgetary breathing room to do it right.

3) Organizational Opportunity

Back in ye olden days (you know, 2013) it was common to find people who thought a web site "belonged" to the IT/IS department, along with everything else that involved computers. So instead of marketing driving the boat, you end up with IT making the decisions, and thus web sites only a programmer could love. Web sites, of course, belong firmly with Marketing — they represent your brand online, and they're one of the primary ways you communicate with members. When the org chart shifts, it's a perfect time to overhaul your online presence.

4) Cast Changes

On a related note, perhaps there are a few new name tags around the management table. Chances are, a newly promoted or hired exec is going to have a fresher perspective and might be more open to making some decisions on the web site.

5) Wild Weather

Are you dealing with some unusual challenges? Are there storms on the horizon? A strong web site can actually help steady the boat. We've found that a new web site often sparks a revitalization of a brand and helps drive the brand into the future. Among many other things, a web site is a big, public brand statement, something to be proud of, a rallying point.

Build your web site brand first

by Brian Wringer

When you buy a car, how do you decide what you want? Does your list start something like this?

- Must have four wheels and black rubber composite tires
- Must have a steering wheel and an accelerator pedal, along with a means for bringing the vehicle to a stop
- Must be capable of travel on standard highways, streets, and roads using standard, widely available sources of energy.
- Doors must be lockable and activation switch must authenticate operator with a wireless device and/or a small uniquely shaped metal device called a "key".

Of course you don't. You don't have to reinvent and specify the basic functions of a motor vehicle each time. Security, safety, and basic operation have all been worked out for years.

The same principle applies when you're building a new web site — the technology and standards are well-understood by any reputable vendor. Things do change and evolve, such as the huge shift to mobile usage over the last few years (similar to the shift to antilock brakes and airbags in cars) but in the end there are many different ways to build a great web site.

So where do you start? How do you make sure your new web site will be right for you?

Our process is to always start with your brand – what's emotional, authentic, and unique? That's because a web site is a flagship — it leads the way for your brand. It helps define the future of your brand. A new web site is an opportunity to redefine, build, and strengthen your unique emotional connections to your members and your community.

Should it be more like the first electric car in the neighborhood, silently showing the way to the future, or like a brawny pickup with four wheel drive and the ability to haul half a lumberyard? The right answer is different for every credit union, but in the end, technology and design always serve the brand.

Snap decisions may only be worth the time they take

by Kent Dicken

We've all heard that more and more consumers will abandon your website if it takes too long to load. Depending upon who you ask, a one second delay can result in 11% fewer page views, and every second it takes encourages more visitors to bail.

Malcolm Gladwell's book *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* explores the idea that snap decisions may be better than carefully considered ones, especially when you live in an age of information overload. Having too much information may actually be confusing to someone making a decision, even leading to "analysis paralysis." Gladwell believes that most of the time, more information simply reinforces or confirms an initial feeling, but does not necessarily make it more accurate.

Psychologists have confirmed that our brains have evolved to make these short-cut decisions, based on past experiences with our environment. Too much information or too many variables make our brain slow down and falter. (Probably not a good thing to happen if you need to react quickly to a potential threat to your survival.)

Of course, not everyone agrees with Gladwell's premise that snap decisions are better, and obviously not every snap decision works out for the best:

How many of us have made a negative judgement call when meeting someone new, only to become friends later?

Have you ever wondered how snap decisions may have impacted our interaction with people different than ourselves?

How has it affected our business opportunities? Have we been too quick to dismiss something that could have been a perfect fit?

So why do snap decisions work sometimes, and not others?

According to Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman, snap decisions are emotional reactions that are based on past experiences you have had, and are often influenced by whether you are loss-averse (more likely to act in order to avoid a loss than to achieve a gain) or optimistic (believe you have substantial control over your life), and the importance you place on the probabilities of something happening (i.e., consequences).

Personally, I plan to leave the snap decisions to when I'm facing a life-or-death decision — burning buildings, terrorists on airplanes, that car braking suddenly in front of me — that sort of thing. Until then, I'd rather take the time to make sure I know I am making a good decision, not just a quick one.

But slow-loading websites still drive me crazy. I'm outta there in a snap.

Five things to expect when building a new web site

by Brian Wringer

Here at iDiz Inc, we build new web sites for credit unions all the time, so we're pretty familiar with the process. But most of our clients are only involved in a web site project once or twice in a decade. Sure, it's exciting and exhilarating, but it can also be exhausting and unfamiliar.

1) You'll be completely over your head.
And that's perfectly OK.
Designing and building a web site is at least ten times more complicated than a print project. The technologies involved are complex and changing almost daily. You'll have to deal in some way with domain names, DNS, SSL, CSS, W3C, and plenty of other obscure acronyms. Things won't look exactly the same on your CEO's computer as they do on your computer. Mix in mobile devices, and things suddenly get even more complex. And now you have to learn a new CMS, and what the heck does "CMS" mean anyway? And, and, and, and…

Relax. Your main job (assuming your web site vendor is doing their job) is to keep your eye on brand and communication. Does the new web site clearly communicate, extend, and invigorate your brand? Does it clearly communicate and deliver the information that your members need? Keep the overall goals in mind at every stage, and you'll be fine.

When you need to make a decision, understand how it will affect your members and your brand. Insist on getting answers you can understand and use.

2) Pick a vendor with people you can trust and work with.
This might seem obvious, but it's easy to get bogged down in lists of technologies and TLAs (Three Letter Acronyms) and forget that web sites are built by people in order to help people communicate with other people. The people involved are far more important than the exact mix of technologies. (Any competent vendor will have rock-solid technology.)

Therefore, make sure you have the chance to talk to the people who will actually be building your web site. Make sure you're comfortable with them, that they'll answer your questions in a way you can understand, that they'll be flexible with finding solutions, and that you'll be able to get reliable advice and recommendations. Make sure the content management system really is easy to use and can really do what you need.

3) It's probably going to take more time and attention than you expect.
You'll have a lot of coordination to do, a lot of learning, and a lot of decisions to make. Make room in your schedule to respond quickly when your input is needed.

4) You're launching a new branch, not a brochure rack.
Keep your new web site project in its proper perspective — it's an important, public, living outpost for your brand.

Or, let's put it another way — for about the cost of remodeling a bathroom, you can get a killer web site that brings you more visibility and traffic than a neon-covered 24 hour branch right next to the interstate. A great web site is a screaming bargain.

5) You will need to be able to say "no". You may also need to hear "no".
The great thing about the web is that the possibilities are literally infinite. That's also the worst thing about the web.

Sure, it's possible to have your CEO walking around on your home page and talking to members, but it's also a terrible thing to inflict on your members. You may need to find a diplomatic way of breaking the news to your CEO.

In other words, not everything that is possible is practical, and not everything that's a good idea on a shoe store's web site would be a good idea for a credit union web site. Keep your high-level goals in mind, and make sure you are open to alternatives and advice from your vendor.

Search is about people, not Google

by Brian Wringer

Every so often, Google updates or changes something, and the marketing press fills up with panicky articles from "Search Experts" proclaiming The End of an Era. The earth is shifting, and everyone MUST update their "search strategy" and change everything right now.

That's pure malarkey. If the latest change-of-the-week at Google screws up your search optimization strategy, **you're doing it wrong.**

Here's the thing to understand about internet search engines, and Google in particular: they exist specifically to **connect people to the information they want**. People. Not machines.

It's right there in Google's "10 things we know to be true." Right up front, point #1 is: "Focus on the user and all else will follow."

Let's look at the very first line on Google's products page:

> *"Larry Page, our co-founder and CEO, once described the "perfect search engine" as something that "understands exactly what you mean and gives you back exactly what you want."*

Google's ultimate goal is to understand what humans want, and to find it for them. It's why Google is constantly improving and perfecting the way things work.

And it's why **your time and energy should be focused on making your site better, more useful, more engaging, and more interesting** for the human beings you serve. This is the same old strategy you should have had all along. As we've stated many times over the past several years, build a better site, and the users will appear.

The bottom line is that time, attention, and money wasted on trying to game the Google system is time, attention, and money that's far better spent creating content and making your web site better for your members. Update your web site more often, write blog articles, add more FAQs, create more financial education pieces, and make sure online banking, applications, etc. are easy to use. It's hard work, but it lasts.

Focus on genuine, human improvements for your users, and the rest will follow.

Why do so many CU websites look like garage sales?

by Kent Dicken

Does this sound like your home page?

- Advertising banners squeezed in everywhere, blinking, flashing, rotating, and screaming for attention.
- Dire warnings about phishing and hacking appear but never seem to go away.
- Hundreds, if not thousands of words crammed into every banner and every available space.
- An urgent notice about the 2012 annual meeting.

It's enough to shock anyone into clicking through to home banking as fast as possible, just to get away.

Why do so many Credit Union websites look like garage sales, and how do we get rid of all the junk that piles up?

1. Treat your home page as if it were an outdoor board.
Most of your visitors will only spend a few seconds on your home page, so present the viewer only with the most important information in clear, bite-size chunks. The old rule of thumb with billboards is that you've got about three seconds and seven words before the reader glances away and drives past, and it's much the same with web sites. For example, you could change the layout to a sectioned, vertical homepage that presents one clear message at a time. Think one image per section, with 5-7 words. Your navigation won't disappear, and there will still be a way for someone to click to your rates or loan

page. But your campaign ROI and your brand messaging will improve dramatically when people can see a clear message instead of mess.

2. Incorporate promotions as content, not ads.

When you place your promos in blocky, blinking shapes along the outer margins they scream LOOK AT THIS AD HERE!! IT'S BRIGHT AND COLORFUL AND WE WANT YOU TO PAY ATTENTION TO IT!!! Unfortunately no one does. In fact, internet users quickly learn to ignore rectangular objects, especially if they move. Turn that screaming, unloved banner image into an intriguing text headline and useful text content. (And don't forget, search engines can only read text — they can't read images.)

3. It's less about how it looks on your monitor, it's how it looks and works on your phone.

As we've noted before, mobile is quickly replacing the desktop for usage supremacy. That's why most programmers are building for mobile. Don't believe me? Ask the people who make most of the world's networking hardware. According to Cisco, "mobile data traffic will increase 11-fold between 2013 and 2018…three times faster than fixed IP traffic." So if you aren't thinking mobile-first and planning your next site using responsive design, you 'll soon be even further behind.

4. People actually prefer long, not wide.

See point #3. People have gotten used to scrolling with their thumbs, which is way easier than zooming in and target shooting links. When planning your responsive design for mobile, stack the content, make the graphics bold, the wording short, and the buttons big and finger-friendly.

LOANS

Those mysterious millenials

The electric car experience

by Brian Wringer

A little over four years ago, I wrote an article speculating on how electric vehicles (EVs) might affect credit unions. After all, car loans are still the bread and butter for CUs, and EVs are bound to be part of the mix.

At the time, the Nissan Leaf had just been announced and Tesla was still a bit uncertain. Electric motorcycles were crude and experimental, and overall the whole field was far from mainstream — only the tech-savvy early adopters were seen as a market.

Nowadays, Tesla electric cars are fast, sexy objects of desire (the word "starship" gets thrown around an awful lot) and Tesla will be releasing a more mainstream "family" car this year. I've seen several Teslas and Nissan Leafs on the road, and if you're paying attention, you probably have too. Electric motorcycles have become refined… and fast.

Batteries and motors are getting better every day, and there's a huge amount of research underway to improve sustainable energy. And pretty much all the manufacturers are shifting research from internal combustion to electricity.

I think we can safely say that electric cars and motorcycles (along with lots of hybrids and even plug-in hybrids like the Chevy Volt) are here to stay. But what about the financial end of things — as EVs go mainstream, will the same old five year car loan still do the job?

Probably not.

Here's a few other factors to consider:

Manufacturers will focus more on affordability
In addition to bringing the costs of the cars and components down, manufacturers are working to remove financial barriers. Financing for EVs can get complex — in order to get some tax credits, for example, you must "buy" the car instead of leasing it, so manufacturers are working with the big names in banks to offer and underwrite complex financing packages to keep payments realistic and allow buyers to take advantage of these credits. Buyers may also need additional

financing to add charging stations to their homes. You'll need to be flexible to compete with manufacturer financing. You may also need to tweak underwriting guidelines or even factor in vehicle usage — an EV owner could end up spending a lot less of her budget on gas and maintenance, so perhaps she could afford a more expensive EV. Some people will need to keep their old vehicle for long trips instead of trading it in, so that could change the financing equation.

EVs will hold unprecedented value

EVs are mechanically far simpler than internal combustion engine (ICE) cars. My prediction, speaking as an experienced amateur mechanic, is that they will last a lot longer than we're used to seeing with ICE cars. EVs are seen as very cool and desirable, and the supply will remain lower than demand for quite a while to come. That all means longer loan terms or lease lookalike loans could be a lot more practical and a lot less risky.

People will seek solutions for range anxiety

Range anxiety is the EV owner's fear that they'll run out of juice on a longer trip. Some families will keep an ICE vehicle in the driveway for these occasions. Some members might depend on an occasional rental to cover the range gaps — what if you could offer a bundled Platinum card with discount car rental rates and included waiver insurance? Maybe you could offer EV buyers a refi feature to allow members to keep their ICE vehicle more easily instead of trading it in. Or perhaps there's a car sharing service in your area you could strike a deal with. Maybe you could sponsor or install charging stations.

Get out in front and toot your own horn

Don't forget to market your EV or green vehicle financing — even for members who would never consider an EV, there's an undeniable cool factor plus a great halo effect from being flexible and creative in your financing solutions. Show members you're leading the way.

A little medieval, a little modern

by Brian Wringer

My wife and I just closed on refinancing our house today to get a lower rate. Throughout the lengthy process (five weeks!?!), I was struck most by the things that hadn't changed at all since 2005.

I mean, you'd think that nine years of progress in the internet age would have made more of a dent in the mortgage business. Shouldn't we be able to just fill a few fields in an online form, tap "OK" after a moment while our credit and life history are checked, and be done? (And afterwards, we could hop in our flying cars and go get ice cream…)

A few things have changed for the better — we were able to begin the process with an online application and a few phone calls (we live about 70 miles from our credit union). And many of the documents and instructions along the way were handled via PDFs sent as emails. To me, a searchable "paper trail" I can store in the cloud is far more useful than a folder stuffed with dead tree scraps and scribbled signatures.

I suppose that no matter how modern the credit union is, they're still dealing with local and state government and laws from the Dark Ages. Many mysterious rituals involving scribbles on pieces of dead trees must still be observed in the world of real estate.

Credit Union Marketers generally aren't involved in Operations or Underwriting, but if you're responsible for effective marketing, you have to get involved. The member experience is a factor in your credit union's success, and sometimes someone has to stop and ask: how can we make this easier and better for the member? How can we make this faster and more efficient for all of us?

As I have mentioned before, every added step your members have to take reduces the number who complete your application or open an account.

Those mysterious millenials

by Brian Wringer

It seems everyone is trying to crack the "riddle" of marketing to young adults. As the Mysterious Millenials enter their early 20s, just about every industry is holding its breath, waiting to see just what they'll actually do.

As it turns out, Millenials are different, very different. And massive changes are on the way.

For example, as soon as we started working, the very first thing my generation (I graduated high school in 1986) did was to go out and buy cars. My parents and their parents did the exact same thing. Millions upon millions of cars, the best and fastest we couldn't quite afford. We were eager to be independent and enjoy the fruits of our minimum wage labors. A bit later on in life, we lined up to buy houses, the bigger the better. In a nutshell, these big-ticket purchases have been driving the economy and expanding in a pretty predictable way for the last 60 to 80 years.

But Millenials aren't so predictable. in 2010, adults between the ages of 21 and 34 bought just 27 percent of all new vehicles sold in America, down from the peak of 38 percent in 1985.

If you're a car maker (or a lender) a cold shiver probably just snaked up your neck. The same thing applies to houses — Millenials have different tastes. Bigger is not better, and they pay a lot of attention to things like environmental impact. They're renting apartments and buying condos where they can walk or cycle to work and shopping. Part of that is the economy, of course, but much can also be attributed to changes in priorities and tastes. Even Millenials with money are spending it very differently.

If you go out and talk to a few younger folks, the differences in values and priorities are astonishing. Many are happily still living with parents during and past college — absolutely unthinkable to my generation. And they're driving a lot less. For example, one of my 19 year old relatives doesn't have a drivers license yet, and doesn't particularly care whether she ever gets one. Driving is just a hellishly expensive, risky hassle, and she and lots of her friends have simply opted out.

If she does ever decide to buy a car, will she be most concerned with the loan rate or with the total cost of ownership? What if she finds a nice used electric car that needs a battery pack? Will you be able to put together a loan that works for her? What if she needs driving lessons?

Changes are coming, and credit unions will have to adapt.

Unemployed Millennials: How will they affect your CU?

by Kent Dicken

Traditionally, college grads hit the market, land their first job, and quickly step up into bigger and better positions with bigger and better paychecks. However, the Great Recession has kept many Millennials out of that first job.

Officially, the unemployment rate for 18-29 year olds stands at 9.1%. If you add in those that have stopped looking for a job, unemployment in that age group would be 15.5%. Out of the 6.2 million Americans that have dropped out of the labor market, 1.4 million are under 25.

That also means that a lot of young people have been kept from, or may even be losing, that first decade of rapid job growth. Since that early career jump makes a big difference in future advancement, what does that mean for credit unions in another decade?

Those 25-35 year-olds may not be buying cars, houses, etc. like their parents. At least not as young as their parents were.

Yes, there will still be successful people of all ages, and certain industries such as science, technology, engineering and math will continue to grow — but other occupations may not see the same growth. Your loan volumes may go down, and your product marketing mix may need to shift accordingly. At the very least, you won't be able to segment your marketing by age as much as you might today.

But it isn't all doom and gloom, and there are always opportunities for a forward-thinking credit union. Rather than expecting Millennials to come to you with a steady paycheck, what can you do to help them become a productive member of society (and a good credit risk)? Could your CU start a crowdfunding program within its membership to help young entrepreneurs? Help set up Peer-to-Peer Education Loans? Job Fairs? What alternative steps can you take now, to ensure they become life-long CU members?

After all, generating alternatives should be second nature to a movement that started out of a cigar box.

Make some EMV lemonade

by Brian Wringer

The switch to EMV cards is supposed to be coming in 2015, and everyone's in a tizzy. Merchants are wailing about the potential cost, CFOs are grumpily adjusting next year's budgets, and everyone's wondering if the increased security of that groovy little gold chip will be worth the trouble.

What's a credit union marketer to do? Get on board fast, and make the most of it! When Visa and MasterCard hand you lemons, it's time to make some EMV flavored lemonade.

1) Educate
The average consumer has no idea what EMV cards are or that they're on the way. It's the marketer's job to lay any fears to rest, explain why they're getting another card, what the chip can and cannot do, how to use it, and what the benefits will be. Don't wait for the mass media to get it completely wrong.

2) Own It

Don't just rely on the generic marketing from MasterCard and Visa — put your own spin on things. Have an awesome new card designed instead of using the same old thing or a generic design. You know your cardholders best, and you know what will appeal to them most. It's important that they perceive the change to EMV cards is something you're doing for them, not something you're being forced into.

3) Talk about benefits from the cardholder's perspective

Got a lot of globetrotters? Point out that their EMV cards will be a lot easier to use internationally. Been through some massive reissues (who hasn't)? Show how EMV cards reduce the inconvenience and bother of fraud, identity theft, and new cards.

4) Get out in front

Would you rather lead, follow, or get shoved out of the way? Start making your plans for the switch to EMV cards early, and start preparing and educating your cardholders yesterday. By the time the new cards go out, they'll be eager to switch. Better yet, they'll perceive your institution as a leader who's using the latest technology to keep their money safe. Build around your brand strengths, not just fraud fears.

5) It's worth doing right.

Make sure your EMV conversion is a success. Carve out some space in your 2015 marketing plan and pump a few extra dollars into your marketing budget to make sure your cardholders get the right messages at the right times so they're ready to hit the ground running when they get their new cards. It'll pay off big with a smoother transition, fewer questions and problems, increased usage, and reduced fraud.

Millennials: No Car, No House, No CU Income?

by Kent Dicken

My youngest son sort-of-hates cars. Sure, Grandma's-hand-me-down-Buick helps him get around town when he comes back to visit family. But that's also a big reason why he plans to always live in a city with a decent mass transit system. He doesn't want to own any car, or make monthly payments for it, much less pay for the gas, insurance, and upkeep.

He also doesn't plan to ever buy a house. Doesn't want to mow a yard. Or paint. Or mulch. Or take out a dozen dead ash trees. Or replace siding that has been the target of woodpecker attacks. He has seen his Dad handle all these and more over the last few years and wonders out loud why anyone sane would want to take on all that work. (His Dad is wondering the same thing.)

It's not that he's a slacker or a bum. He's a millennial.

He, like many others of his generation, sees life as being less about "things" and more about living a rewarding and fulfilling life. He has two Bachelor degrees, gave up a good (but somewhat boring) job to go teach in China, and has recently been accepted to Australia National University with the goal of getting his Masters in Linguistics. Based on his intentions to "see the world", I would be surprised to see him settle down in one city, at least for a few more years. His friends seem to think along the same lines.

Now, whenever I am asked by clients about how to reach the millennials, how to bring them in as the next wave of members to keep the credit union alive and thriving, I think of my son and his friends. I start to wonder why a credit union would choose to target him as a member if he isn't ever going to take out a car loan or mortgage.

Then I relax and remember that most credit unions don't think like banks. Because millennials bring tons of opportunities. They're productive, passionate, and smart as hell. They are valuable members to have.

You just have to be ready to adapt to the world citizen of the future:

- Every modern citizen, for example, needs a credit card. What tools can you give them for managing their money? Can you handle direct deposits from China? How good are you at handling international wire transfers?
- Would some of them use a concierge service? What about a service where the CU has power of attorney to handle certain things for the member while they are out of the country?
- Car sharing and leasing services are going to grow in the future — what financial tools might be needed for this? (And why don't more CUs offer ANY sort of lease alternatives?) Can you set up the lease and have a new electric car waiting at the airport for a high-income young software developer with no permanent US address arriving from China next Tuesday?
- Can you handle a person who has no fixed address? How do you handle a family with addresses in three countries? At what point do you need 24 hour staff to cover all global time zones?
- Closer to home, there's a massive student loan crisis looming. Same for health care. What are you doing about it? What are your young members doing about it, and how can you help?

Money is going to continue to make the world go around for the foreseeable future, but it's going to look a lot different. Car loans and mortgages, much like checking accounts, may be starting to fade away. Whether this is an opportunity or a disaster depends entirely on your CU's response.

LEADERSHIP

Meh boss? Maybe it’s you.

Does your marketing department deserve more respect?

by Kent Dicken

Your in-house marketing department is likely made up of capable, well-qualified and talented people, yet it may feel that you never get any respect from management or the rest of the company. You seem to get stuck doing all the small, tedious jobs while outsiders are brought in for the big, important projects. You obviously know your credit union, its products, services, members, and even your competition – so why are you not seen as experts at what you do?

There are three likely reasons:

1. You're too close. In corporate-think, when you are right down the hall, you can't be experts because experts are hard to find. Familiarity may not always breed contempt, but closeness and apathy are often best buddies.

2. You only have one built-in client. That client isn't going anywhere, so you don't always see the need to keep that client happy. Paradoxically, you also can't tell your client "no" if you want to be seen as a team player.

3. Because you only have one client, you have never had to market yourself. Marketing is about controlling the type of work you get to do, not the volume of work you get. If your client only knows what you have done in the past rather than what you're capable of, that means you need to market your department internally. Think of your department as a client, and develop a marketing plan to get where you want to be.

As with most marketing plans there are three distinct phases:

1. DISCOVER. The first step is to gather all the facts. Not only do you need to find out what everyone knows, you also need to find out what they don't know. You could do this yourself, or hire an outside consultant. Either way, these are the first important steps to take:

• Start by assessing your team. Every member has different capabilities and skills, and may have picked up additional training on their own or at previous jobs. Some may have even been stuck in a position that needed filling rather than a position which they're better suited. You need to know the capabilities of your team (potential), where they excel (expertise), and where they could use some help (need).

• Survey internal clients. Ask them how you have done in the past, whether you have kept them well-informed on the progress on those jobs, and whether they got the results they needed. Then, if they have used an outside firm, ask if there is anything they experienced that they would like to see as part of your internal process.

• Understand your own brand positioning. If you position yourself as the low-cost, do-it-all resource, you also lower your perceived value to your internal client. Outside firms tend to get projects because they are focused and specialized, not all-purpose generalists that try to do everything as cheap as possible. Remember, you are THE Brand Champion. No one knows your credit union like you do.

2. DEVELOP. Once you have uncovered all of your positives and negatives, then you need to build the structures you will need to improve your processes and capabilities:

• Develop internal systems. Treat your internal clients as clients. That means developing a standard process for starting every job, setting up a system to ask all the right questions and get all the pertinent information before beginning the work. That means your clients have to treat you professionally as well (no more being told "we need an ad Thursday" while you're passing someone in the hallway.) You also need to start tracking how you use your time so that you can provide realistic timetables and consistent progress updates, as well as accurate estimates of outside expenses and delivery dates.

• Create your own marketing plan. Now that you have the structure in place, you need to show everyone what you can do. Options you might want to consider are: company-wide emails that highlight the results you accomplished for another department, lunch-and-learn marketing seminars for co-workers that are both fun and informative, and updating your workspaces to make the atmosphere as creative as the people in it.

• Build a list of who you want to bring in. Now that you know your strengths and weaknesses, you need to focus on doing the work that fit your team's skills so that you excel at those projects, and connect with outside partners when it isn't a good fit. That way you remain in control of projects, and are seen as the expert because you always provide the best solutions.

• Consider a chargeback system. When dollar signs are attached to a project, expectations are higher on both sides. These can be on paper only, with funds "transferred" when the project is complete, or, even better, part of each department's actual budget. Not only will your internal client focus on the important projects instead of silly requests, but you will be accountable for the quality of the work and share credit for the results. Offer to help other departments with their marketing budgets and you open more opportunities to talk about what you do.

All of which leads up to the third and final phase:

3. DELIVER. Every time.

Big decisions are more successful when everyone understands WHY.

by Kent Dicken

When it comes to big decisions, some people seem to know what to do. They understand the need for a change, and they take it as their personal responsibility. They take the lead, build consensus, and make it happen.

What I don't understand are people that let others decide for them — especially on big decisions, the type that could mean the difference between future success and failure.

I've seen CEOs — people that were hired to lead — choose to hand off major decisions to the group, without any preface or explanation. I've seen one negative comment during a management meeting knock out a perfectly good option without any further discussion. I've seen CMOs spend good money on member research, only to have it ignored because a Board Member wasn't comfortable with any kind of change. (CEO to CEO: Remember there's a difference between "building consensus" and simply being a doormat.)

If any of this sounds familiar, then I suggest you change your approach, starting with this one basic concept:

Big decisions are always more successful when everyone understands WHY.

This begins with you. Every big decision needs a champion and if you aren't convinced, then you won't be able to get anyone else to understand, either. Once you get your head wrapped around it, then you need to champion the idea and help others understand why. Get their buy-in, and get them to make a group decision to change.

Then you can start your search for a solution. Do your research, hire experts when out of your knowledge or comfort zone (but only if you are ready to listen to their recommendations), review the best options, build a strategy and then a plan. If you have to go back to the management team or Board, remind them of their decision to make a change before you present the best solution. Move forward and don't let anyone, including yourself, second-guess the decision everyone made.

CEO to CEO: Marketing is either your baby or your fault

by Kent Dicken

When you think about what Marketing accomplishes, are you usually excited or puzzled?

I've been lucky enough to own my own marketing company for over 25 years. I also consult with companies that want to boost the performance of their internal Marketing team. Previously I worked as a designer/director at other agencies, at corporations and even as a state employee.

On every occasion, I have found the boss' attitude and approach towards Marketing to be the biggest difference-maker in accomplishing goals and obtaining highly successful results. Those that understand that good marketing is a wise investment, not an expense, do pretty well. But those that understand that GREAT marketing is an INCREDIBLE investment do even better.

That's why I wanted to share my recommendations on how to turn a mediocre Marketing Department into the growth engine of the future that you need:

1. Marketing should be headed by no less than a VP.
On your executive team, does Marketing have a seat at the table or are they mostly responding to directions from someone else?The CEO's attitude towards Marketing helps set the tone for everyone else on the executive team. That's why your Marketing person should at least be at the VP level, because they need the authority and resources to get things done. They need to have a seat at the table so they understand what solutions are needed on a strategic level, and so they have a hand in setting policy. They need to be given your support, and they also need to be held to the high standards expected of the rest of your team.

2. Stop hiring people who can draw.
The last person you need on the payroll is someone who only knows how to lay out your newsletter, write your ads or update your

brochures. You don't need someone who can "sort-of" use layout and image editing software — those talents can be bought from an outside source whenever you need them, without paying for salaries, sick days, desks and computers. Think of it this way: $40K salary + $10K benefits = a whole lot of great outside creative work, and hiding overhead $ in the HR budget isn't a very efficient use of financial resources.

3. Hire for strategic talents instead.
Marketing can help you grow faster than any other department. That's why you need people who can think strategically and think for themselves, see the Big Picture, connect the dots, and plan ahead. Hire for vision, creativity, and leadership. Hire people who have the potential of moving up to your job (when you are done with it, of course.)

4. Stop filling chairs and start filling needs.
Instead of looking at candidates as a way to fill a vacancy, focus on finding people with specific talents:

Big Picture Producer – The most important person to find is someone who can see and understand what needs to be done, and has the power to plug in the people with the talent, creativity, expertise and perspective to meet those needs. Your Big Picture Producer should have the flexibility, authority and access to the resources needed to enact change, not just maintain the status quo.

Brand Champion – Your brand is more than a logo or business card; your brand is what the world thinks of you. That's why someone has to live and breathe and tend to your brand every day. Does this promotion fit with the image you want to portray? Does this new fee help or hurt your image? Should we support this non-profit organization, or this one? Your ideal Brand Champ should be someone that understands the power of a unique, true, and emotional brand, that leads and lives the organization's brand culture, and is a strong advocate for the member/customer/user experience.

Social Hubster – Training staff and connecting to the community has never been more important. You need a never-met-a-stranger, business development/PR pro on steroids, the person who knows how to combine social media with handshakes in order to connect people together and get results. Confident, enthusiastic, and often extroverted, she should be able to communicate with all audiences, even those very different than herself.

New Product Designer/Disrupter – Who better to create products that people will want to use than a creative that understands people? How many things can be improved over "the way we've always done it"? You want someone with the unique ability to see things that your IT and Operations people may not, that is willing to push the envelope and never settles for boring or bland.

Idea Generator – These people are extremely hard to find. Education and job training can produce workers that do their job. Only occasionally do we get the brainstormers, the innovators, the creatives with minds that make intuitive leaps, the people that keep throwing out new ideas and just can't turn it off. If you see one of these, hire them immediately, then figure out what to do with them.

5. Some of the staff you have now may fit these roles — if you give them the opportunity. Stop pigeon-holing them in the jobs they have and challenge them to show you what they can do. Remember, when expectations are low, so are the results.

Money isn't everything – budget time and attention too

by Brian Wringer

What's your total marketing budget?

No, not just the number of dollars you spend on media, services, and clicky pens. I'm talking about the other parts of the equation: time and attention. Time + attention + money = total resources.

Time, of course, is a combination of staff time (how much time can and should you spend planning, directing, evaluating, deciding, and executing?) as well as calendar time (how long does it take to get things done?).

Attention is probably the most important, but it's hardest to manage and nearly impossible to quantify. It's a combination of several things — levels of care, responsibility, effort, and priorities. What are you willing to neglect in order to give a certain project the attention it needs? What can you delegate? What do you need to handle personally? (Or what should others delegate to you?) How much do you honestly care? Where does it make the most sense to trade dollars for time and attention, such as by using the services of trusted experts?

Great marketing demands plenty of time and attention, but these too often get neglected in the mad scramble to obtain, justify, increase, track, and evaluate dollars. Make sure you budget the time and attention needed to do things right and make the most of your dollars.

In-house, or outsource? 3 ways to tell.

by Kent Dicken

Over the last few years, the economy was obviously a factor in tightening budgets and cutting back on outside expenses. Which meant that In-house marketing departments had to take on more and more responsibilities in keeping that sales pipeline flowing.

Of course there was some interesting management logic that happened at the same time. For some in-house groups that meant more personnel could be added because the HR budget was a different line item than Marketing. (I never have figured that one out.) But for most marketing departments it simply meant that they were expected to accomplish more things with less people, less budget, and less time.

Thankfully, the economy seems to be returning back to normal, and apparently your workload has increased as well. We've certainly seen an uptick in new campaigns as well as an renewed interest in rebranding and web sites.

So when is it better to keep it in-house, and when is it best to use outside resources? It usually comes down to one or more of these three reasons:

1. Capacity. If you're booked solid and don't have the time or the hair left to pull out, you need to find a cost-effective way to take some things off your plate. Decide who you want to use by what is most important to you: quality, price, creativity, the capability to deliver what you need when you need it, etc. Keep in mind that you will still have to find time to manage that resource and give timely feedback in order to keep everything on schedule. A provider who's familiar with you and your brand will save a LOT of time and require a lot less "babysitting".

2. Expertise. Some projects don't fit the skill set of the people you have in-house. Whether it is designing and coding a web site, shooting video, or coming up with a unique creative concept for your next campaign, pull in the experts when you don't have the capability or you're in a rut. For example, if you have staff who are better at production than out-of-the-box concepts and copy, consider hiring pros to develop the concept, copy and design of the initial pieces as a starting point.

3. Objectivity. Some projects are simply too big. I don't know of many successful rebrandings or web site redesigns that were done in-house. Some projects are simply too dangerous to handle in-house. When you (or your Board/Management Team) need to hear and make decisions on the truth, without any mixed agendas, you need an outsider's perspective and experience.

Meh boss? Maybe it's you.

by Kent Dicken

You may actually have a lousy boss and work in a toxic environment. If so, then you should run, not walk, to the nearest job exit. But if your Boss is basically okay, yet your job seems to be going nowhere and you don't seem to get the opportunities you say you want, then it may not be the fault of how she manages you.

It may be the fault of how you are managing her.

Managing your boss has nothing to do with office politics, manipulation and maneuvering, kissing up, or even being the boss's toady. I'm referring to the steps you can take to become the valuable, indispensable asset that your boss needs; how to help set and meet expectations and thereby gain the influence you need to get things done and boost your career. When you "manage up", you are building a long-term working relationship with your boss, with the goal to obtain the best results for not only you, but also your boss, and your entire organization.

Here are three steps you need to take in order to start managing your boss (and your career):

1. Understand your boss's personality, preferences & perspective.
Every boss has different likes, hot buttons, weaknesses and strengths, so the better you understand why your boss does what she does, the better you are positioned to deliver results. Try to put yourself in her

shoes, even if you'd never wear heels that high. Avoid her pet peeves (like a loud radio or not participating in a group discussion), and recognize that her weaknesses may also be an opportunity for you to build on your strengths. When you know what drives your boss (or what drives them crazy), you can both start to communicate without all of those distractions.

2. Communicate directly and regularly.
Most bosses want those that report directly to them to also be direct. They need to know that the information they receive is accurate, the steps taken are timely, and that the input given is truthful (even sometimes when they don't want to hear the truth.) Talk to your boss face-to-face, not through email or by post-it notes with smiley faces. Be sure to keep bosses in the loop on all progress, and avoid surprises even if they are good surprises, so that they are always ready to share the news with their boss. Keep the conversation going both ways — ask for direct feedback and learn to accept it when it is given.

3. Provide solutions, not just problems.
Problems are going to pop up, regardless of your efforts to prevent them. And trying to sweep problems under the rug will only hurt you in the long run, because bad news doesn't get any better with age. A key component of managing up is being trustworthy. By proposing solutions at the same time you let your boss know about the problem, it shows that you have thought the situation through, which will help to build trust in both directions. Never go over their head or behind their back with a problem (unless the problem is the Boss.)

You may just find that you have more control over your job environment than you might imagine.

The epic battle between Marketing and Accounting

by Kent Dicken

Some things just don't mix: Light and dark. Fire and Ice. Marketing and Accounting.

But why has there always been this constant struggle between the two sides? Why does Marketing see Accounting as a miser with an iron grip on the budget, while Accounting sees Marketing as a wasteful spendthrift with no sense of ROI?

My feeling is that the whole matter is one big misunderstanding between right-brained and left-brained people. They just don't understand how each other thinks.

After all, it's not like only one side is interested in seeing the credit union grow. It's not that either are unwilling to work with others to achieve common goals.

They just may not have seen WHY they should work together.

The Chinese philosophy of yin and yang is based on the idea that seemingly opposite forces are actually interconnected. They are complementary, not combative, and together form a whole greater than each individual part.

Marketing and Accounting are similar opposites, and each one balances the other in a way that nothing else can. Marketing is responsible for growth, for the future potential of the credit union, while Accounting is responsible for the bottom line, the foundation of the credit union.

Both are extremely important roles, for without both, there is no credit union in the future.

How to turn your CFO into Marketing's BFF

by Kent Dicken

Be honest. Are you BFFs with your CFO? Or do you have to fight for every penny and justify every expenditure? Ever been blindsided by a budget cut? The struggle between Marketing and Finance goes back to the days of cave painting, but it doesn't have to be that way.

It's not that CFOs are bad people, nor do they dislike the people in Marketing. It's their training, not their fault. They're simply being blinded by their own accounting rules.

According to the rules of accounting, any outgoing money has to be shown as an expense, but there's no place in the ledger to list potential future profit. Once Marketers understand that, it may be easier to understand why CFOs view marketing as an expense and not as an investment.

Unfortunately, some CFOs don't seem to grasp that accounting rules aren't perfect.

(To the CFOs and CFOs-turned-CEOs that may be reading this post, I know that's dangerously close to heresy, but follow me here for a little bit…)

According to Wikipedia, an **expense** "is an outflow of cash or other valuable assets from a person or company to another person or company…technically, an expense is an event in which an asset is used up or a liability is incurred."

Meanwhile, an **investment** is "putting money into an asset with the expectation of capital appreciation, dividends, and/or interest earnings." In other words, an investment is an outlay of money within an acceptable range of risk, in order to receive an expected return.

Now if you'll humor me, I'd like you to re-read that paragraph above, but substitute "marketing" in place of "an investment".

Interesting, eh?

After all, the only reason to do any Marketing is to gain a positive return. In fact, great Marketing can return exceptional results, and with minimal risk. It's a fantastic investment.

For example, let's say you spend $5K on a marketing campaign that brings in 100 new members. If the lifetime value of those members is at least $100, you've just doubled your money. Not many investments can boast that type of return.

Plus you've added 100 new members, from 100 new families. Treat them well, gain their trust and increased business, and you have lots of ambassadors roaming the community when someone else is looking for a new loan or financial institution.

Bottom line?

Marketers, talk to your CFOs. You're on the same team. Figure out where they're coming from. Give them the data they need before and after campaigns. Refer to marketing and branding dollars as investments, not "costs", "expenses", or (Filene forbid) "spending".

Discuss risk up-front, in terms they understand — including the risks of inaction. (For example: if we don't market car loans, we'll lose at least 50 loans to MegaBank's summer campaign; if we don't update our web site, we'll lose out on younger members and high-income professionals who depend on their mobile devices.)

CFOs, for their part, need to look deeper into their training and accept that Marketing isn't an expense. It's not even a luxury.

It's an investment for future growth.

Get out there and get nosy

by Brian Wringer

I've always believed that credit union marketers have the right — no, the duty — to get involved in every aspect of credit union management. Even the most boring numbers stuff. Especially the boring numbers stuff. And the boring policy stuff. And operations, and product development, and… well, you get the idea.

In other words, go ahead and stick your nose in. As the Brand Custodian (would Keeper of the Brand Flame be too grand?) everything members see and experience is, in fact, a marketer's business.

For example, I noticed a couple of articles from the good folks over at CreditUnions.com on new approaches to lending risk management — for example, Give Underwriters A Reason To Say "Yes!" talks about training front-line staff to think like underwriters and advocate for members seeking loans who need a little flexibility. It turns out this leads to making a lot more good loans and a lot of happy, loyal members — pure brand and marketing gold.

It's the marketer's job to advocate for changes like this. And that means sticking your nose into ALM, underwriting, operations, training, and many other areas that probably aren't technically in your job description.

So get out there and get nosy!

Building the ideal credit union marketer

by Brian Wringer

Over the years, I've noticed that our most successful clients — the credit union marketers who get the best results and make this job a lot of fun — have a lot in common.

In fact, several years back, I started compiling a list of traits for our ideal client as a way to define our target market. And after a while, I started to notice that the list also looked a lot like an outline for an outstanding career in credit union marketing and management.

Of course, no one actually has ALL these traits, but we've found that the closer they get, the more the awards and successes tend to pile up!

Do you see yourself in this list?

Thinks strategically

- Comes to us with problems to solve and strategies to enact
- Harnesses our expertise, creativity, and perspective
- Understands that good marketing is a wise investment, not an expense
- Understands that great marketing is an incredible investment
- Thinks long-term, thinks in terms of strategy, not lists of tasks
- Tracks ROI, not impressions
- Understands "The Numbers" forward and backward, and exactly how marketing makes them move

Understands brand

- Understands the power of a unique, true, and emotional brand
- Understands brand continuity and flexibility
- Holds the CU to a world-class standard for quality
- Leads and lives the CU's brand culture
- Strong desire to tell the CU's story and push it to greatness
- Strong advocate for members and the member experience
- Embraces new technology and media that serve the brand

Willing and able to act

- Reports directly to the CEO (often has a VP title)
- Integral part of management team – goes to the ALM meetings, Board meetings, etc.
- Has strategic responsibilities and goals – performance judged on results and growth, not "neatness of desk" measures like % under budget
- Has flexibility, authority, and access to resources needed to enact change, not just maintain status quo
- Leads efforts to update, launch, and change products and procedures
- Works with a management team that sees the value of investing regularly in marketing and has a strategy for revising investments on the fly based on ROI, strategy, and goals
- Is willing to institute and campaign for needed changes (budget, culture, products)
- Makes decisions promptly; delegates wisely

Has great communication skills

- Has the talent to understand communication to target audiences very different than herself
- Is willing to learn from us and peers
- Is knowledgeable and willing to share
- Communicates strategy and actions directly to the Board of Directors regularly
- Able to talk "money-ish" with the CFO and "legal-ese" with Compliance

Personality

- Confident, enthusiastic, often extroverted
- Believes in the credit union difference just as much as we do
- Frustrated with limitations, a little impatient, ready to push things along
- Ability to be speak up quickly and clearly if something is not quite right
- Willing to push the envelope; never settles for boring, mild, or bland

Helping the not-so-ideal credit union marketer

by Brian Wringer

In my last article, I outlined the attributes of the Ideal Credit Union Marketer — an empowered, invaluable, brand-savvy communication dynamo coordinating a turbocharged marketing engine that powers record growth.

Let's face it — that kind of perfection would be kind of annoying. And out here in the real world, the Ideal CU Marketer doesn't exist — although we've worked with a few who come close.

The truth is, every CU marketer, even the very best, has several of the following "not-so-ideal" attributes. A big part of what we do is help figure out what challenges our clients are facing, and help them become heroes.

Lost in the trees, forgot all about the forest

A marketer's job is to help the credit union grow. That requires devising, revising, and carrying out a clear, long-term strategy. It's sooooo easy to get bogged down in the details of planning and executing and forget all about where the heck you're going and why.

- Unclear or nonexistent strategic planning, no clear connection to CU's overall financial plan.
- Confuses branding with identity (Our brand? Look at this cool logo!).
- Confuses "message" with "tag line".
- Thinking based on projects or promotions rather than overall positioning and strategy — every project starts over from scratch.
- Unable to stick with a strategic plan or even a consistent brand identity (But I'm so boooooored already — change everything!)

Planning perils

- Wingin' it — no marketing plan, no strategy at all.
- Planning paralysis — spends months crafting the perfect plan, yet taking no action.

- Undocumented – marketing plan gets written every year, and then gets ignored.
- Inflexible – marketing plan is the Final Word and the Law Everlasting, and Thou Shalt Not change The Plan.
- Budgeting based on "oh, whatever we spent last year".
- Budgeting based on "oh, whatever we spent last year" minus 10%.
- Budgeting via dartboard "oh, I like to spread things around".

Environmental disasters

Every marketer has to deal with some aspect of their environment that's counterproductive. It may be organizational, or it may be fellow management, or even the Board. You can't market effectively without access to the resources and respect needed, so savvy marketers have to learn to work around organizational obstacles.

- Wearing waaay too many hats — "VP Marketing/Branch Operations/HR", or "SVP" Marketing/IT/Facilities/Operations/Lending/HR/Special Projects".
- Low-level title, marketing shut out of upper mgmt decisions.
- Problems getting access to demographic data, no access to results (no MCIF, system outdated, IT issues).
- Problems interacting with CEO/management and/or Board.
- No influence or input into products — required to sell whatever the CU has to offer.
- Little to no authority – unable to approve anything or spend money without consulting the CEO/CFO/Board, etc.
- CEO insists on proofreading everything…

Knowledge gap

Sure, the "soft side" of marketing is a lot of fun, but sometimes CU marketers could stand to be a little more versed in the numbers and regulations that make CUs work.

- Lacks working knowledge of marketing regulations — unable to negotiate with Compliance Officer.
- Lacks working knowledge of CU financial fundamentals and financial goals.
- Unable/unwilling to calculate ROI.
- Unable to read a Call Report.

- Doesn't know the basic numbers for their CU — how much income an average auto loan generates, services per member, what a checking account costs, major ratios, etc.
- Cannot or does not participate in ALM, Rate, or Board meetings.

Taming the toxic client

by Brian Wringer

In my last two articles, I discussed iDiz Inc's perspective on Building the ideal credit union marketer and Helping the not-so-ideal credit union marketer. Now it's time to dish up some dirt!

With some people, it's almost impossible to develop a productive business relationship. I'm sorry to say we've encountered all the red flags below, but thankfully, there are very, very few truly toxic people in credit union land.

Trust issues
We understand — your brand is your baby, and it can be hard at first to trust an agency. Or maybe you've been hurt in the past, so it's hard to let go. These are all pretty normal feelings. But truly toxic clients cross the line into outright paranoia…

- Unwilling to share basic info — budget, strategy, goals, etc. C'mon, you have to tell the doctor where it hurts — we at least need to know the basics of what we're trying to do for you.
- Argues or complains about every invoice, even though it matches the signed estimate exactly.
- Drags needless complications into everything — complex contracts, compliance constipation, reams of RFPs, endless estimates, insane indemnification, etc.
- Constantly suspicious and defensive — demands examples and proof for every recommendation, always sure someone is trying to rip them off.
- Micromanages, or unable to delegate, yet perpetually unavailable.
- Has rapidly burned through several agencies and vendors.

Ethics, schmethics

- Asks us to copy someone else's work or concept; tries to circumvent or violate copyright.
- Demands free work or work "on spec". ("Speculative" work is demanding to see completed work for free before making the decision to commit to the project.)
- "Just one little bitty thing more…" Consistently demands work that's not part of the project estimate. We love to go above and beyond, but we also love to see our families once in a while.
- The Confusinator: sows discord by hiding information, lying outright, or telling different stories to us, their boss, and/or their co-workers.
- See you under the bus — blames everyone else for anything and everything that goes wrong.
- Creates a toxic work environment — rules minions with an iron fist, treats vendors badly, treats co-workers badly.
- Just a big ol' meanie.

Helpless

- Trapped — victim of a toxic work environment.
- Totally unrealistic expectations vs. resources. Sorry, a new web site is going to cost a little more than $500…
- Unable to plan ahead and always needs it tomorrow. We've been known to work miracles, but we need at least a little time…
- Unable or not allowed to make any decisions at all.
- Unable to give constructive feedback — "I don't know what's wrong, but I'll know when it's right. Try again. And again. And again."
- Recent financials out of whack, or way out of line with goals, with no explanation — unwilling to lend, stagnant or negative growth, lopsided operations costs, etc.

And don't worry — we've all made some of the mistakes on this list. No one gets the toxic title until it becomes a pattern!

WE DARE YOU

Dare to be human

How will you change the world in only 5 years?

by Kent Dicken

I've always been amazed at how the Beatles completely changed America's taste for music in just 5 short years. It was a culture shift that hasn't been equalled since.

Now, I admit I'm a huge Beatles nerd. I was just a kid when they were in their heyday, but I discovered their music in college and still listen to them today. My sons were so over-exposed to Beatles music that they both took an amazing music class on the band while at Indiana University (I sat in on a few of their classes, and highly recommend Dr. Gass' class) and know more about the band than I do.

What many people may not know is how hard the Beatles worked before they hit it big.

In 1960, the Beatles were just another English Skiffle band until they were hired at a dive bar in Hamburg, Germany. There, they played every night, all night long, refining their sound during five long stints over two years. Back in the UK, they played gigs and appeared on radio shows whenever they weren't in the studio, cranking out multiple singles and albums every year. In 1963 they did 3 tours of England in 6 months, left for 5 days in Sweden, then back again to England for another 6 week tour. In 1964 they staged 37 shows over 27 days in the Netherlands, Denmark, Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand. They made movies and music videos before MTV and YouTube ever existed. They greeted their fans, chatted up the press and posed for photographers over 100 times. They were everywhere.

Yet they were still somewhat unknown in the US. Because of a lack of marketing support by Capitol Records, EMI's American subsidiary, most Americans weren't aware of the Beatles. It wasn't until December 1963 that a $40K marketing campaign for the Beatles was launched in Tidewater VA, and in just a few days every other song played on the local radio station was a Beatle's recording. In January, they took that same campaign to New York. By the time they appeared on The Ed

Sullivan Show just one month later, 34% of the US population tuned in to see what the fuss was all about.

It was the evolution of their music over the next 5 years that made such a difference. Starting from their pop singles in 1963 (*She Loves You, Love Me Do, Please Please Me*), to the confident sound of their *Rubber Soul* LP, to the creative complexity of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in 1967, the Beatles moved popular music ahead further and faster than anyone else ever had. A process that started as cranking out a single in an afternoon had turned into a studio album that took over 700 hours to complete and included a 40-piece orchestra. Even after 1967, *The Beatles* (White Album), *Abbey Road* and *Let It Be* were major influences on other bands, musicians and music lovers across the world.

In just a few years the Beatles changed how we thought about music, influenced our cultural attitudes, and opened our eyes to new possibilities. They are also a great example of how many people you can reach, and what can be accomplished, when you combine talent with effort and good marketing.

We have lots of talent in our industry – all hard workers with plenty of marketing knowledge – so why couldn't we change how people think about their money in just a few years?

CUs are supposed to be all about empowerment, not just free checking and cheap car loans. But in a time where 1% own almost 50% of the total wealth of the world, it sure seems like a good time for someone to step up and help the other 99%. Not to mention the looming student loan crisis. There are other economic issues of our time where practical, nonpolitical leadership is desperately needed as well. So what are we going to do about it?

And if we don't do it, who will?

Dare to be human

by Brian Wringer

Go take a look at the web sites or marketing materials for a few extremely large companies. Take your pick — banks, car makers, restaurants, retailers, or manufacturing. Check out their social media postings.

Where are the people? The real people, not the retouched unrelated models portraying the Perfect American Family. With very few exceptions, you won't find anything that hasn't been approved by a committee and massaged by a legal team.

It's simple, obvious point, but it's worth re-examining once in a while: Human beings are wired to respond most strongly to other human beings. Real, live, messy, imperfect, uncertain, weird, funny, pimply, wonderful real people with real stories to tell.

I'd love to see more brands understand that, and have the guts to get real.

Stop aping the 5,000 pound gorillas — you have the very real advantage of being much closer to your audience. Tell stories to and about real people in your marketing, using real language. Have real interactions on social media and in person. Make mistakes, fix them, and apologize. Let your people be people. Blow up your punitive social media policy, banish market-speak, and abolish fine print. And would it kill you to crack a joke once in a while?

Dare to be human — people are loyal to people, not institutions.

Maybe it's time to ditch the RFP

by Kent Dicken

Let's say you have a big, important project in mind and you'll need to hire a vendor. So the first thing to do is get a committee together, lay out all the specifications in as much detail as possible, then send out a Request For Proposals (RFP) to a wide variety of vendors. Then just sit back, wait for the responses, reconvene the committee over an enchilada lunch, and pick the best one from the pile. Right?

Well, no. Not always. Or at least, there's a right way and a wrong way to go about it.

Here's a little secret: RFPs add significant effort, time, and money to a project, so only use the RFP process when you're sure it's needed: When you simply can't arrive at a decision any other way, when you're truly going to be comparing apples to apples, and when you need special expertise. If you can't get the project off the ground with your existing processes, resources, and contacts, then a concise, savvy RFP can be a worthwhile way to help you find the expertise.

Next time you are considering sending out an RFP, do yourself and everyone else a favor and ask yourself these four questions first:

1. Do I realistically have the budget to accomplish what I want in the way I want? First, do your research (check with peers and discuss your "wish list" with trusted vendors for ballpark numbers) to make sure your expectations are in the ballpark. And clearly disclose your budget and timeline expectations in the RFP. Any vendor worth working with will respect your budget; there's absolutely no reason to be cagey about the numbers. And any vendor worth working with will also be happy to show you how to make the most of your available budget.

2. Am I sending out RFPs to a long list of companies I have no intention of hiring? Stop. Wasting. Everyone's. Time. Remember, the idea of an RFP process is to find experts who are the right fit. Do your research up-front, get in touch, have some conversations, and narrow it down to two or maybe three capable providers. I'm confident that most of my competitors will agree with me — if you already have a strong preference, then a proposal isn't going to change your mind. If you're just sending out the same RFP to every vaguely related firm that popped up in a Google search, or if you're going through the motions because your boss wants you to "get some bids", then quite frankly we all have better ways to spend our time.

3. Is this a laundry list or a strategic outline? A list of 120 detailed questions with 40 pages of appended legalese might enable you to tick off checkmarks on a list, but will it tell you whether a vendor is really like to work with? Will it help you assess their expertise? What they really need to know are your goals and strategy for the project — define the parameters as quickly and as loosely as possible. Remember, you're hiring pros to solve a problem or reach a goal.

4. What happens if I ditch the RFP completely? There's a good chance you will be happier with the end result and you'll spend less money and time. Do your diligence, find the right provider that fits your needs, schedule two-way conversations with all of the decision makers, share your brand guidelines, budget, and business objectives, and negotiate a price. That's the fair way to work with a partner.

5 New Year's Resolutions we dare you to make

by Kent Dicken

Every New Year we make resolutions to improve our future; go to the gym, lose weight, get a raise, take that dream vacation, finally pay off the credit card…you know the drill. Lists are written and promises are made (mostly to ourselves, and mostly forgotten within a few days.)

But what if your department did it as a group? What if everyone resolves to accomplish one extraordinary, game-changing goal that will help grow exponentially within the next year, and then held each other accountable?

Here’s are five resolutions that we dare you to make:

1. Be radically transparent. How do you expect people to see you as anything but a bank if you don’t show them the difference? Take authenticity in your branding to a whole new level and show them exactly what you do with the money — how much is spent on salaries and overhead, how much is used to lower rates on loans, how much is reinvested to give them better access through branches and improved web sites. Not only will it improve accountability, it will become the mission for everyone.

2. Bust up silos. Most companies get way too comfortable doing things they way they always have, creating departmental silos of employees by product or function. letting them burrow into their cubicles and routines. But if Susie is sick, who is going to update the web site? Bust up those silos, spread the responsibilities out, and make sure everyone understands just how interconnected their jobs are.

3. Put everyone in the Marketing Department. People need reasons to come to the credit union, so you need everyone focused on how to differentiate your credit union from all of the other options available. Get your entire staff involved in ongoing conversations with members in order to find out what they want and need, then build the products and marketing to match. Once everyone understands how their work helps to satisfy and attract members, you begin to build brand ambassadors internally.

4. Focus on vertical, not horizontal. Stop trying to be everything to everybody; find a niche and excel at it instead. Being known as “THE place to get a great auto loan” is much better positioning than “kind of like a bank, but not a bank”, plus it makes money. Focusing on a specific demographic may provide a tremendous opportunity: Hispanics were over half (56%) of the population growth in the US last year, there are over 9 million women-owned businesses in the US generating $1.4 trillion in sales.

5. Bake innovation into your budget. Unless you set aside a portion of your budget purely for innovation, any new idea will have to wait until there is money for it to happen. Budget for the cost, and innovation will become part of your culture.

What if we invite the angry?

by Brian Wringer

As we all know, one of the brutal realities of the credit union world is that financial services are simply a "utility" to most people, like reliable electricity or clean running water. These services are all vital to civilized life, but they're mostly invisible.

It's tough to face as a marketer, but the truth is that most people don't spend two seconds per day thinking about their financial institution. Sure, people think about money all the time — they just don't think about their bank or credit union.

One exception, of course, is when something goes wrong. When someone is truly irked and ready to Hulk out — that's the time to bring them a solution.

What if you actually targeted the irked, annoyed, the angry, the boiling, hopping mad, the furious, the irate, the livid, and the aggravated? What if your credit union had a Screwup Strike Team, or a Money Mess Cleanup Crew ready to swoop in and save the day?

What if your credit union were the solution at an emotionally powerful point in someone's life? Sounds like a great way to gain an incredibly loyal new member.

Incredibly bad marketing advice

by Kent Dicken

We've been blogging for a few years now, always trying to give you good marketing advice in order to help you grow your credit union. But after 900+ posts we're getting a bit bored. So here is some incredibly bad marketing advice instead:

1) Your logo isn't sacred. Tweak it as much as you want.
No one really cares if it is supposed to be PMS 308, do they? Which means you should also update those accent colors. And that font

– who uses san serif type anymore, anyway? You always preferred something a bit grungier. Or medieval. After all, it's the same letters, in the same order, so everyone will know who it is. And next week you can change it again. With a retro Star Wars-look, maybe.

2) Share everything you do. All of the time.

Hey, social media is about sharing, about conversations, right? So why wouldn't everyone love to know that you are trying out for the local roller derby team. After all, your friends love all those tipsy tweets about what happens when everyone hangs out at the pub after a match. And your obsession with kitten videos and British sit-coms just make you real. Your CU's members should get to know you better.

3) Why pay for marketing, when social media is free?

Sure it takes some time out of your day, but there are so many places online to post something that you can just hop from one to the next and you'll never run out. I mean, who needs a plan? You're sure to reach tons of people if you do a little bit on each and every site sometime during the week. And if you don't get to it this week, there's always next month. You're getting a few likes and retweets so it must be connecting to someone. And if you need more, just give something away. Everybody likes FREE!

4) Don't look at what you get, just buy on the price.

The CFO only cares that you stay in budget, not that the website you just paid for wasn't optimized for search and won't let you update anything. And you got a great deal with that online printer, even if the people looked kinda green in the photos. Just tell everyone you shot the pictures at your branch in the next county – those people look funny anyway. Besides, look at all those extra spots you got on your radio schedule by not buying drive time. You RULE late night.

5) Okay is good enough.

As long as the basic idea is on there somewhere, everything's okay. You're pretty good with Word and with a little bit of time in MS Paint you can fit all kinds of words on that outdoor board. Plus you won't have to spend any money on those fancy-dancy designers that cost money, and your CFO really approved of that idea last time. Besides, all the good ideas have been used already, so just print the rate real big and call it a day.

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BECAUSE CREDIT UNIONS MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE,
and we like working for the good guys.

We started SharediDiz.com back in the fall of 2007. Our goal was to provide a unique voice and real value for credit union marketers, while keeping it interesting and fun to read. Over the years SharediDiz has grown to include over 900 posts, covering marketing, branding, creativity, business, culture and more.

In early 2010, we put together a book (*Shared iDiz*) of our favorite articles from the first two years. The book proved to be such a big hit we did it again (*More Shared iDiz*) two years later. *Even More Shared iDiz* is our third edition, and is, well, even more of the same.

We hope you enjoy reading and thinking along with us.

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