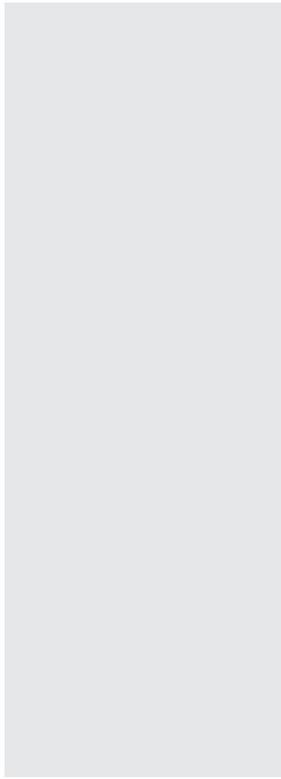




**How
credit union
marketers
make the world
a better
place.**

Shared iD!z



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8021 Castleton Road
Indianapolis IN 46250
877-576-0602
www.cuidiz.com
contact@idizinc.com

Book design by Sara Love, iDiz Incorporated

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Foreword



At iDiz Incorporated, we help marketers make better credit unions.

We do this because marketing is the engine that drives credit union sustainability and growth.

And we believe that what we do is important and valuable because credit unions make real, positive differences in the lives of millions of people. The world is a better place with better credit unions and more credit union members who participate more.

About two years ago, we started blogging about credit union marketing on sharedidiz.com. One of the most interesting and distinctive things about credit union marketing is the constant collaboration and sharing – it’s just part of the credit union way of doing things. SharediDiz is our way of participating in the conversation.

This book is a collection of our favorite articles from the first two years of sharedidiz.com. We hope you’ll enjoy reading and thinking along with us. If you haven’t done so already, please visit sharedidiz.com to see the latest articles and sign up for the weekly email or RSS feed. We post three new articles and a survey every week.

We look forward to adding your voice to the conversation – your ideas, thoughts, and comments are welcome, and if you’ve got something to say, we’d love to talk with you about a guest column.



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 of iDiz Incorporated, he is proud of the creative team he has assembled and the continued growth of the credit unions that iDiz has helped – not to mention all of the marketing awards that they have won together. When not working at iDiz, Kent works at throwing pots, trying to grow plants in the shade, paying for college for two sons, and is learning how to brew 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.



Kelley Parks

For nine years, Kelley has been the Vice President of Marketing & Business Development for Call Federal Credit Union. A graduate of Virginia Tech, Kelley has won numerous marketing awards, including the CUNA Marketing & Business Development Council's Marketing Professional of the Year, has innovated as part of the Filene i3 team, and has been involved in too many other credit union volunteer activities to list. A frequent contributor to Shared iDiz and an iDiz client, Kelley seldom sleeps as it interferes with her creative flow. If you ask her nicely, she will sing the alphabet backwards for you.



Lisa Taylor

Lisa Taylor is Project Manager at iDiz Incorporated. She grew up in Upstate New York, graduated from Northwestern University with an English/Teaching degree and moved to Indianapolis 16 years ago. She volunteers as a puppy raiser for Canine Companions for Independence and as an adult literacy tutor with Indy Reads. She is obsessed with knitting, is an avid reader, and trains so many dogs they have to take turns coming into the office.



Matt Rohland

Matt is iDiz's chief web developer, and a graduate of Taylor University. Matt combines fine arts talent and training with the programming chops to build amazing and effective web sites and applications. As the youngest member of the iDiz staff, he adds a unique perspective to clients' marketing. Although he spent most of his childhood in Egypt, Matt never had a pet camel, and can't imagine how his relatives in Pennsylvania got that idea.

Are you selling Sea Monkeys?



Is failure a winning strategy?

by Kelley Parks

I'll admit failure is my worst fear. Well, behind something happening to my loved ones and perhaps spiders. It's the fear of ridicule, criticism, and poor choices coming back to haunt.

Perhaps it's because people love to criticize. Heck, there's even a blog that is devoted to tracking failure of all shapes and sizes.

But it seems that there are real merits to failure. In fact, going out on a limb, the willingness to fail and learn from it is what truly propels success. Consider this:

- Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team
- Freud was booed off stage the first time he tried to present ideas to the scientific community
- Winston Churchill failed 6th grade
- Henry Ford went broke 5 times
- 27 publishers rejected Dr. Seuss
- Babe Ruth struck out 1330 times
- Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper for his lack of imagination and ideas
- Charles Schultz had every cartoon he created rejected by his high school newspaper
- The first time Jerry Seinfeld went on stage he froze
- Beethoven's violin teacher described him as a "hopeless composer."

The marketing textbooks are filled with case studies of epic failures that seemingly cost companies and careers. My favorite is New Coke, the corporate American marketing blunder of the century. But when you consider that Coke made a significant gain in market share once Coca-Cola

Classic was introduced, it is easy to believe that the worst failure turned into the best win.

And in CU Land, University of Iowa Credit Union's renaming was stopped by the members just hours before it was to go live. Can you imagine a worse nightmare for a credit union marketer? But because of the resilience of their amazing Marketing Director, the credit union has seen double digit growth in all key areas since that fateful day.

So, should failure be an option? Is any publicity good publicity? Or is it simply a matter of how you rebound, the lessons you learn and how quickly you find your feet again? Failure provides an education no book can teach.

Maybe Churchill had it right: "Success consists of going from failure to failure without the loss of enthusiasm."

This is that time of year where we come face to face with the year's successes and failures. **So, if you had a few, consider yourself in good company.**

It's simple



by Lisa Taylor

It seems simple is the new black... or something like that. According to USA Today, simple is the latest marketing buzzword. Consumers have started demanding fewer ingredients, easier lifestyles, and more transparency. Frankly I'm all for it. Who wants complicated?

My first thoughts of a product using "simple" as a selling point were of Ivory soap - the "leading pure soap on the market." According to the nice folks who make the soap, "Ivory is a connection to the simple, pure times of yesteryear. It represents everyday moments that become special memories." Wow... all that from a bar of soap? If they say so.

But in researching this article, it does seem that marketers are increasingly touting the simpler aspects of their products (what's inside the box

and what's on the outside as well) and I'm sure there are lots of new ones in development, soon to be available at a store near you. Here are just a few examples of simple:

- Haagen-Dazs Five ice cream – the 5 ingredients are listed on the front of the container
- Natura Pet Products – fewer ingredients than any other pet food on the market
- Simple shoes – their taglines are “less>more” and “shoes for a happy planet”
- Real Simple magazine – “life made easier every day”
- Simple Living Network – where I found the following catchphrases: “Living in a way that is outwardly simple and inwardly rich” and “learning to do more with less”
- Simple Green cleaner – environmentally safe cleaning products
- “Simple” – a song by Katy Perry
- Twitter – the simplest method of communication on the web, they even limit how many characters you can type so that, well, you'll keep it simple.

Not surprisingly, there's even a credit union that uses the simple concept. Fairwinds Credit Union of Orlando, FL, offers Clear, “pure and simple banking” that includes free VISA, bill pay and overdraft protection.

What can you do at your credit union to make things simpler, easier for your members?

Clearly, consumers are looking for ways to simplify and make their lives easier. It's your job as marketers to figure out how to tell them you have exactly what they're looking for.

And please put away the hoops that they commonly have to jump through to get it.

Go guerilla to do more with less

by Kelley Parks

In a day when marketing budgets are lacerated and traditional media is inept, the question we all face is, “How do you break through?” It’s time to get innovative in the way we connect in our marketing. So, here are 5 of my favorite, inspirational stories where a marketer found new and creative means to dispatch an idea:

For the birds: When wine vineyards in Maine had problems with birds, Down East Credit Union sent local vineyard farmers mylar balloons emblazoned with their logo as an environmentally friendly way to scare away the birds. Not only did the balloons line the vineyards just in time to be seen by the thousands that make the trek to the Annual Common Ground Fair, but the story made a great feature in the local newspaper. Down East CU’s Marketeer, Linda Howe, reports this has been a great win for the vineyard farmers as well as a win for the credit union.

Up, up and away: Local marketing mavin Susan Epperson’s credit union sponsors a hot air balloon. The balloon has been known to fly overhead at local football games, outdoor concerts and most recently at the NASCAR race when it came to town. It’s fun to watch people’s mouths gape open as the balloon appears seemingly out of nowhere into the sky. Best of all, in Susan’s generous nature, she has shared the balloon with the rest of us for our local credit union cooperative marketing campaign – What if Credit Unions.

See Rock City: Rock City is a beautiful look-out mountain park in Chattanooga, TN. But perhaps more impressive than the view is the creative advertising tactics this park has used over the years. For 32 years, the owners of Rock City painted the words “See Rock City” on the sides of street-side barns to advertise the park all over the East Coast. At one point, over 900 barns were painted with the famous slogan, making it one of the most famous advertising and iconic slogans in American history.

Mime patrol: In Bogota, Columbia the injuries and deaths that occurred from people jay-walking were rampant. Rather than imposing fines or stricter laws, the Mayor of Bogota simply employed white-faced Mimes

to go into the streets and poke fun at drivers not obeying laws. Street related deaths and injuries in Bogota have gone down exponentially as a result. It seems that public humiliation is sometimes a greater deterrent than having to pay a fine. In fact, it's been so effective, the Mayor has hired even more Mimes to keep crime low.

You've been flocked: One of my favorite fundraising ideas I've heard recently is flamingo flocking. For a donation to a local charity, folks will "flock" your neighbor's yard with tacky pink flamingos and a giant yard sign that says, "Congratulations! You've been flocked!" Not only is it a great way to raise money for a charity, but also perfect revenge on a neighbor whose yard is just a bit too perfect.

So, what are you doing to make the most effective use of your members' money? As our budgets get the ax and we are challenged to produce more with less, it's a great time to kick the creativity up a notch and go guerrilla.

Your media mix may be wrong

by Kent Dicken

Contrary to popular opinion, social media may not be the best way to reach young people. Consider these stats that have been published recently:

Twitter evolving into entertainment focus.

According to Nielsen, Twitter has grown 1,928% in a year, with 21 million unique visitors each month. Even though Twitter started with a tech-oriented focus, as it has become more mainstream it has followed the interests of its broadening audience, and according to Mashable.com, become more focused on entertainment. Don't believe it? Take a look at TwitterholiC, where celebrities make up the vast majority of top Twitter users and followers.

Teens spend less time online and more time texting.

Teens spend about 11.5 hours/month online since they have less access through the day, according to Nielsen Online. Compare that to an average of 29+ hours for the average adult, who spends most of the work day

connected to the internet. Yet both groups access similar web sites (41% of online teens visit Facebook, 33% MySpace and 2/3 of them update their page at least once a week.) But that pales to texting numbers: 83% of teens with phones use text, and the *average* teen sends or receives 2899 text messages per month (but only 191 calls).

Facebook is getting older, but not Old.

In the six months between January 4th and July 4th of 2009, the number of Facebook users older than 55 grew over 500%, and ages 35-54 grew 190%. 18-24 year olds now only make up 25.1% of the Facebook crowd, and 35-54 year olds now make up 28.2%, according to Mashable.com. Interestingly, numbers of users over 55 have been decreasing lately.

Teens don't tweet. But they do watch TV.

Actually teens do tweet, but not as much as you might think. According to Nielsen, 84% of Twitter users are over 24 years old and over 90% of Tweetdeck's users are as well. Twitter reaches 6.6% of those under 25, 12.1% of those over. However, TV viewership is up for teens, now over 104 hours/month. Which is still low compared to 153+ hours/month for the average person. (*5 hours a day? Get a life, people!*)

90% of people who can TiVo ads, do.

And only 14% of people trust advertisements, according to Erik Qualman, author of the blog Socialnomics.... which lists these interesting bits:

- 80% of Twitter usage is on mobile devices...people update anywhere, anytime...imagine what that means for bad (member) experiences?
- 78% of consumers trust peer recommendations.
- More than 1.5 million pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photos, etc.) are shared on Facebook... daily.

What do these mean for your CU marketing?

With any media you have to know who you are reaching. You should review your media choices regularly to make sure you are reaching your target audience. Look for recently updated sources that will give you unbiased information.

Social media rules are changing quickly, so you can't jump in without a purpose and a strategy and still expect to connect with your market. You need a focus, almost a micro-focus. And the best way to find that focus is to look at your members – are you serving working moms, small business owners or rocket scientists? What brings them together? What will give them a reason to follow you so that you can engage with them?

A whole lot of crazy

by Kent Dicken

Birthers. HealthScare hecklers. *Gun-righters who carry assault weapons to Presidential speeches.* Insurance and banking executives cashing bloated paychecks even after their companies had to be bailed out.

It seems to me that Americans have seen a whole lot of Crazy lately.

But then I saw the latest outdoor board from PETA, and I realized that all that other stuff was just normal crazy.

PETA, on the other hand, really is nuts. At least in terms of their marketing.

PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), an organization funded by donations, apparently doesn't need donations because they don't care who they tick off – as long as they get publicity. What kind of marketing strategy is that? I don't know of any other organization that goes to such lengths to consistently offend and alienate different groups of people.

Consider these examples, all in 2009:

(January) PETA produces their "Veggie Love" ad to run during the Super Bowl, which featured barely-dressed female models caressing produce. NBC refuses to air the ad. – *Well, NBC's refusal to air the spot did get some Googling going. And if you are a guy you probably didn't mind the spot. But I would guess that most women thought it pretty stupid.*

Goodbye, female audience.

(February) Members dressed up in KKK garb to demonstrate at the Westminster Kennel Club Show – *something about the American Kennel Club trying to create a master race...wait...what?*

There goes the African American audience. And dog-lovers.

(June) PETA publicly condemns President Obama for killing a fly during an interview – *who are they trying to reach here? Do they really believe that anyone has a soft spot for a housefly?*

So much for the average Joe who may have kind of liked the Veggie Love spot.

(August) PETA puts up a billboard in Florida featuring an obese woman, with the headline of “Save the Whales – Lose the Blubber; Go Vegetarian.” *That’s nice, PETA, make fun of the chubby kids.*

But since overweight Americans probably are in the majority now, just how many extra-large donations did you lose from that one, PETA?

Now, before you start sending me hate mail, let me say that I love animals (how many businesses have office dogs?) and hate the idea of any of them being mistreated. I just don’t agree with PETA’s conceit that controversy = effective marketing. And I wonder if there is a market segment that PETA has not offended yet?

How does it ever make sense to alienate the same people you are trying to reach?

Seems like a whole lot of crazy to me.

“There is no such thing as bad publicity except your own obituary.”
– *Brendan Behan, Irish author and dramatist*

But he died in 1964, fourteen years before PETA was founded.

Get some dynamite

by Lisa Taylor

All CU marketers know how difficult it is to get new members to switch their checking accounts. Years ago it wasn't such a big deal, but today – with online banking, bill-pay, and automatic payments – it's harder than ever.

"Because of the hassle, most consumers don't switch banks unless they move to another part of the country," according to James Van Dyke, president of Javelin Strategy and Research, in USA Today. He also finds that only about 11% of bank customers change their bank accounts every year. How hard is it to get a customer to change?

"It takes dynamite to remove them from their bank," Van Dyke says.

So what form of dynamite should you use to encourage people to switch their checking accounts to your credit union? It might be best to first focus on *why* people switch, and the answers play right into the hands of CU marketers:

WHY CONSUMERS ARE WALKING	
Reasons consumers switched from their primary bank or credit union:	
Too many fees	44%
Unsatisfactory customer service	33%
Wanted higher interest rates	17%
Limited access to branches	14%
Wanted more protection from identity theft	11%
Limited access to ATMs	10%
Moved to a new area	8%
Wanted more online service capabilities	6%
Wanted more product selection	6%
Other	11%

It seems that more and more consumers are finally growing tired of their bank's soaring fees and shabby service. So play up your low fees, friendly service and rewards checking accounts and make it as painless as

possible for people to switch. Make sure you have a great “switch kit” that will help people change their direct deposits and automatic payments. The easier you make it, the more likely you are to attract other fed up consumers to do the same.

Pink: patronizing, passionate or perfect?

by Kent Dicken

Maybe it's society's fault there is so much pink. Baby girls are wrapped in pink blankets and pink booties when they are born. One of the first toys little girls are given is a Barbie doll that lives in a pink world. And if their parents thought Barbie was too much of a stereotype, then Hello, Kitty. Not to mention all the everyday pink items: pink toothbrushes, pink pajamas, pink backpacks, pink purses, pink etc.

Apple, of course, is no stranger to using color on their products, so it is no surprise to see pink iPods – they have been out long enough that they have even been slimmed down to a thinner pink version. Of course, now you can get your cell phone, your laptop, your television – all in pink. In fact you can even search online for everything a store such as Target carries in pink. And of course, pink ribbons are the well-known symbol for the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, so now you can color coordinate with your charities.

You can even drive a car in pink without selling Mary Kay. Ford believes that “all growth in new car sales between now and 2020 will be to women,” so what other color would they use on their 2011 Fiesta? Ford swears it is “hot magenta,” not pink.

Sports teams have jumped on the pink bandwagon in a big way. Think they might have heard that *over 45 million women* watched pro football games, and that *80% of all sports apparel dollars are spent by women*? Forget about those team colors, Jack – make that jersey and coffee cup pink!

Is this plethora of pink patronizing? Have the male-dominated board-rooms all decided that the simplest way to market anything to females is to paint it pink so that “they” know it is meant for “them”?

Have pink-loving female execs finally taken over all the marketing and product development departments, and now believe that pink is such a strong part of the female identity that it is therefore a symbol of empowerment to women?

Or is pink just in style right now? Is that why they call it Hot Pink?

All I know is, I’m going to buy a blue car because I’m a boy.

Labels sometimes stick too well



by Kent Dicken

Identification. Labels. Tags. The human mind needs to be able to classify items in order to be able to make sense of them. So we identify everything we run across, slap a UPC-type tag on it, then stick it away in a memory bank, ready for recall at some point in the future.

Demographics in marketing are no different. We look at age, income, education, home-ownership and credit history, then assign each person to different categories. It’s a series of (mostly) logical selections that we make in order to target our offers for better results.

But why do we continue to market generationally? Why do we market to The Greatest Generation, the Boomers, the Xers, GenY, etc., as if being part of an extended range of birth years can point to a person’s unique character? Where’s the individuality in that?

All I have to do is compare myself to my brother to see that that strategy is a skewed way of looking at things. I love him, but we are polar opposites in looks, interests, and attitudes. After all, he’s a former early 70s college hippie turned lawyer turned minister, while I’m a graphic designer. He’s conservative, I’m liberal. He’s republican, I’m picky. The only thing we

truly have in common, other than family genes and history, is that we belong to the same generation.

Which of course means that we get the same marketing pieces sent to us. Granted, that works for some things, but **a one-size-fits-all mentality is like using a sledge hammer on a gnat.** And it only works for some media. Direct mail is read by older members, and trashed by younger members. We know that, so we use different media for different age groups.

So what happens when the media has evolved? Online is no longer just the realm of younger people. Boomers are on Facebook. Parents of Boomers are checking for email from their grandkids. Generational lines are getting blurred. So who are you supposed to be marketing to when you market online?

Adam Sarner from forbes.com also sees generational distinctions breaking down on the internet, where “behavior, attitudes and interests start to blend.” Customers are “not defined by age, gender, social demographic or geography,” but “are likely to act like several generations at any given time.”

What I found even more interesting is that Sarner then applied his own strange label to this group: “Generation V.” While I’m not so sure that label will stick, Sarner does point out that “third-party customer data providers, business intelligence and analytics markets will shift from collecting demographic information to psychographic information” in order to understand the actions and motivations of the online user. In simpler words, **online marketing will need to focus on interests instead of age.** On individuals, instead of generations. And if it works online, you can be sure it will change other media as well.

So you might want to rethink those labels.

I'm every marketer's worst nightmare

by Matt Rohland

I'm a 24 year old college graduate who grew up overexposed to advertising. No matter how punchy a direct mail piece is, I instantly dump it in a recycling bin conveniently placed below the mailboxes at my apartment complex. When I'm watching TV, I consistently switch to PBS the second commercials hit, and when the radio turns to commercials I shuffle through my six presets looking for music (the Classical Station never fails). While browsing the web I run an add-on called AdBlock that strips every site of all its advertisement banners. I don't do this because I hate all advertising. I even design ads for a living. I do this because it's easier than sorting through the polluted pile of BADvertisements for something appealing.

So who gets through to people like me?

- Hulu.com (a site for watching TV shows online) shoves one advertisement in every commercial slot. Because I appreciate Hulu's service and one commercial is not long enough for me to accomplish anything, I gladly endure it.
- Pandora.com throws one ad on the side and gives me free music, so I let them keep their one ad.
- If there's an interesting magazine article adjacent to an interesting ad – I'll read it. Chances are if I'm just thumbing through the magazine and don't find an interesting article I won't pay any attention to the ad – unless a hamster is taking a mini-chainsaw to the plastic groom atop a wedding cake or something of equal hilarity.

The only ads that seem to get through to me are single ads not lost amongst the clutter. Even those that do get through are usually disregarded as generic, insulting to my intelligence (and I'm not that smart) or poorly executed. The handful of ads that do speak to me are all **witty**, **simple** and entirely **unique**. I find ads that sell a personality rather than a product far more effective. If I connect to the brand/personality of a company I'll buy their products.

Am I the majority of your targeted audience? Probably not, but I am a credit union member and I have friends just like me who find the fundamental idea of a credit union appealing. The question is - does your current marketing reach people like me?

Are you selling Sea Monkeys?

by Brian Wringer

Remember Sea Monkeys? When I was a kid, colorful ads in all the comic books promised you could send for cute, goldfish-sized magical aquapals that would hatch instantly, and then frolic entertainingly

Of course, the reality was that you got a packet of brine shrimp eggs. Brine shrimp basically look like hideous little swimming roaches, and when they hatch, they're nearly invisible without a microscope. The instructions said that with time and regular feedings of special Grow Food, my "Sea Monkeys" -- er, brine shrimp -- might have achieved a majestic 1/2 inch in length. But I was eight years old, and not all that interested in mindless, nearly invisible swimming bugs. Within a week, my beloved Sea Monkeys were just a glass of smelly sludge. Mom made me dump it in the toilet.

Fast-forward to today: you've got a brilliant campaign planned, a member mailing list fine-tuned to perfection, an irresistible offer, and the budget to make a huge splash. What can go wrong now?

Take a close look at the bottom of your ads and marketing pieces. See that cloud of gray stuff down there? You know, the fine print? That means you're selling Sea Monkeys. Legions of disappointed eight year olds have learned a hard lesson: "What the large type giveth, the fine print taketh away." Fine print makes people wary and suspicious.

Fine print will always be with us, but keep in mind that with every word, every exception, and every requirement, your response rate plunges. There are several things a credit union marketer can do to make sure you're not selling Sea Monkeys:

Clean up the offer – how many hoops do members have to jump through to get a free tote bag, a rate break, or \$25? If they can't respond with one quick phone call or a few clicks, they won't bother. And neither should you.

Clean up your apps – every blank to fill in on your membership, loan, and credit card applications represents a certain percentage of members who won't bother. Response rates rise dramatically when forms and applications are simple and well-designed.

Clean up the product – to an MBA, an interest-bearing checking account with a list of twelve requirements looks simple. To most people, it looks complicated and not worth the effort. Keep in mind that you and the other members of the CU management team are financial experts. Don't design products only you can understand.

Accept small incentive risks – if you're offering an incentive, don't smother the offer in fine print requirements and impediments designed to ensure that no one "games" the system or gets a reward they don't truly deserve. If you're giving away a toaster with every new account, then hand the new member a toaster with a smile, right then and there. Fine print designed to entirely remove the risk of giving away an undeserved toaster or two will also entirely remove the chance that anyone at all will bother.

Read, research, and understand regulations for yourself – there's a balance between compliance (regulatory or legal) risk and the risk of wasting time and money on marketing doomed by fine print. In order to work with your legal and compliance advisors, you must have a good working knowledge of the regulations and practices governing credit union advertising. NCUA's web site is an excellent place to start if you need information on a specific regulation or opinion.

“I went to buy a toaster and it came with a bank.”

by Kent Dicken

The current financial crisis has inspired a whole line of jokes about banks, bankers, and other financial professionals that are circulating around offices, being emailed to friends, and published online at an amazing rate. Which is not surprising to psychologists, since humor is a way of dealing with stress and the frustration that comes in times of crisis.

“Humor is a psychological coping mechanism, it helps us to cope with difficulties,” explains psychologist Mike Lewis on BBC.co.uk. “It helps particularly with difficulties that we can’t do much about, or ones we can’t solve.”

Dr. Lewis also says there is a “genuine need to make jokes about bad situations, even disasters.” Since most of us believe in a “just world,” we need to believe that the world is basically an ordered place. “But if something happens to challenge that belief we cope with humor, by joking about what is interfering with that basic belief.”

Lately, a lot of the humor has been directed at banks, and bankers have even replaced lawyers as the butt of the classic “lightbulb” jokes. But is it cruel to relish their misfortune? Not according to Dr. Lewis. “It is not cruel, it helps us to cope,” he says. “By joking, you use a mental process, so you feel you’ve done something about the situation.”

Since banks are taking the brunt of this situation, Credit Unions have the chance to not only chuckle, but also learn a few things by listening to the jokes, understanding what causes them, and doing something about it if they themselves tend to resemble the punch line. Here are a few starting points:

Never set yourself up as a target.

While most banks have not been entirely responsible for the problems that started this crisis, their public image of large buildings, fat cat executives, and a constant stream of nickel and dime fees has made the Average Joe resent banks. This resentment has made it easy to turn bankers into

jokes. CUs need to remember that an accessible, cooperative image is absolutely crucial to your brand.

Get rid of the “gotchas.”

Take the time to review your policies. If it causes extra work or isn't fair to the member, get rid of it. Slipping in that extra fee or condition on a product may help the bottom line temporarily, but at what cost to your brand?

Empower your members.

People believe that the world is basically just. When it isn't, and they can't do anything about it, they get mad and strike back by talking to others (or telling jokes). Give members the resources and access to CU employees that they want and need. Take the time to listen, then assist in any way possible to let them take control of their situation.

Take these few steps and I bet your members will not only keep you out of their jokes, they will gladly recommend you to those unhappy with their banks.

“Borrowing money is like wetting your bed...”

by Kent Dicken

“Borrowing money is like wetting your bed in the middle of the night. At first all you feel is warmth and release. But very, very quickly comes the awful, cold discomfort of reality.”

– from *CNNMoney.com's series, The Smartest Advice I Ever Got*

Author Elizabeth Gilbert's father wanted to make a point about debt to his daughter because he cared about what happened to her in the future. His example was a bit homespun perhaps, and perhaps a bit strange to really consider, but it is memorable, and it stuck with Gilbert. She has religiously paid off her credit card each month and stayed debt-free (and dry) all of her adult life.

Gilbert's father equated one concept she could understand (bedwetting) with another concept (debt) with which she had little previous experience. That simple association permanently locked the idea into her mind.

Wouldn't it be great if all your marketing was that effective in providing a mental "hook" that would help your members remember the main point and take action?

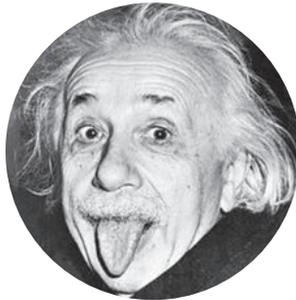
The key is presenting it in a way that they understand – by connecting it to their world.

Of course, most members are adults, not young kids, and not everybody experiences life the same way. Which means not everyone learns the same way. Because of heredity, environment and upbringing, different people process information differently. Even the "experts" on how people learn can't agree on the ways people learn. One claims there are three types of learners (visual, auditory, interactive/kinesthetic). Another has four general classifications of learners (concrete, abstract, active, reflective). Yet another claims seven styles of learning (linguistic, logical, spatial, musical, bodily, interpersonal, and intrapersonal)!

But there are common elements and life experiences for your membership if you look. These experiences are usually your best opportunity to communicate what you have to offer your members.

And if you can say it in a unique way, it just may stick with them the rest of their lives.

Defying gravity



Dog fooding

by Brian Wringer

You've probably heard the term "eating your own dog food" before. It means that everyone on your team also needs to be a consumer or user of your product, whether it's dog food or checking accounts.

Some CUs require employees to have CU accounts, but how many of your accounts and products do your employees actually use regularly? You might be surprised at the answers – many CU employees cite privacy concerns as reasons they do not use CU accounts regularly. Other services, such as home banking, often are little used by employees because it's so easy for them to take care of their business while at work. When I worked at a credit union, the people in the mortgage department were shocked when I refinanced my mortgage with them – not one of them was comfortable "undressing" financially in front of their peers, and they all had mortgages elsewhere.

In many industries, "dog fooding" is a critical part of development and quality control. For example, software companies often uncover some surprising insights when they actually have to use the software they create.

The same applies to credit unions, too. Some differences in service are inevitable, but dog fooding is still a great way for employees to understand your products from a member's perspective. Is dog fooding part of the culture at your credit union? Are there channels for good and bad employee experiences to be heard and acted on? How similar are the processes for employees and members? What happens if an employee has a problem or praise? What processes are in place to ensure privacy, especially of salary information?

Dog fooding should be the expectation at CUs – after all, how are employees supposed to be enthusiastic and knowledgeable about products they refuse to use?

Does your credit union defy gravity?

by Kelley Parks

If there is anything that the last year has taught us it's that we are vulnerable to greater forces around us. The fundamental laws of nature require that organisms and organizations alike adapt to survive.

Do you defy Newton's Law of Gravity?

The Apple fell from the tree, pelted Newton's noggin and fell to Earth. It didn't float up to the Moon. Why? The Earth was closer and more convenient. The same is true in marketing. It's nearly impossible to convince folks to join a credit union when there is no perceived presence. Visibility and connections between people with like interests create gravitational pull. The closer we get, the stronger the attraction. Conversely, the farther away, the less pull. This is also why dealerships sell cars, not relationships with credit unions.

Do you ignore Einstein's Theory of Relativity?

Einstein theorized that even the most constant of objects are being changed and warped by the energy affecting them. River water reshapes the rocks just as an economic crisis impacts consumer behavior. Suddenly the principles of the credit union movement are relevant values to consumers. Thrift is sexy, being local matters, and trust is king. But how do these principles really translate into action at the credit union?

Do you dismiss Galileo's Law of Motion?

Galileo showed that all objects fall at the same speed regardless of their size. Wall Street proved this theory when it toppled over like dominoes. Big or small, it didn't matter. The forces of nature don't care how big you get. While credit unions have clamored to achieve magic asset sizes, corporate stabilization suddenly has compromised Titanics and Tug Boats alike. The reasons for capital adequacy and the importance of strategic planning have suddenly materialized.

Do you discount Darwin's Theory of Evolution?

Eat or be eaten. Kill or be killed. There is no doubt that the sheer volume of unprecedented regulation, competitive pressure from overlapping fields of membership, and commodity products and services have given

birth to a real game of survival of the fittest. Are we becoming dinosaurs? Could another meteorite wipe us into extinction? How we evolve our DNA will ultimately determine our sustainability.

Everyday we have a choice to either fight the powers of the universe or use them to our benefit.

Attract.

Be relevant.

Move.

And evolve so you don't get eaten.

Five ways to keep your job



by Brian Wringer

Now that everyone's nervously looking over their shoulders, the logical next step is to wonder "Yoicks! How do I keep my credit union from cutting marketing?"

The fundamental problem stems from the common misperception that marketing is an expense rather than an investment. Never forget that in the minds of an uncomfortable number of your board members, marketing's main function is to waste money on sending out junk mail and arrange for the right kind of fruit punch at the Annual Meeting.

So how do you market the very concept of, well, marketing? Assuming you're already doing a pretty good job, you have to make sure the right people know about it. And then you have to do an even better job.

1) Do the Math – ROI calculations are so simple, yet surprisingly, incredibly rare in credit union land. Go ahead and run the ROI numbers for your product marketing campaigns. It's the simplest way to prove that yes, Marketing Makes Money. We're going to assume you already know who to show the numbers to...

2) Focus on Goals – What are your CU's goals as far as asset and membership growth? Where are you right now, and what is marketing doing about it? What's your 30 second "elevator speech" for what marketing is doing right now? Think about the difference between "Well, uh, we're working on the half-page ad for the Sunday newspaper." vs. "We've already met our yearly membership growth goals, so we're looking at strategies to keep that growth going and boost services per member without adding staff."

3) Get a Seat at the Table – If marketing is not already directly involved in setting rates, developing products, and determining policies, or you're not attending Board meetings, that's a problem. You're the representative of the credit union's brand, and your role in decision-making is (or should be) vital.

4) Show How Marketing Solves Problems – Is your CU facing some big problems? So is every other CU. Think big. Show how you can market and grow your way out of the crisis. What if your CU had to come up with a half million dollars tomorrow – is it smarter to make cuts in an already lean organization or invest in growth that generates income?

5) Share the Plan – Develop a framework or road map for your marketing strategy that enables the other members of the management team to connect the dots – they need to see why each piece is essential and how it connects to your overall strategic plan (*We're doing X because it connects with target audience Y because they are essential to our continued growth for reasons A, B, and C*). Keep them updated with the progress of the plan throughout the year, too (*Promotion Z exceeded its goals by Q%, which is projected to total \$R in annualized revenue*).

Five ways to get a seat at the table

by Brian Wringer

It seems my article from a couple of weeks ago, “Five Ways to Keep Your Job” touched a nerve, in particular, the third item in the list:

Get a Seat at the Table – *If marketing is not already directly involved in setting rates, developing products, and determining policies, or you’re not attending Board meetings, that’s a problem. You’re the representative of the credit union’s brand, and your role in decision-making is (or should be) vital.*

Only half of the respondents to that week’s poll question (“Does Marketing have a voice at your Board and/or Management meetings?”) indicated that they’re an integral part of making policy and decisions.

About a third of you (35%) felt that “I’m on the outside looking in.” and the rest (15%) chose “I am occasionally allowed to contribute.”

Wowzers. That’s an awful lot of marketing talent that’s not being used. So if you’re one of the marketers “on the outside looking in”, what can you do about it? Some of these tips reiterate points in previous articles.

1) Explode Out of Your Role – Whatever your job description, focus on your *real* job as a marketer (For example, “Use communication to help your credit union help your members lead better lives”). Marketing can and should be everywhere – designing new products, helping to set rates, managing the web site, training new employees on the CU’s culture and brand, and contributing in Board meetings – anything that affects members.

2) Invite Yourself – Sitting around in a Board meeting is probably not your idea of a fun evening, but Marketing needs to be there. Who sets your loan and deposit rates? Ask nicely, and I bet they’ll let you sit in if you promise to be really quiet. But be prepared, too – they’ll probably start asking you for your input. In other words, go ahead and ask to be there and contribute wherever decisions are being made – your perspective is important.

3) Get Smart – Your credit union is dealing with millions of dollars in member money. Yep, there are lots of numbers involved, and you can't escape them. Learn and understand what makes the credit union go – it's a prerequisite for gaining some control. Take some classes (the hard ones with numbers in them). There are TONS of reference materials and classes available for all aspects of CU management, even if you have little or no budget for training.

4) Get Help – Be open with your CEO, CFO, and the rest of the management team about what you're up to. Set goals for yourself, and don't be bashful about asking for help. You might be amazed at the way your CEO or CFO lights up when you express a genuine interest in CAMEL ratios. In the process, you'll learn how to speak their language. And you'll probably find you've been on the same team all along.

5) Focus on the Cash First – Some of marketing's most important and unique roles are somewhat intangible – branding, service, and culture – but in order to find respect you first have to show your value in cold hard cash. Track everything, and set goals and track results in some way even for activities without a direct ROI. Marketing sometimes looks like voodoo to numbers people, so show them the connection.

Tempting your members

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by Lisa Taylor

The other day in the mail I received six blank checks from my credit card issuer. Each offered a little something different: no interest at all for six months, 2.99% interest for the rest of the year, etc. I could write the checks for up to my credit limit on my card. Buy anything I want.

Boy it was tempting. Of course there are several things I'd like, but do I really *need* any of them? No.

But I paused for a minute and considered the offers. I could get a few things fixed around the house, get a couple of new tires for my car or just have some mad money to play with.

But then the angel on my shoulder shouted NO and I quickly ripped up the checks and threw them away.

Then I started thinking: why is this financial institution encouraging me to get into debt? *"Spend, have fun, don't worry about it!"* In their defense, it was plainly stated in the letter (not the fine print) that if your balance wasn't paid off by the due date, your interest rate would be 27+%. Yikes!

I know that card issuers make lots of money off people who rack up big credit card debts. And those blank checks make it even easier for someone to borrow big money that they won't be able to pay off the next month. How can it be morally responsible to encourage borrowing like this, just so that you are able to charge outrageous interest rates when payments are (likely to be) late?

As a credit union, where the credo is to enhance the financial lives of its members, are you abetting the card issuers in this? Are you making it too easy for your members to go further into debt?

My sandbox

by Kelley Parks

In every sandbox, there are big kids, little kids and toys to play with. Some kids share, some don't. And if you're lucky yours is free of bullies. The terrain isn't always even. Some kids pull all the sand over to their space, some dig holes and some may even plow right over whatever you just built. Each sandbox is unique.

Your sandbox could be small or big, deep or shallow. My guess is that you make a bigger impact in a smaller sandbox. And sometimes you get lucky enough that the sand has the ideal conditions to build perfect castles. Like right now...

I always loved the analogy of competition to playing in a sandbox. Maybe it's because I never really grew up or I like the idea that work should be a lot like play. The sandbox metaphor is one that probably translates best to credit unions because let's face it, we all exist within the confines of a

limited space. Whether your charter is teachers, astronauts or everyone who breathes within five counties, we aren't exactly global organizations. And isn't that our beauty?

I play in a sandbox with about 25 credit unions. Most of us have overlapping fields of membership, which means we truly do play in the same sandbox. I used to think that I had to play alone. What if we couldn't agree on what to build? Or what if they didn't play fairly? After all, there is a limited amount of sand, so I kept a watchful eye over my toys.

That all changed when financial hurricanes flattened the big sand castles the competition built in this box, changing the landscape and thereby making the conditions ideal to build perfect ones of our own. The bullies are gone, but they'll be back. And what a great opportunity for credit unions to band together to construct something colossal.

Financial cooperatives really can work cooperatively for the greater good of all. (*Hey - here's proof: www.whatifcreditunions.com*) There's just something magical about working (ok playing) side by side with other credit unions to advance ideals that give us a common last name.

And I have been quite lucky to play in this sandbox with some of the coolest kids I know.

Real credit union superheroes



by Kelley Parks

Erki Pisuke and Andro Roos are CU Executives from the former Communist country of Estonia and in my book - real life credit union Superheroes. To me they have the gumption of Batman, the will of Superman, and have already faced their fair share of kryptonite in their short careers. Their story is an epic one of courage, hope and inspiration.

Estonia is a very small country in Northern Europe. Tartu Estonian Credit Union was founded in 1902 as one of the first credit unions in the world. The CU Movement grew rapidly over the years, and by World War II credit unions represented over 50% of the market share in their country. Then

Estonia was overtaken by a communist regime; therefore, all deposits became public and the credit union movement was lost.

Fast forward 50 years and freedom has returned to Estonia, yet foreign banks have moved in. And Erki and Andro are restoring the once lost Credit Union Movement. They are starting from scratch with no modern conveniences of ATMs or core processors or even share insurance. Standing behind the competition for 15 years with no Home Banking, direct transactions or common accounting standards, just simply a vision to do what is right for the Estonian people.

I had the pleasure of meeting Erki and Andro through a partnership between the Virginia Credit Union League, the World Council of Credit Unions and the Estonian Union of Credit Cooperatives. They came to Virginia to learn more about the modern credit union system in America. Ironically, I gave a talk about a guerrilla marketing promotion my credit union did that involved superheroes. I thought perhaps they could use the capes and masks much more than I ever could.

What strikes me most about their story is the parallel between freedom and the credit union movement. While the country now has its independence, the people now need the opportunity of local choice. And I can't help but wonder what it would be like to have to start over with no rules in place, a true underdog with no preconceived notions - just the iron will to do what's right.

And I just hope the capes come in handy because I can't wait to see them fly!

The CU philosophy is spreading



by Lisa Taylor

I read some very surprising news in USAToday about New York City, home to most of the big, impersonal bank headquarters: the **city of New York is giving out cash rewards for good behavior.**

Opportunity NYC, started in 2007, encourages poor residents to save money and help break the cycle of poverty. It pays participants money for

a variety of activities (visiting the doctor, doing well on state tests, holding full-time jobs), one of which is saving money. Thus far the program has paid about \$7.5 million (funded by private donations) to participants who can earn up to \$6,000/year if they receive all the possible rewards.

For instance, the city offers people a 50% match (up to \$250) if they put money from their federal earned-income tax credit into a savings account and keep it there for a year. Currently there are about 2400 families and 5700 children enrolled in the program.

Are they overstepping? While the program is not without controversy, it does seem to be catching on. Other cities - San Francisco, Atlanta, Dallas, Baltimore - offer similar incentives.

While you may not agree with the program, the reasoning behind it makes sense. Teaching people the value of "behavior deemed beneficial to society," saving money for example, is good for everyone.

This is something credit unions do with their members all the time – but it's focused solely on the financial side of life. CUs have youth programs, teen programs, first-time home buyers programs, etc... whose goal it is to teach good financial habits. These cities are essentially doing the same thing but they're expanding their influence to many aspects of people's lives.

Nice to see someone copy the CU philosophy of giving back. Hopefully they will do it with the same CU passion for the work.

Sleeping with the enemy

by Brian Wringer

According to the good folks over at Credit Union Times, a long-simmering movement to develop an all-CU secondary market for mortgages could get off the ground soon. In a similar vein, another recent article points out that there's also a lot of potential for CUs to build an all-CU system for funding and servicing student loans.

I touched on this in a few previous articles, and I think it's always been a fantastic idea. As the bank and government-based systems stumble, there's a historic opportunity for CUs to step up and build a better system for their members.

So what does all this mean for credit union marketers?

Just imagine the huge advantages in differentiation, member service, and marketing when the services your credit union offers are truly and uniquely "credit union quality" through and through, and integrated into your current products.

For example, there's now a very real and jarring disconnect when a member turns to your credit union for a student loan, and then gets shuffled off to a student loan company. The student loan balance doesn't appear in their account, no one at the CU can answer questions about it, and shortly after graduation they start getting bills from a lender they probably never heard of. They're also limited to the same choices and rates they can get at the bank down the street.

It's the same story with some CU mortgages, although more and more CUs are retaining mortgage servicing these days.

The point is, weaning credit unions away from dependence on for-profit "back end" systems will have positive and very real effects on the products, service quality, and pricing available to members. It will be another point of difference – another way credit unions are better than banks.

What's in it for me?



WIIFM (What's in it for me)?

by Kent Dicken

If you don't have something that interests me, I'm gone.

So get to the point.

Don't waste my time blathering on and on, adding copy, bullet points and fine print until my eyes glaze over. Just give me enough to let me decide if there is something there for me.

Then, maybe I'll keep listening.

With all of the marketing messages being broadcast every day, people have been trained to ignore anything that does not benefit them. In fact, *What's in it for me?* is a phrase that has gotten so popular that it has its own acronym.

Sure, it's a self-centered attitude. It also offers a few insights into human behavior that you need to understand if you want your marketing to be effective:

Think of WIIFM as shorthand to all marketing; a quick way to tell if your marketing is going to reach your target audience. If you can't see a benefit right away, you can be sure your audience won't either.

Understand that WIIFM isn't patient. Is what you are offering slightly complicated? Tough. Hard to use? They don't want it. The more hoops you place in front of a benefit, the fewer there are who will jump through. Make it simple and fast.

Don't confuse WIIFM with What's In It For You. If you are talking about yourself, you're not talking about the right person. It's *their* benefit, not yours. Use a viewpoint and voice that makes a personal connection with the audience. Same thing goes for any "Message from our CEO", "60 years of serving central Podunk" or other "press release" type of marketing. WIIFM doesn't care and won't read a word of it.

Don't assume that WIIFM believes anything you say. To most of your members and market, the bank down the street seems just as warm and

fuzzy as you do, and unfortunately they probably have more branches. So don't waste your money telling WIIFM that you are friendlier or better – prove it. And make it snappy.

Remember that WIIFM isn't always about the money. If you are using word of mouth or social networking as part of your marketing mix, you are asking individuals to spend their social capital in order to spread your message – so the benefit needs to make them look good in the eyes of their audience. Help WIIFM look smart.

Facing fear

by Brian Wringer

As marketers, it's easy to get used to dealing only with the positives. Look at all these features! These benefits are fantastic! Great rates! Easy to apply! Friendly service! Low payments! High earnings! Better! Faster! Bigger!

But it's well worth the effort to consider the negatives, too. What are people afraid of? What's scary about your products, your marketing, or your processes? What reasons are people giving themselves for going elsewhere or simply not taking action? What's unfamiliar, mysterious, or potentially humiliating?

You have to face and understand fears in order to remove these mental and emotional barriers to action. In fact, fears are a lot more emotionally powerful than the positives. Unless you reduce fear, simply marketing the positives doesn't work.

Let's look at an example: lending. You probably haven't seen it this way for a long time, but getting a loan is downright scary.

You have to bare your financial soul for starters. How much do you make? What other lenders are you fooling around with? And then there's the mysterious Permanent Record. That's right, we're going to check your credit report, and everything you've ever done wrong is written down inside. In fact, we're going to base our entire decision about whether you're worthy enough for the loan around a mysterious secret number...

Another biggie is the fear of being fooled. What's all that fine print going to take away? If I switch to this checking account, what's keeping you from treating me the same? That certificate rate can't be for real – look at all those disclosures.

Facing fear is a little unnatural for CU marketers – we're a pretty positive bunch – but it's absolutely key to making better marketing.

Do you have card-carrying members?

by Kent Dicken

I had to have my son's car towed recently, and I was certainly happy that I carried my AAA card with me to avoid the tow charge. Then I used it the next week to save a few bucks on a hotel room when traveling. That's when it hit me –

I'm a card-carrying member.

Now if you don't know your history, that term has some historical baggage to it. If you were a "card-carrying member" back in the late 1940s you were probably a member of the Communist Party, which meant you were also a target for Senator McCarthy in the 1950s. More recently, according to William Safire's 1988 newspaper column, when the term modifies a non-political noun it means "unmistakable" or "authentic."

"Authentic" sounds like a good way to describe the value a Credit Union brings to its members. **So why aren't Credit Unions handing out a membership card** that also gives discounts at local stores, nearby restaurants, and hotels all over America? Saving a few bucks here or 10% off the bill there would be a great little differentiator – not to mention a nice little conversation starter between members and non-members. It may be Old School, but that doesn't mean it won't work.

Turns out at least one CU already has a card. North Jersey Federal Credit Union members can buy clothes, cars, meals and more with exclusive discounts at participating businesses, and the retailers can advertise with coupons in statements and offers in branches and on the web site.

While we are at it, why not gain some national awareness? Why can't CUs be known for their card like AAA? A national program could offer several national-level discounts, and a common web site to list the discounts would help. But to really make it take off, each CU would need to make the effort to connect the card to their community and support it through their marketing.

What do you think? Is this something that all CUs could get behind?

Women are taking over. Kind of.

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by Kent Dicken

Massive job losses in traditionally male jobs/industries have turned the tables on the breadwinner role in a family. Women could outnumber men in the U.S. workforce for the very first time, passing the 50% mark.

Out of the 5.1 million jobs lost in the U.S. since the recession started, 4 out of 5 are men, according to the Financial Times. Nine of 10 construction workers and 7 of 10 manufacturing workers are male – two industries that alone have lost 2.5 million jobs. The Postal Service is shedding tens of thousands of unionized blue-collar jobs, again dominated by men.

Women, on the other hand, account for 75% of education, government, and health care jobs, which are more stable – at least for women. Local governments (cities, schools, water utilities, etc.) have hired 167,000 women while cutting 86,000 men from the payrolls, according to USA Today.

Which means more women have increasingly become the primary source of income for their family. Unfortunately, this also means that the traditional problems that women have encountered in the workforce are now everyone's problems. Women have usually been paid less than men, and while that status may be improving, it is still not equal. Women work fewer hours than men on average, and are also the most likely to have worked sporadically – taking time away from work to look after children or relatives – which can limit job options when they return to the

market. Therefore, because of low-wages at part-time jobs with little-or-no benefits, those families that depend solely upon a woman's income are hurting.

Which of course adds to the burdens felt by women. While surveys already show that women manage nearly 80% of all household finances in this country, apparently only a few feel confident about it. In fact, one survey found that 41% of women would rather visit the dentist than talk to their spouse about daily finances.

What's the target audience for the majority of your marketing? Is it women? Sounds like a perfect opportunity for your credit union to step up, help rebuild that confidence, and create a member for life.

Okay, women really ARE taking over

by Kent Dicken

Women really are going to run the post-recession economy, according to new study by Boston Consulting Group (*and reported By Rana Foroohar and Susan H. Greenberg on newsweek.com*), and the impact "will be broad and deep." Because of a narrowing wage gap and rising female employment worldwide, the gap between total income earned by men v. women will shrink over the next five years.

In the U.S., most college students are already women. Across the world, literacy rates for women are within 1% of men, as opposed to a 30% gap in the past. Working women numbers have jumped exponentially as well around the globe. BCG estimates that women control "\$12 trillion of the world's \$18.4 trillion in annual consumer spending" and that number will continue to rise. In developed countries, there is even a new class of "young female professionals who are more powerful than their male counterparts" and make more money.

There is also research that suggests women's spending priorities may be exactly what the world needs right now. "Economists have studied how women spend in comparison to men, and they tend to spend more on things that are linked to people's well-being, like health and education.

They also tend to save more, and exhibit less risky financial behavior,” according to Yassine Fall of UNIFEM, the U.N. agency dedicated to women.

Goldman Sachs has also noticed that the narrowing gender gap is giving women greater influence and power within households and markets. As women gain more decision-making power, spending patterns in households will likely shift as well. Goldman Sachs then points out that those areas of the economy likely to benefit “include food, healthcare, education, apparel, consumer durables and **financial services**.”

Of course that last item is what is most important to credit unions, but the other items listed may give an indication of where financial services are headed. “The vast unmet desire among Western women for more simple, understandable financial products and services could also help make retail investing in countries like the U.S. more accessible and transparent. Analysts say companies like Visa, Wal-Mart, Nestle, Johnson & Johnson, and others that already have a strong leg up in the women’s market stand to prosper further from the female consumer boom.”

What one shift in definition means to CUs

by Kent Dicken

Americans sure are adaptable. Gallup polls now show that **most people feel that they have enough money to pay for the things they need**, with relatively few worrying about it on a daily basis. In fact, 41% of Americans may say the economy is getting better, the highest consumer confidence measurement since January 2008. But spending by consumers is down sharply, across all age groups. In fact, the majority say they are watching their spending very carefully, with about two-thirds saying they are cutting back on their spending.

Does this mean Americans are actually learning to live within their means? Most credit unions can already verify that people seem to be saving more than they used to, simply by looking at their increase in deposits this year. Have people really changed their attitude about spending?

Maybe it's more about a change in definition.

If you combine the bold-type statement from Gallup in the first paragraph with their polls that show an ongoing concern about how much the average person spends, it seems more likely that people have finally adjusted their definition as to what constitutes something they **need**, versus what they **want**.

Is this a permanent shift? How will your credit union respond?

For those who come out of the recession relatively unharmed, it may only be a temporary condition until the economy bounces back enough that their pent-up plastic can be freed. Maybe some of your members will need help fine-tuning the differences between their needs and wants, so they don't start feeling too giddy and overspending.

For those who have lost jobs, cars or homes...well, no one goes through that unaffected. They will continue to want the security of savings products and will likely avoid variable rate loans (or perceived risks to their homes) such as HELOCs.

And, of course, we're already seeing the competition shift their marketing back into high gear. The few banks that are left are *hungry*, and they're gunning for your best members.

Shoes with soul

by Kelley Parks

I have recently developed a strange relationship with shoes. Whenever I accomplish something momentous in my life or reach a milestone, I buy an iconic pair of shoes symbolic of the occasion.

For instance, when my daughter was born I bought a pair of pretty pink shoes, dainty as a newborn baby girl. When I won a big award I didn't expect last year, I purchased a pair of ruby red slippers because the event was as surreal as a yellow bricked lined jaunt to Oz. And just recently

when we launched a big local cooperative campaign, I acquired a funky pair of orange sandals that reminded me of the campaign's graphics.

It is hard to find occasion to wear these shoes. After all, it does seem like a bit much to wear shimmering red shoes to a membership drive at a manufacturing plant. But I do love to walk into my closet, survey my wearable trophies, and reminisce about the events, decisions and occasions that mark major landmarks in my life. I suppose it is probably atypical to celebrate through a 7.5 sized pair of open toe, fuchsia pumps, but it does add a little chic flair to life's events. I realize it's a strange vice.

I often think that as credit unions, we have so many opportunities to add to our members shoe closet. We're there for them through all the important life events - from marriage to divorce, apartment to house, sports car to minivan and back again. We're an ally through life's ups and downs, offering aid and comfort through the best and worst. And just like a good pair of shoes, we help them walk, run and jump through life's obstacles.

What I love about shoes is that they're all different, each with a purpose, and each solves a problem for the moment - whether it's to help me run faster, improve my game, gain confidence, look stylish or just simply to get me from here to there at that moment.

It is pretty amazing when you stop and think about all the shoes that grace your lobby, the problems solved and lives enhanced. So, whether you serve work boots, high heels, or loafers, whatever you do - just make sure the shoe fits.

True confession time

by Lisa Taylor

I have something to confess. I bank at, uh, well, a bank. I moved here 15 years ago, chose my bank based solely on convenience to my home and have been there ever since. Oh, and it's had THREE different names since then. (The second bank offered the prettiest VISA... it made me sad when I had to give it up.)

Do I like my bank? Sure, it's fine. Probably the only reason I am thinking about it now is because I work with credit unions. Otherwise I'm sure I would spend almost no time at all thinking about where I bank. And I bet most people are like me on this.

My bank doesn't hit me with erroneous fees and everyone who works there seems to be reasonable. Several years ago when online banking first started, they charged a monthly fee. But when I called to complain (and point out that their competitors were offering it for free) they happily removed it. And once, the branch manager actually came out of the branch and ran to my car in the drive-thru lane to assure me that they would indeed open an account for my 16 year old daughter. Did he have to do that? No. Above and beyond? Maybe.

My mother also uses a bank. Once a quarter her banker lady comes to see her and brings her flowers. Above and beyond? Absolutely.

My brother-in-law worked at a bank. One of his clients actually had a picture of him in her house. Honest. He went to her funeral when she died. Above and beyond? You know it.

So my question is this: are banks really that bad? I'll concede that the rates are very often better at a CU, but is the service always that much better? I've heard good things about the service offered at CUs, but I've also had good experiences with the people at my bank. Has anyone out there worked at both a bank and a credit union and can compare the two?

Obviously not all banks are bad, and not all credit unions are great. From my experience, I'd say it has more to do with the employees than the sign on the door. It's really the people that make it stand out.

So how do you make your credit union stand out from the banks that aren't bad?

Vendors of a feather...

by Kent Dicken

Do you consider yourself a vendor to your members? Probably not, but let's be honest: to most people you are just another source for financial products.

That makes your credit union a vendor to your members; one of many options available to them. Which also means that, more than likely, they have relationships with other financial institutions. In fact, you are in the same position with your members that your CU vendors are with you.

And you both have the same basic problem: How do you convert good customers/members into true believers? How do you become their Preferred Vendor? How do you get them to tell others about you?

Change the relationship with every member from a vendor to an ally. Find the ones who are invested, the ones who use you as their main financial provider, and ask them why they use you. Ask them what they would improve. Ask them what they would like to see in terms of future products and services. These first few members are going to help you improve your products and services immensely, so do everything you can to help them get what they need.

Find the natural "spreaders," and deliver beyond expectations so that they will. The trick, according to Seth Godin, is finding those willing participants. If they love it, you win. We all know people who are great at spreading news, who have so many contacts and friends that it seems they know everyone. Find these people among your members and make your products and services so fantastic that they'll eagerly and naturally spread the word.

Continue to deliver beyond expectations. Every time. You never know when that next customer/member is going to be that natural spreader.

Trends worth noting by marketing

by Kent Dicken

Marketers have to pay attention to shifts in people's preferences and behavior in order to put their efforts and limited budgets to best use. *(After all, is anyone still wasting money on Yellow Page ads?)* Here are a few notable trends:

"Must-haves" from Pew Research:

- Half of Americans believe going online + high speed internet are a necessity
- Fewer consider TV a necessity: 52% of Americans (down from 64%) think of their TV as a necessity. Cable or satellite TV loses importance (23% in 2009, down from 33% in 2006). The trend is undoubtedly digital – 24% of respondents have reduced or cancelled their cable or satellite TV subscription, but they are keeping high speed internet at home to watch shows on sites such as Hulu
- 49% see cell phones as necessary, roughly the same as in 2006. However 22% have changed to less expensive plans or canceled services. *(In a related note from the CDC: For the first time, U.S. households with only a cell phone outnumber households with only a land line – 20% to 17%. About 60% have both).*

Additional findings from the survey :

- 57% bought less expensive brands or shopped more at discount stores
- 21% have made plans to plant a vegetable garden, and 20% started doing home repairs on their own.

Internet usage from Pew Research:

- Over 800 million people use the internet everyday: 75% of adult women, 73% of adult men. Percentages within age groups vary from 18-29 (87%) to 50-64 (72%)

- 55% have used it for banking online, with 19% using it for banking online on a “typical day.”

Online Communities continue to grow:

- *LinkedIn* counts 12.5 million active members (up 143% in the year)
- *Twitter* had 14 million active subscribers in March (up a phenomenal 1200% in the year)
- *Facebook* had 91 million active members (up 195% in 1 year) in March 2009:
 - 193+ million total users: 51% Female and 45% Male
 - Largest age group of active users in the USA: 18-25
 - Largest growing category in the USA: 55-59 (with 60-65 not far behind)
 - North America and Europe account for over 70% of Facebook usage.

Demographic shifts from the Brookings Institution:

- About 80 percent of the nation’s foreign-born population in 2007 hailed from Latin America and Asia, up from just 20 percent in 1970. The Southeast has become the fastest-growing destination. Today, more than half of the nation’s foreign-born residents live in major metropolitan suburbs, while one-third live in large cities.
- Hispanics have accounted for roughly half the nation’s population growth since 2000. Already, racial and ethnic minorities represent 44 percent of U.S. residents under the age of 15, and make up a majority of that age group in 31 of the nation’s 100 largest metro areas (and a majority of the entire population in 15).
- As the first wave of baby boomers reaches age 65, the senior population is poised to grow by 36 percent from 2010 to 2020. Because the boomers were the nation’s first fully “suburban generation,” their aging will cause many major metropolitan suburbs to “gray” faster than their urban counterparts.

- The suburban poor surpassed the central-city poor in number during this decade, and now outnumber them by more than 1.5 million. The suburban poor have spread well beyond older, inner-ring suburbs, which in 2005-2007 housed less than 40 percent of all poor suburban dwellers.

The art of quitting

by Kelley Parks

Quit while you're ahead is the chorus line of any good gambling streak. Good gamblers know that you choose your end or it is chosen for you. They know that when the crowd swarms to cheer you on, this is the exact moment to walk away from the table.

Buy low and sell high is the mantra of every good investor. Sure, it sounds logical enough, but when emotions come into play, it takes real discipline to cash in or face the law of diminishing returns.

Our favorite brands follow this same logic. Just when you think Apple couldn't possibly top their last move, they delightfully surprise with another innovative wow, while quietly retiring the old. It's a powerful magic trick. They dazzle us with what's in their left hand, so we forget what disappeared in their right.

Jerry Seinfeld knew this when he walked away from one of the highest rated television shows at its peak. Michael Jordan left basketball when the world was wanting more. Even Dan Mica cited his reason for leaving CUNA is that no one should stay in a position longer than ten years. They all understand that what goes up, must come down.

It's economics 101. Every product, service, TV show, career and business model has a beginning and an end. They are innovated, experience growth, mature and eventually die. Demand is not meant to be a sustainable resource.

So, what should credit unions quit?

Should some of our products, services and business models take a bow, exit left and make room for something better? **What has reached its peak? The checking account? The branch model? The way people save?**

We're taught that no one likes a quitter, but the reality is that people love quitters who master the art of a graceful exit so something just as remarkable can take its place.

Finances 101: A parent's view

by Lisa Taylor

I have two children in college and both are responsible for paying for all their incidentals. Neither really has a great concept of what things cost or what is truly necessary vs. what they just want. They want a lot of things, but honestly don't need much. And, big surprise, they are frequently short of cash.

When they were growing up, my frequent refrain to them was, "I have no money for that" or "We can't afford to buy you those new shoes right now". Then I might turn around and spend a chunk of money fixing the furnace or making a down payment for braces and my children could never understand it. I assume other parents had many similar conversations with their children.

"I thought you said we had no money!" was something I heard all the time. My reply was always, "We don't. We had no money for a vacation because I figured it was better to have heat this winter."

The highlight of these ongoing financial spats was when my 18 year old daughter said to me: "I don't understand why you never have any money. All you have to pay are the cell phone and cable bills."

I thought I might scream. But when I calmed down, what came over me was how sad it is that she truly thinks that. She has NO concept of what it takes to run a household.

Then I had a conversation with my friends about the lack of financial education our children receive. And yes, this is partly my fault because I haven't taught them about it. But I think many parents are reluctant to divulge too much information about their finances to their children. They're embarrassed or feel it's none of their business. I grew up having no idea how much my parents made and the same is true for many of our children.

So why aren't more schools teaching kids basic money management skills? They can teach cooking and sewing but not how to balance a check book or how to figure out what you can afford on your paycheck? This is crazy!

But wait. Who has risen to the challenge and recognized the need to educate our children about all-important financial matters? America's Credit Union Museum through the Credit Union industry.

CU4Reality is a financial literacy program that teachers can use in their classrooms to help students learn how to manage money. It is geared toward middle and high school students, teaching them the skills they'll need to make informed decisions about their finances. Check out this amazing program here:

<http://www.acumuseum.org/movies/video.htm>

As parents, shouldn't we be stepping up and taking more responsibility for this? Does your local school system teach this? Find out. Sign up your children. It's certainly more useful than sitting in a study hall.

Think slippery, not sticky



How does your web site measure up?

by Brian Wringer

We've had some interesting discussions lately on metrics for credit union web sites. How do you measure the success of a credit union web site, and how do you justify spending money on it?

One key is to remember that to members, your site is a tool, not an entertainment destination or a fun place to hang around. They're there to get something done. CU sites should be slippery, not sticky. Just like your branches, members should be able to get in and out as fast as possible. So less traffic can be a very good thing. (I'm leaving aside tracking clicks on promotions and promotional pages because that's pretty straightforward.)

Another key is branding and brand personality. Just like a branch visit, members should come away from your web site with the correct impression of your brand personality. Prospective members should be able to get an accurate "read" on how they'll be treated, what you're like to do business with, and what they can expect.

But branding impact in any form is tough to measure – can you point to revenue from the shade of paint used in your branch, or the type of bushes planted outside? Not so much, but it's obvious a branch environment has a large impact. A web site is much the same – does it position you as trusted, competent, energetic, laid-back, high-tech, old-fashioned, cheap, or what? Does it damage your brand by being plain vanilla or does it align with and improve your brand in unique ways?

One way to measure these things could be with a series of quick one-question surveys on the home page. If you don't require a login or personal information, you'll get lots of results. The questions themselves would be another way to communicate your brand personality (hip? techie? fun?). The very fact that you're seeking and acting on member feedback is unusual in the world of business, but it's a natural connection to basic credit union values.

In terms of pageviews, it's important to relate aspects of the web site to other parts of the CU. In other words, look outside the web site for

baselines and ways to measure the influence of the site, and see if that correlates to any trends in the site data.

For example, I don't know if anyone is doing this yet, but I'd love to see a CU track "nontransaction" phone calls (and perhaps even branch visits) over time, then use that data to work on making information easier to find and understand on the web site. (And, of course, train your phone service people to mention the web site to members.) In that case, over time you can start to see and track actual cost savings from the web site. Same with your higher-traffic branches – how many people are there for something they could do or find online? If this is a problem, perhaps a few reminders about the web site could help.

You can also get an idea of how you're doing by tracking search terms used within your site (using the search built into the site, not a search engine like Google). Your internal search should log successful and failed queries so you can find out what people are looking for when they get to your site, and make content adjustments if needed. For example, we've found that the top search term is often "routing number", so perhaps it's a good idea to post this on your home page.

Another interesting and simple metric would be to ask new members whether they looked at the CU's web site before joining – "Have you seen our web site?" You'll likely find that a surprising number have looked through the site and factored that information into their decision to join. Note that this is a different question than "How did you hear about us?" – they may have first heard about the CU from a friend, or at work, but then they researched their decision online.

Think slippery, not sticky

by Brian Wringer

To your members, a credit union web site is a tool, a way to learn something or get something done. It's the online equivalent of a branch – a place to get some answers, conduct your business, and get on with life

as efficiently as possible. While the experience should be friendly and enjoyable, it's not entertainment or socializing.

This is fundamentally different – most web sites want users to stick around longer in hopes that they'll see more ads and/or make a purchase.

But on a credit union site, tactics intended to make a site “sticky” and increase pageviews simply get in the way. It's important to think about your web site from the member's point of view – think “slippery” and “smooth” instead of “grabbing attention” or “counting eyeballs.”

We're Just Here for the Online Banking, Thanks.

We've found very consistently that between 90% - 95% of the visitors to a CU web site are members who are there simply to log in to online banking. So let them – make it easy. Put the login form on every page exactly where they expect it, in the top right corner.

If your online banking login is actually located somewhere else, most members will simply bookmark the real login page to save time, and they'll never see your home page at all. *(Most online banking sites look terrible – is that really the impression you want them to have?)*

Almost all of the leftover 5% - 10% of site visitors who didn't just bounce out to online banking are looking for one of these four things:

- What are the Current Rates? (Mostly Auto Loans and Certificates – put your rates on a page they can bookmark)
- What's Your Phone Number/How Can I Talk to a Human? (This IS on every page, right?)
- How Late/Early are the Branches Open? (Hours & Locations)
- Any Good Deals Right Now? (Current Specials)

(Curiously, the top internal search term on a CU site is usually “routing number” – every automatic payment setup needs this, and few people bother to carry a checkbook any more. Make sure your routing number is on your web site somewhere, and can be found easily.)

If you can answer all these questions right there on the home page or provide easy-to-find direct links, you've just made life a lot easier for well over 99% of your site's visitors. Your page views will be down, but member satisfaction will be up.

The same applies for prospective members too – most people nowadays will review your web site before deciding whether to open an account. They'll have pretty much the same questions, with a few extra regarding the details of your checking accounts, fees, and so forth. Make this information easy to find and complete. (*More credit unions should be proud of their fee schedules.*)

If members and prospective members have to sit through pointless splash screens, wade through blinking, talking, walking Flash ads, or they get ambushed by unexpected sounds, they'll get the wrong impression and move on quickly.

Why rent eyeballs when you can own?

by Kent Dicken

Traditional media is based on buying exposure – how many people will see this newspaper ad, this TV spot, this outdoor board, this trade show booth. As a result, buyers of traditional media calculate what it will cost to “rent” those eyeballs just long enough to get a message across, then pray for a 1% response in order to pay for the media, and (hopefully) make a profit.

Traditional media has worked for a long time, and I don't see it going away anytime soon. If you have the right budget, the right creative and the right media mix, you can still be very successful using it as part of your marketing plan. Just remember to always think nontraditional in order to stand out in traditional media.

But traditional media is having a hard time getting things right lately, especially when costs seem to keep going up even as numbers are going down. Between DVRs and satellite radio and ad-blocking software and sorting mail over a trash can, people have more and more ways to dis-

connect from your marketing. So I think there could be a much deeper issue to consider.

Maybe we need to think about marketing as more than just a numbers game. Maybe it's because when you "rent eyeballs" there's no bonding, no personal connection. Kind of like renting a car, according to Seth Godin; "You want it to be clean and shiny when you get it, you want to avoid getting in trouble when you return it, but hey, it's a rental."

What if you can "own" those eyeballs instead? What if you can draw people to you in a way that allows you to build your own audience, with people who want to hear from you?

Take a look at other companies that are building platforms that will allow them to build their own audience, that they can then educate and nurture. In one post, Godin talks about a chiropractor coaching a running club instead of paying for a yellow page ad, a clothing designer that avoids the retail store control by selling direct online, and a real estate agent who starts a digital community magazine (and only features her listings.)

Notice that not all of these platforms are online or based on Twitter, Facebook or some other social networking site. In fact, this isn't even a new idea, and some credit unions have been building platforms for years – they just may not have used that term. Community Financial in Plymouth, MI has had a student-run credit union program for 20 years, operating 30 school credit unions and dedicating 2 full-time and 2 part-time staff to the program. Now that's a platform!

Your credit union already has an audience that wants to hear from you. You just have to start building. As Godin points out, "The smart way to build a brand today is to invest in the elements of the platform... the product, the technology, the websites (plural) and the systems you need to make it easy for people to show up at your very own trade show. And then embrace these people and shoot for 90% conversion, not .5%. Like most good investments, it's expensive and worth more than it costs."

So what are you going to build? When are you going to start owning?

Those crazy kids

by Brian Wringer

You've probably seen a couple hundred articles about all the ways the internet and social media are going to change marketing forever. We are facing a fundamental shift in marketing, but it's not particularly tied to a certain technology or fad – it's tied more to some profound differences in generations.

The younger people now coming in to economic power (ages 18-25) have been target marketed to for their entire lives. Database marketing got its start in the late '70s and became prevalent in the early '80s. People in this age group also grew up surrounded by cable TV, computers, and the internet, and many have had their own cell phone since at least their early teens. We can't market like it's 1950 any more.

Here are a few of the ways young adults are different – probably more different than you expect.

Young adults feel absolutely no obligation to you or your message. This is an important point – where someone over 40 might open or at least glance at your message out of a quaint sense of obligation, a young adult will immediately mark it as spam or chuck it into the recycling bin, usually with no conscious recognition. They eagerly use ad blocking software online, rip ads out of magazines before they read them, shovel most of their mailbox contents directly into the recycling bin, and skip commercials entirely:

- Young adults have nearly infallible built-in spam filters. In fact, there's research that indicates they literally don't even *see* things that look like advertising – for example, anything that blinks or is the *shape* of an ad or billboard might as well be blank.
- Young adults instinctively understand that their attention is valuable. You can't have it for free.
- Information is also valuable. You won't get a real email or physical address without providing significant value in return. If you have a roadblock in

front of something they want, you will get the garbage input you deserve in return.

So what's a marketer to do? If you're flexible and respectful, there's a bright side for credit unions:

- We all know they spend a lot of time online, but young adults place the most value on *authentic* human connections and *reputation* – these are two areas where credit unions can and should do very well. It's also easy to mess this up – does your web site look and feel real, unique, trustworthy? Or is it just another corporate-looking clone of a bank site? Do you allow members to email you, and does a real human respond almost *immediately*?
- The medium of contact means very little – the human on the other end is what matters. Most young adults have close friends they've never seen in person. If you send an email, make sure it's from a real person, and that it's welcome and relevant. If you have a blog or use social networking, put a real person with a real personality in charge of it, and make sure they have the time available to do it right – otherwise, don't bother.
- Reputation is everything. Understand and manage your reputation online and in personal contacts.
- Honesty is part of reputation. Again, credit unions can and should have a leg up in this area. Design (or revamp) your products and your marketing with an eye toward simplicity, authenticity, and value. If you're hiding everything behind walls of fine print, you're being dishonest.
- There's great value in being different. This is something credit unions *do* very well day-to-day, but very few *market* the difference, or allow the personality of the credit union to come through on their web site.
- Pay closer attention to the way your web site, your home banking, and your other online services work, look, and feel. Young adults will delve into your web site and research your reputation online before they ever consider opening an account. Does your web site do a good job of reflecting your credit union's positioning, personality, and branding? Does your home banking look like something designed by a fly-by-night in 1994 or a modern financial institution in 2010? Is your online loan application a fake – "We'll call you the next business day..." – or is it actually part of your process?

Social media simplified (part I) – Twitter

by Matt Rohland

So you want to attract that ever elusive younger demographic with some of their own toys. Unfortunately, today's toys take more than 3 twists of a key crank. So let's look at a web 2.0 toy – Twitter.

What is Twitter?

When you get past all the snazzy branding lingo, Twitter is just a simple news aggregation tool. When you create an account, you are given the ability to post short announcements as your own public news feed. Anyone with an account can then choose to subscribe to as many feeds as they want, view all of them chronologically, and, in essence, create their own current news page.

Why is Twitter so successful?

Most young adults with even an iota of honesty are not entirely sure, yet Twitter's number of site hits continues to increase. Most likely it is because Twitter's greatest strength lies in its simplicity. It demands this simplicity by limiting each post to 140 characters. It provides a surprisingly simple method of managing your posts and viewing other people's posts. Yet despite its simplicity, it also uses all the latest technology to help developers integrate twitter content seamlessly into other sites and applications.

Who is using Twitter?

Quantcast statistics show:

- That there are slightly more female users than male users
- The average user is a young adult between (18 and 30)
- There tends to be more use in urban settings
- Slightly over 50% are college graduates
- The site pulls "a less affluent audience"
- Most of its visitors are considered "Passers-By" as opposed to "Addicts".

Should I be using Twitter for our Marketing?

You probably should be using Twitter. You have news to post, and a 140 character limit will only help the quality of those posts. No CMS provides a simpler way to submit posts, so you could replace your existing news and announcements systems entirely with Twitter, feeding the results seamlessly on your site. You may even find that people who never bothered to visit your site and read the announcements, are willing to follow you on Twitter and read your announcements along with all their other Twitter posts. The simple truth is, if you treat it like a tool for posting news and announcements, there's really NO EXCUSE not to use it. Just don't expect anyone to follow your CEO's musings or mascot appearances.

Should I rely entirely on Twitter to promote my Social Media presence?

No. The demographic stats above are obviously not going to be ideal for all of your marketing. You may even wish Twitter pulled a "more affluent" crowd that is addicted to checking the site repeatedly day after day. In addition, there are times you would like to have more than 140 characters. That's where Facebook comes in – but that's another article for another day.

Social media simplified (part II) – Facebook



by Matt Rohland

A while back I wrote an article that attempted to explain Twitter and how it should be used for CU Marketing. In the article I danced around a very important point that I probably should have lead with. We, the younger generation, are not freaks eagerly ingesting any and everything that happens to appear on a trendy social media site. We are just as discerning as the rest of humanity and very good at tuning out any and all shameless plugs.

We see Facebook as a tool for connecting with people similar to us. It's a relaxed environment where we share photos, our favorite bands, what we believe in... etc. I cannot speak for everyone on Facebook, but my demographic will not become a fan of a specific Credit Union without

some tantalizing incentive. We usually become fans of products that define us like: our favorite bar, White Castle, Pop Tarts and Peanut Butter Jelly Time. But a financial institution... that's unlikely.

So what tantalizing incentive are you going to offer? If you offer a promotion that requires people to become a fan you may generate some short term buzz. Burger King definitely did, but how are you going to keep your fans when they can leave as easily as they joined?

There aren't any magic beans. To even have a shot at keeping fans you'll have to overcome the un-cool factor that surrounds being a fan of a financial institution. You'll need to:

- HAVE A PERSONALITY, nothing contrived or eye-roll worthy, but something a robot couldn't mimic
- Keep your fan page current
- Pack it with USEFUL information
- Make your fans feel special by offering them unique deals and opportunities
- Provide them with the inside scoop on INTERESTING happenings at the credit union. They may even appreciate a compelling anecdote that reveals your credit union's unique personality
- How about asking your fans what they think? We're an opinionated crowd... even if we can't spell.

There are plenty of other morsels of insight out there. Maybe some fellow readers can even comment on a few? But no matter what you do on Facebook, don't forget to keep things interesting, useful and full of personality.

Basics before buzzwords

by Brian Wringer

Are you feeling a little guilty these days because your credit union doesn't have an active blog, a MySpace page, and a loyal audience of thousands following a Twitter feed?

Before you start chasing the latest buzzwords, make sure the basics are in place – a useful web site, with *current* information that's easy to find. To be honest, most credit unions could gain a lot by simply paying more attention to maintaining their web site and making some tweaks to make information easier for people (and search engines) to locate.

Following are a few examples of the basics – take care of these before you worry about how many times the credit union has been friended or how many tweets the CEO has sent today:

1) **Get it right.** Personally go through every page on the site with a fine-toothed comb and clean up outdated, incorrect, and incomplete information, dead links, broken layouts, technical issues, and other flotsam. This sometimes takes a surprising amount of time, but it's extremely important – members *must* be able to depend on and trust your site.

(If a cumbersome process gets in the way – you can't make these changes yourself easily and quickly, or they cost you extra money, may we humbly suggest that you consider a change?)

2) The following are the **four most-requested pages** on every credit union site on the planet. Make sure yours are extremely easy to find, contain the stuff most real people really want to know, and make VERY sure that your members can use them exactly the way they want and expect.

Home Page

90% to 95% of site visitors simply hit the home page and continue to the home banking. Let them. Make it as easy as you can, with a login right there on the home page.

Rates

Many rate-watchers bookmark the rates page. Consider splitting rates into different pages so they get only the rates they want – and you can tell which rates are getting the most attention. If you want to court their business, consider adding an RSS feed or rate alerts. Consider helping them out with a separate rate sheet showing only the current best deals and specials.

Locations & Hours

Where are you and how late are you open? Believe it or not, this information is *incredibly* hard to find on most credit union web sites. Include phone and fax numbers. Names and photos of the branch managers are a nice personal touch.

Contact Us

Every page on your site should contain your phone number, but for some curious reason most CU web sites omit this. Members are almost always looking for a phone number on the contact page. Your call center number – and the hours – should be the first thing they see. Bonus points for specific branch and department numbers. If I want a mortgage, I want to talk to a human being in the Mortgage Department. Super double bonus points for a list of real humans and their names and numbers.

3) **Get real** - after you've corrected everything back in step 1, go back and remove the market-speak, blather, and hype. People don't trust hype on the web, and they prefer and trust information in smaller, plainer chunks.

4) **Use text** - graphics and Flash are generally invisible to search engines and make web pages harder to read and update. Modern CSS can make type look great while keeping it readable to people and machines.

Web 2.OhNo!

.....
by Matt Rohland

Credit unions are slowly starting to warm up to the modern web trends. I'm starting to see some brilliant Web 2.0 features finding their way onto Credit union websites, including standalone and tie-in Web 2.0 features

like: offering people to people lending programs (like Zoppa or Kiva), allowing members to publicly rate/review your products and services, offering RSS feeds for rates, mobile banking, etc.

Despite this encouraging trend there seems to be an abundance of confusion surrounding the definition of Web 2.0. so let me clear up some misconceptions.

Web 2.0 has NOTHING to do with:

- Videos you post
- “Interactive” flash elements
- Weather widgets and other such gimmicks
- Designs with rounded corners, gradients and glossy reflections.

Web 2.0 is: the simple idea that the web should be a two-way street. Traditionally websites would provide you with information; the owner of the site was responsible for providing every bit of content on it (a one way street). The idea behind Web 2.0 is that in addition to the owner adding information to a site, visitors also provide and share information through the site. The information they share can be anything from comments and ratings (like on most blogs), to entire discussion topics (forums and message boards), to their entire lives (Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace).

Now that you have a clearer idea what Web 2.0 is - do you really want it?

Do you want members to publicly review your products and services or would you rather complaints be handled privately? Do you really want members offering investment suggestions to other members through a message board on your site? Maybe not...

However, you could create a Facebook Group where you can announce your community outreach programs and get your members involved. Create a Facebook application where people can donate to local causes and share information about the causes with their friends. Perhaps you could even offer to match donations.

Or maybe you could start a Flickr photo competition where people can share photos of their favorite hangouts to drum up some local pride. Set up simple polls and surveys. Should Saturday branch hours be extended? What color should Pam the teller dye her hair? You just don't know until you ask.

Where's the little lock?

by Brian Wringer

Sure, this is a credit union marketing blog. But if you're a CU marketer in charge of building or rebuilding your credit union's web site, there are a few bits of technical knowledge you just can't escape.

I'll try to make this painless, I promise. First, a definition:

SSL stands for Secure Socket Layer. It is a standard way to encrypt (scramble) communications between a web server and a web browser. When you are using SSL, your browser will display a lock icon, and the URL will begin with "**https://**" instead of "**http://**".

(That's the basic idea, but there's lots more info out there if you really want to know more and you have a couple of days to read.)

Following are a few of our security recommendations for CU web sites:

Only use encryption when it's needed.

There are a couple of reasons for this. Using SSL slows things down because the server and the browser have to encode and decode everything, and must transmit more data.

SSL also acts like a "KEEP OUT" sign to search engines, and inconveniences site users who just want to look around your site. Reserve SSL for situations where you are actually displaying or receiving sensitive information, and don't use it for information that should be public.

It's OK to use encryption for forms housed on unencrypted pages.

As long as a form is set to transmit information to a secure URL (one that starts with https://), the form will automatically encrypt the information before it sends it. It doesn't matter one bit if the page itself is encrypted. In other words, it's perfectly OK to put a secure form on an unsecured page.

The most common example is a home banking login form on a CU home page. There's no need to force the home page or the rest of the site to load using encryption. When the login is processed and the user's account information is displayed, then that page must be encrypted, of course.

Sensitive information must be kept safe every step of the way.

SSL encryption only covers the exchange of data between the user's browser and your server – it's only the first step. For example, if you have an online loan application or a contact form, the information must also be stored and accessed in a secure way. Sensitive information should never be simply emailed or stored as plain text.

Think carefully before you request or store sensitive information.

If you never have it, you can't lose it. If you're just doing a member survey or signing up members for a seminar, do you *really* need an account number? Probably not. If you absolutely must collect sensitive info, keep it secure every step of the way and purge the data as soon as possible.

This is only an overview and a few recommendations based on the most common misunderstandings and issues we've encountered in CU land.

Ooooo, shiny!



A new kind of loan shark

by Lisa Taylor

Many lower-income consumers are shying away from credit cards these days. They're either sick of the high interest rates, can't get one at all or the credit limit is laughably low.

My daughter, who is in college and has no job, was recently offered a credit card with a \$500 limit. I was hesitant about letting her get it, but she wanted to start building her credit rating. So she went ahead and got it. And then the credit card issuer (Capital One) hit her with a bill for 30 some odd dollars – the yearly fee to have the card. She quickly called and cancelled, and wisely decided to put off taking on debt for the time being.

So what does she do when she wants to buy something online, and doesn't want to use a debit card (or doesn't have enough in checking)? There is an alternative for her and lots of people like her. A company called Bill Me Later (owned by eBay) will loan consumers the money for a single purchase with just a name and part of the social security number. Thousands of online sites offer the service, including Amazon, Toys R Us, Walmart and Zappos.

The good news is that there are no interest charges for the first few weeks. The bad news? If the Bill MeLater balance is not paid on time, the shopper will get hit with a 20% interest rate plus penalties. A \$20 purchase could end up costing \$40 or more. And since Bill Me Later is used for individual purchases, the repeated credit checks could end up hurting the user's credit rating.

Who is using Bill Me Later? In most cases, those who can least afford it get slapped with the fees and penalties. Bill Me Later has a slogan – “No wallet. No wait. No worries”. – but it doesn't tell the whole story. As always, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Now more than ever, it's important to make sure your members understand the basics of safe shopping online. With credit cards in turmoil, more and more people and online vendors are looking for other ways to

fund purchases besides credit cards, and more financial institutions are looking for sources of income. Bill Me Later is just one example. And, of course, there's also an opportunity here – what could your CU do to fill the need for safe online purchasing?

Why CU marketers should not approve loans

by Kelley Parks

Working in a soup kitchen each Friday during lunch became one of those “do good” credit union community service projects that stuck (well, for a while). Each Friday I'd drive into the city, feed the parking meter, and greet the Andersons who were often dumpster diving for treasures on my way in. I'd help take cans of donated food and turn it into something that only on the rare occasion didn't taste like Green Bean Casserole.

The Soup Kitchen served homeless people of all varieties – old, young, even some children, and it was intensely satisfying to help them. Mr. and Mrs. Anderson were a sweet old couple in their late 70s. They could have been my grandparents and it took everything I had inside me not to take them home with me each Friday.

One year, my credit union was having a Christmas Brunch and one of the staff had the brilliant idea to adopt a needy family. I immediately thought of my friends from the soup kitchen and the next week I eagerly told them that I was going to pick them up and bring them to my credit union for a real Christmas Brunch. They were delighted and I snapped their picture and shared with the staff my adorable, perfectly innocent old couple.

As promised, I picked up the Andersons that Friday and brought them to my credit union. The staff was overwhelmingly generous and showered them with gifts, cards, and a feast fit for a king. The Andersons cried, we were all so touched, and I was a hero! We had given so many things to the Andersons my CEO had to use his pick-up truck to haul all the “stuff” back to their uh....well, I didn't exactly know or even think about it.

We drove down the highway and Mrs. Anderson sweetly told me, "Turn left here, dear. Take a right just ahead, honey." And then, we pulled into the nicest condominium high-rise in the city. I was trying to rationalize why the Andersons wanted me to take them to this high rise community on the nicest street in town. Maybe they have a relative here? Maybe they live in a cardboard box behind the dumpster? Nope. They lived on the 12th floor, and what could I do but politely take all their gifts up the posh elevator one cart load at a time. And to top it off the name on the door didn't say "Anderson", it was another last name. I was had, but what could I do? My CEO and I giggled all the way down in the elevator and vowed an oath not to tell anyone. I figure 5 years is a good expiration date on an oath like that.

There's a reason why CU Marketing Directors should not approve loans. We just live in a world of unending optimism and trust. The glass is always half full and the people are always good. And the energy of an idea propels us farther than being cynical ever would. But our heart, at least, is almost always in the right place.

Steal your members

by Kent Dicken

If you were a small soft drink company, you wouldn't be trying to convince people to drink soft drinks when they were thirsty. That's the job of the market leader. That's Coke and Pepsi's job. What you would be trying to do is to connect with the consumer in a way that when they walk up to the cooler, they end up buying your soft drink instead. You would be trying to steal some of Coke and Pepsi's market share.

In most markets, credit unions are not the biggest player. And their local competition, the smaller community banks, seem to be getting swallowed by bigger banks. These megabanks are the market leaders simply because they have deeper pockets for advertising. Yet many CUs still try to convince people that they are the *same* as a bank, rather than highlighting the reason that people should use them *instead* of a bank. That's

like trying to sell the idea of buying a soft drink instead of telling them why they should buy your soft drink.

When you are not the market leader, you have to steal share of the market. You have to differentiate yourself.

Instead of telling people that you also offer car loans, you need to communicate why they need your car loan. Instead of saying you have a good checking account, you have to tell people why your checking account is perfect for their lifestyle. Instead of telling people why you are just like a bank, you need to tell them **why you are not just like a bank.**

Credit unions have so many positives about them that the hardest part is communicating the difference to potential members. But that's how you "steal" members.

Ooooo, shiny!

by Matt Rohland

So a squirrel was gathering nuts when he happened upon a distracting piece of aluminum foil...

Almost 2 years ago I was looking for my SECOND car. I walked into my bank to see if I could get pre-approved for a small auto loan (under \$10,000). They asked me a laundry list of questions and abruptly told me that (even though I was a college grad with a job) I would need someone to co-sign for this loan as well. With my family scattered across the globe, there just wasn't any way I could get anyone to co-sign.

Disgusted with my bank, I knew that credit unions would prove a better fit since I now worked with them every day. The question was which CU should I join? Surprisingly, three of them in my neighborhood were running new member campaigns so I was in luck!

- One of them was offering a free iPod Nano – how cool is that? But their site was heinous looking and after I gave their online banking tool a test drive,

I nearly gagged. I decided that if they didn't have enough self respect to put together a decent looking website that functioned properly, they just weren't the CU for me.

- The second credit union I checked out was offering a chance at a car. How perfect – except that if I didn't happen to win the raffle, I'd still need an auto loan and their rates were double digit percentages. Absurd!
- Number 3 came around and their new member campaign offered \$50 to anyone who could juggle chainsaws while tight-rope across the mythical river Styx. Despite the absurdity of their new member campaign, they had a half way usable online banking system, their rates were competitive, and they could also take care of my car insurance for the lowest rate I'd ever seen. So I joined the credit union and tried not to laugh as the lady explained their amazing new member deal. If only I knew where the river Styx was.

...So the squirrel spent hours carting the shiny ball of aluminum foil up the tree to his den. That winter was extra long and unusually frigid, so the squirrel died.

Well what did you expect? Squirrels are stupid – but potential members aren't. We know "specials" are just carefully crafted distractions. We can smell the stink of a long disclosure. We don't want introductory rates or short term gimmicks. We want a consistently solid product. We want usable home banking tools, competitive rates, convenient branch and ATM locations, and a good portfolio of secondary services (car insurance, low rate credit cards, flexible investment options...).

So next time you're budgeting for a new car giveaway, consider revisiting your website instead. Make sure your rates are competitive. If you don't get the basics right... all the foil in the world won't be tantalizing enough for us moderately discerning squirrels.

Duh!!

by Lisa Taylor

Debt Hell – Your cash is being used to pay the minimum on your card balances so you don't have the cash to pay for the stuff you want. Solution? Put it on your credit card.

Once you find yourself in that revolving circle of debt hell, it's really tough to get out of it.

There is hope however.

The only thing you really need to know to stay out of debt: **don't buy stuff you cannot afford.**

Very sound advice yet I think it needs a bit of refining. True, "afford" is the word that is normally used: "Don't buy stuff you can't *afford*" or "Can we *afford* that?" But that still doesn't fix the problem.

People obviously think they can *afford* a lot of things. Credit cards enable us to *afford* all kinds of stuff! The lexicon needs to change to "pay for," starting right now. **Don't buy stuff you can't *pay for*.** In other words, if you don't have the cash, you can't buy it. Period.

Craig Wilson, a columnist at USA Today, made a New Year's resolution a few years back not to buy anything that wasn't absolutely essential for an entire year. Was it painful? Probably at times, but he confessed that he felt "cleansed." It's basically a matter of simplifying your life.

So how do we simplify in an age where we're bombarded with images of things we need to have to make our lives better: new cars; big, flat screen TVs; designer duds; cruise vacations, etc.? Ignore it all! Will you really feel like a lesser person without all this stuff? Doubtful. Just a person with more cash.

And how do you find a nice way to tell your members to stop buying stuff? It's kind of like a supermarket telling overweight people that in order to lose weight, they will have to stop eating so much. It may hurt your credit card income, but your members will have longer, happier lives.

I wanna be a kid again



Colorful psychology

by Kelley Parks

I'm in the process of painting several rooms in my home. Over the week-end, I watched my spare bedroom transform from an inconspicuous green to a spirited red. What used to be a relaxing bedroom is now a vibrant home office. I'm intrigued how color can affect your state of mind, since studies show that it can actually change the way you feel. As I was settling on paint color, I became curious about the psychology of my choice and how I could use color to invoke similar feelings with my members:

Red: The color of energy, action and passion. Red is the most emotionally intense of all the colors. Studies show that red can actually raise your blood pressure and cause you to take action. I wonder if putting phone numbers, websites and other calls to action in red helps response rates.

Blue: The color of peace and harmony. Blue invokes trust and confidence as the ultimate power color. It's also the best selling and most universally accepted of all colors. Blue can actually make you appear more trustworthy, so kudos to the NCUA for picking the perfect color for their logo. (BTW, blue also decreases appetite, so I may have to paint my refrigerator.)

Green: The color of wealth and luck. It is also the easiest color for eyes to absorb. For this reason, green instantly puts people at ease and has an emotional connection to safety and growth much like blue. Now I understand why so many financial institution logos are green or blue.

Purple: The color of enlightenment, independence and creativity. It combines the stability of blue with the energy of red. There is a gender bias with purple so it should be used with discretion. Also, studies show that the majority of children choose purple as a favorite color so it's a great color to connect with kids.

Brown: The color of stability and tradition. It shows credibility and brings you down to Earth. You can use brown to convey warmth, honesty and wholesomeness. I suppose it was no coincidence that Grampa's old chair was brown.

Orange: The color of joy and enthusiasm. Orange combines the happiness of yellow with the intensity of red. Studies show that orange actually increases oxygen to the brain, and is highly accepted by young people. Orange can bring out excitement and fun and is believed to actually cheer you up if you are down.

Yellow: The color of happiness and optimism. It is also the most difficult color for your eye to absorb so it can be unbearable if used too much. Yellow can be used as a sign of hope. If yellow is a sign of hope and optimism, perhaps all credit union board rooms should be this color.

Look around you. How do you use color in your marketing materials to members? What color is your lobby? Could the color of your office affect how you work? Most importantly, how can we better use color to achieve the right response, invoke the appropriate emotional connections with members, and help us manage our brands?

Building the perfect CU marketer

by Kent Dicken

I'm not sure how a CEO of a credit union selects a Marketing Director when they have an opening – especially since most CU CEOs come from a dollars and sense background. Do they look in the mirror and just pick their opposite? Maybe it's simply a process of checking off the skill set, education, and experience listed on the resume?

Or maybe they hire based on something else. I got one of my earliest jobs just because I wasn't as tall as the other candidate, and the interviewer was kinda short – it was a very sobering thing to find out a few months into the job that it wasn't my portfolio or talent that got me the job. But that opportunity launched my career, and it did give me a rather unique perspective on the whole hiring process. Maybe it is the little things that matter more. Maybe there isn't always a perfect person for the job.

But what if you could “build” the perfect CU Marketer? Since I have had the pleasure of working with some excellent CU Marketers over the years (some

CEOs obviously got it right), I thought maybe I could combine the best qualities of all of them. See if you recognize yourself or others in this list:

1. She's a whirlwind.

So don't stand in her way. She will spend more time away from her desk than at it, with creativity that does not watch a clock. This person has a high level of originality, a strong intuition about what will work, and strong values of what is right. Building a fun brand comes naturally, and good people skills leads to good communication with staff, members and vendors. Possibilities are truly endless to this person, so don't expect too many details when celebrating the results.

2. He's everyone's friend.

A true people person, this Marketer understands how strong connections make a strong community of members, and that products need to match up to how members live. Warm-hearted, charismatic and conscientious, this person prioritizes people over procedures.

3. She's curious.

She cares enough about new ideas that she reads every blog, every book that piques her interest. She shares her ideas with others, sometimes just to get a reaction. She then processes and shares this information in new ways that opens eyes.

4. He's connected.

And I don't mean politically. Complex projects fall into place as each piece connects to the prior step. From concepts to layout to media placement, this Marketer understands how each part is intertwined, how each part helps meet the strategic goals.

5. She's motivated.

Self-imposed goals are what drives this Marketer more than those handed down from above. Not only is it more satisfying for her to hit new heights, but she looks forward to raising the bar. She knows that it isn't what you are given that matters. It's what you do with it.

If you were in charge of building the perfect CU Marketer, what other qualities would you add to the list?

I wanna be a kid again

by Kent Dicken

I've heard that kids laugh an average of 400 or more times a day, while adults laugh an average of 10-15 times a day. Now this "fact" may be just an urban legend, as I can't find any documentation of any kind, but I really hope that I'm not in a 390 laugh deficit every day. Otherwise, I wanna be a kid again.

Because kids have a sense of humor. Everything is funny to a kid, from armpit farts to booger jokes to never-ending knock-knock jokes. It doesn't take much to get a kid giggling, and the true measure of a successful joke is still whether or not milk spews out someone's nose.

According to psychologist Ed Dunkelblau (in an AP article by Leanne Italie featured on msnbc.com): "I think we're hard-wired to laugh." Research has shown that "children respond to humor long before they can fully understand language or develop long-term memory...which goes a long way in explaining what makes peek-a-boo ad infinitum so amusing to children." As kids age, word play becomes funny, as multiple meanings of words and sound-alikes become the basis for knock-knock jokes. This fascination with words is now viewed as a sign of intelligence, and psychologists are telling parents to view it as an asset.

Obviously what is funny to a kid isn't always funny to an adult.

How many times have you heard an adult ask a giggling kid "What's so funny?" In the same AP article, Devra Renner, MSW and co-author of the book *Mommy Guilt*, is quoted as saying that "parents tend to forget what made them laugh – and how good it felt – when they were young. But if we give up the adult definition of what 'fun' is and remember what was fun when we were kids, I think many parents would be amazed at their newfound ability to once again discover just what it is that's so damned funny."

Laughter may also be a great way to connect with people.

Dunkelblau points out that "Kids learn to build relationships through humor and laughter," and helpguide.org, a non-profit site about mental

health and lifelong wellness, says that “When laughter is shared, it binds people together and increases happiness and intimacy.”

I’m not recommending that you try to make it as a stand-up comedian, but since marketing is all about connecting with people, maybe it wouldn’t hurt to lighten up around your members?

Me? I’m gonna work on that laugh deficit. Know any good knock-knock jokes?

8 pranks to play on your CFO

by Kelley Parks

It seems that lately there is no one more stressed in the office than the CFO. Between low investment rates, Corporate Stabilization and not knowing what to do with the influx of deposits pouring in through the windows, those left-brain, graph-wheedling bean counters are in desperate need of a good laugh. Fortunately, we marketers have the gift of humor.

Here are 8 pranks to play on your CFO (and yes, I have successfully attempted nearly all of them):

1. Steal his calculator and hold it for ransom. Be sure to leave a note and ask for something good – like chocolate.
2. Cover his computer entirely with post-it notes that have clever sayings like “You might be an accountant if...you didn’t know GAP was a clothing store.”
3. Take his _____ (insert prize office possession here: highlighter, coffee mug, etc.) on your next trip. Email him pictures of the object having a good time at a resort, getting on an airplane, and drinking beer. (It’s even better if you set up a gmail account for said object).
4. Redecorate his office with your own flair. Does he need more color? Inspirational objects hanging from the ceiling? Motivational quotes?
5. Send blank sheets of paper marked “Important” via interoffice mail.

6. Put a post it note on his chair from the CEO that says, "I need to see you right away after your job interview. It's important."
7. Take him to lunch and tell the waiter it's his birthday. (A milestone like 30, 40, or 50 is even better.)
8. Leave the entire room in cups of water. For bonus points, write a message using different colored upside-down cups.

Disclaimer: I am not responsible for any retribution that occurs as a result of deploying any of the above.

Can you sell service?

by Brian Wringer

In the January 2009 issue of *Credit Union Magazine*, James Collins made a very interesting point near the end of his "Branching Out" column:

*"Being successful lenders in 2009 will take determination and perseverance. It will also mean avoiding certain pitfalls, such as... Trying to sell service. **Good service is a great way to retain members but awful in attracting new ones.**"*

This is so true, but why? I think there are a few reasons.

Mainly, there's simple credibility. Service claims have simply been worn out from misuse and over uses. And, in most people's experience, service promises are worthless when put to the test. In fact, the very act of making a service claim instantly makes the rest of your message less credible.

Secondly, good service must be experienced to be believed. It's something you do, not something you say you do. And, of course, the actual definition of good service is infinitely variable depending on the situation.

So what's a marketer to do? After all, service quality is one of the biggest differences between CUs and banks.

Part of the solution is to be specific: what exactly are you doing? "Great Service" is a vague concept, but extended drive-up hours on payday are great service in action. Talk about things you do, not grand philosophies or mission statements. "We'll come to your home or office to close your loan." says a lot more than "We strive for convenience."

"Do or do not. There is no try." - Jedi Master Yoda

Another way to show great service in action is through testimonials. You'll usually want to make sure that the testimonial is something portable and specific, not just one extraordinary experience or a sob story. But allowing people to use their own words can be a powerful way to show your exceptional service.

Lastly, don't be afraid to go small. Little, everyday examples of good service – the stuff you probably don't even think about any more – can be powerful, credible evidence of your credit union's service quality in action. For example, are your phones answered by a live human or a phone menu that demands an account number before you can proceed?

Credit Union science fiction

by Brian Wringer

Forget next year's media budget or your five-year strategy. Let's gaze deeper into that CU crystal ball than we ever have before.

What's the distant future of finance? What are credit unions going to be doing 25, 50, or 100 years from now?

Virtual CUs

Correct me if this has already happened, but is there a totally branchless, totally online "virtual" CU out there? There are a few virtual banks doing business, but as far as I can tell, CUs are still building more branches than they're tearing down. Younger people are already perfectly comfortable doing business with people they've never met, and in the future more and more will prefer it. Imagine the savings in operations costs...

A new virtual CU wouldn't surprise me, but it'll be interesting to see if and when an existing "bricks and mortar" CU closes its last branch and goes entirely online.

Online Common Bond

There are already thousands of online communities with enough members and resources to form their own CU if they wanted. Someday, we'll see virtual CUs built by and for these communities.

For example, imagine a CU built around an online gaming community. It could offer compelling features to assist members with "in-game" transactions – keeping track of your "gold" (in-game currency) balance right along with your dollars, and offering easy conversion back and forth. Maybe even a single sign-on for you and your character.

There are thriving online communities built around every interest – how could a custom CU serve a huge global group of motorcycle enthusiasts, or fans of Thai cooking?

The End of Paper

One day, one brave CU will declare an end to all this silly business with scraps of dead trees. No more checks, no more vast halls of dusty paper archives, no more filing cabinets. Bet you can't wait.

Global Currency

In every science fiction story, the characters seem to use "Credits" or "Stars" instead of "Dollars" and "Euros." At some point in the future, will we see one world currency? How will this affect CUs?

Interplanetary Finance

Can you get a mortgage for a nice little retirement dome on Mars? How will a colony on Pluto keep track of their finances when the transmission time to get a signal to Earth is 4.5 hours? Perhaps distant colonies or explorers could bring a secured "CU in a Box" with them to handle finances, which would reconcile with the CU back on Earth when they return.

Intrinsic Value

When humanity is scattered far enough, and perhaps isn't even entirely human, will scraps of funny paper or electrons in computer memory still have any value? Perhaps there will be a return to gold, platinum, radio-

active isotopes, or another medium of exchange – something with a certain intrinsic value.

Alien Finance

When the aliens finally land, will they need credit unions? Do creatures from the stars need flying saucer loans? Will you be able to find a way to open an account for a wealthy sentient polyp with no drivers license?

Extended Longevity

When we finally conquer aging, how will this affect finance? Obviously, retirement planning will be entirely different when people can reasonably expect to live for 800 years. How might you structure something like a 200 year mortgage?

Five ways to squeeze the most out of your agency

by Brian Wringer

In times like these, we know you have to pinch every marketing penny until it screams. As a service to our clients and potential clients, as well as to our colleagues in the creative biz, we've put together a few ways you can make sure you wring every precious drop of creativity out of your marketing agency.

Take these hints to heart, and you'll find that projects glide along, budgets and schedules remain intact, and your agency will walk through fire for you. And the piles of awards will get positively embarrassing.

Trust Us

We understand – you've probably been hurt before. Maybe some other agency didn't work out, or they ran off with your budget. Maybe you have a fear of commitment.

The first step in learning to market again is to find an agency worthy of your trust. And then trust them. Start small, if you like – try a little fling with a smaller project, and see how well that goes.

And do your homework first – look through a prospective new agency's portfolio and try to get a sense of how they met each client's needs. Lots of agencies can make pretty things. Few can truly communicate. If you can see a connection to a distinct audience in every piece, relax – you're in good hands.

Share

Go on, tell us everything. Who's your target audience? What's been done in the past? Who are the decision-makers at the credit union, and what are the politics involved? Who has a phobia of the color purple? What's your budget? What are your projections and targets? We won't tell – cross our hearts and hope to die. But we need all the dirt so we can deliver.

The same applies to feedback – if you don't like something, be fearless and tell us right away. And tell us exactly why. We won't bite or burst into tears, promise. And if you *really* like something, send cookies.

Step Up

This one's important – one person has to step up and take charge of a project, and has to have the authority to make decisions. Design and marketing by committee or remote control will water down the message. The very best communication speaks with one distinct voice.

Stick Up

I'm afraid that the world, including your credit union, is full of people who love to find fault. When you show a piece or a concept to others, be prepared to stick up for the concept, and stick to the idea behind it. Remember why it was created and for whom, and be ready to explain it. If you let everyone make *just one little change*, pretty soon you've turned our soaring concept into a plucked chicken. Find people who can dispense constructive criticism, not just critics. (Of course, if something truly stinks or is just plain wrong, don't be silly about it.)

Follow Up

Once our fabulous brain-child has hit the streets, what happens? We'd love to know, too. Keep us in the loop regarding results, and you'll become one of our very favorite clients of all time. You'll also find that the information improves your future marketing. It's part of the great circle of marketing.

Culture eats marketing for breakfast



How to make your brand even more durable

by Kent Dicken

People are holding onto cars for 9.4 years instead of trading them in, the highest number of people ever are carrying library cards, and DIY has picked up 30% of the home repair market. **Getting value out of every purchase has made durability the latest “trend” in our cultural values.**

Since credit unions have been around for over a hundred years (with many of you celebrating fifty or more), is it any wonder more and more people are attracted to credit unions for their no-nonsense, long-term approach to financial services? This durability has become a huge asset to every credit union’s brand, and a natural marketing focus when other FIs are going down in flames around you.

Yet, durability is just one of these newly rediscovered cultural values that seem to dovetail into the credit union brand. Take a look at these themes and see how companies are promoting values:

Transparency – Corporations like Gore (as in Gore-Tex) are putting management expense reports on the web.

Living Liquid – Consumers are learning to live financially savvy, not being locked into spiraling debt, and paying cash and using debit instead of credit. When the recession hit the hardest in the last quarter of 2008, the personal savings rate jumped 5%.

Authenticity – Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty has tapped into a resentment against stereotypes for women and built a community aimed at real people (although they are a bit heavy-handed on the product promotions.)

Community Connection and Organization – DECA and Johnson & Johnson are having “momversations”, and Wellpoint has teamed up with Zagat’s, adding healthcare provider reviews in addition to their restaurant reviews.

Sustainability – Consumers are paying more attention to the stability and viability of companies they deal with. Who will honor my Chevy’s warranty if GM goes bankrupt? This credit card looks like a great deal, but what is this bank going to do to me to make their money? Are they going to sell out and change everything next year?

Of course, durability is far more than a trend to CUs – it’s built in to the way CUs work. Maybe it’s a bit dull, but there’s never been a better time to tell this part of the credit union story.

What are you known for?

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by Kent Dicken

McDonald’s has a variety of food items, but where would they be without their Big Mac? Burger King without their Whopper? Would Nike be just another Keds without Air Jordan? Without the Macintosh, would it still seem as if everyone in the universe owns an iPod from Apple?

Most successful companies have a best-selling product for which they become known, and once they are recognized for that product, they are able to then build on that base and expand their offerings, introducing just enough new variations each year to keep their market connected.

You know each and every one of these companies by name. You may not know everything they offer, but you do have a good idea of their product focus. Which is pretty amazing, considering how many companies are out there, vying for your attention.

Successful companies stand out. They are known for something. That is their brand. Their true market identity. They don’t blend in with the rest of the world, and especially not with their competition.

If you ask the average person what they know about credit unions you would find that most CUs have less of an identity and more of an identity crisis: Are they just like a bank, or something different? Don’t they both offer the same things? Let’s face it, even after all these years of trying, the

average Joe just doesn't know. And your credit union needs to be known for *something*.

So, what ONE thing are you known for?

Auto loans? Low VISA rates? ATMs and branches blanketing the market? Online banking so fast it will make your head spin? Chances are, you couldn't pick just one thing. Chances are, you can come up with a complete menu of good, financially-healthy products and services that benefit your members. Lots and lots of great benefits, but so many that they blend together and nothing that stands out as uniquely yours.

If so, then what you offer is probably not much different than what the bank down the street offers. Ask yourself this: if you switched logos on your marketing and theirs, would anyone be able to tell?

If you can't see the difference, how do you expect your market to see the difference?

So simplify. Get known for ONE thing. Ask your members what you do exceedingly well. Find your defining product or service, your product hero. If it turns out to be something as simple as always having the lowest auto loans around, embrace it completely and put it front and center in your marketing. Show your product hero as visually as possible in order to make an at-a-glance connection. Use copy points that articulate the benefits of belonging and that differentiate you from your competition.

Stand out. Or stay unknown.

Be what you are

by Brian Wringer

We've had a remarkable stretch of cold and regular snow here in Indy the last few weeks, so I've been forced to drive to work instead of riding a motorcycle. Being stuck inside a "cage" is pretty rough for me, but at least I can listen to the radio. I even pay attention to the commercials, mostly out of professional interest.

This morning, I heard something remarkable: a commercial for Toyota that simply talked about how reliable their cars were. This one featured a salesman who had to travel a lot, and who said he felt better and safer driving a Toyota because it was the most reliable. The ad didn't mention power, styling, cost, or a sale, and only mentioned the model (Camry) once. No screaming, no outrageous claims, no fluffy tag lines, no obnoxious simulated car crash, no need for huge, desperate rebates.

Why was this commercial remarkable? Ask around, and check the statistics – for decades, Toyota has long had a well-deserved reputation of building the most reliable vehicles on the planet. They might be a bit dull, but they “run forever”. (As the current custodian of two Toyotas with 220,000+ miles, and the former owner of other Toyotas that went well over 250,000 miles and more, I agree with this.) This is what they are – reliable.

But their marketing has, until now, hardly ever mentioned reliability. Toyota has always tried to talk style, excitement, fun, power, “toughness” (whatever that is), price, or value – all the same stuff their competition was doing. Maybe it's just that the times are finally right for this approach. Maybe talking about reliability is too boring most of the time. But maybe it's that someone at Toyota has decided to finally embrace their biggest advantage instead of trying to advertise based on everybody else's criteria. I think it'll work.

The same thing applies to credit union branding and advertising, too, of course. Understand what you are, what makes your credit union different from all other credit unions. Be different. Claim your obvious advantage. Tell the truth as simply as you can. Be what you are. And don't be afraid of being a little dull. That actually works pretty well for credit unions, too. The world has had a little too much financial excitement lately.

Culture eats marketing for breakfast

by Kent Dicken

In most companies, management sets the tone for the corporate culture with a focus on either profits or customers. Amazon.com CEO Jeff Bezos made news this year for working at one of their fulfillment centers in Kentucky, and has made it a requirement for every employee to spend two days every two years in customer service. When a focus on customers comes from the top, it sets the tone for the entire corporate culture, and that gets reflected in every customer interaction.

Credit unions are no different. If the management team values profit over people, or values management hierarchy over creative solutions, it becomes part of the culture that affects how every employee does their job and how members experience the credit union. This culture then becomes reflected in your reputation with both members and non-members.

This reputation is your **brand image** – the psychological and emotional connections that people make when thinking about your CU – and also one of your biggest challenges to manage if there is a disconnect in marketing your brand.

No matter how you represent your credit union in marketing, if your brand image does not match up to your marketing it cannot and will not connect. If you promote yourself as a warm and fuzzy alternative to banks, but your fees, policies, and reputation are similar to a bank, then you have a huge disconnect between the wishful thinking in your marketing message and the reality of your brand.

Culture (what you do) **trumps marketing** (what you say you do) **every time.**

To a degree, you can get away with marketing that's different than brand reality if you're in a business where all you need is one sale per person (there's a sucker born every minute, you know.) But this disconnect can be deadly when you depend on sustaining relationships – you're constantly disappointing or surprising your members, and missing your best prospects entirely.

So what's a marketer to do? First, understand that aligning culture with marketing really is your job, and that both components may need to change in order to bring them into alignment. Large culture changes are difficult, slow, and dangerous, but much of the benefit is in discovering and defining an existing culture, then polishing and smoothing the rough edges.

Start by finding out what the culture of your credit union truly is. How are you perceived by your members and potential members? What kind of reputation do you have? Ask management the same questions. Then ask your staff and members. You'll probably be surprised by the answers. Does this culture really work with your marketing?

The next step is to develop a sustainable, long-term strategy for enhancing and aligning culture and marketing. Do you have a warm, lively, caring culture but generic banklike marketing? Do you have a very buttoned-down, efficient, strictly business culture with a scattershot "flavor of the week" approach to marketing? No matter what culture you have, your credit union will benefit immensely from sustainable, more truthful marketing.

And when marketing aligns with and augments the reality of a brand, the effects are incredibly powerful.

Is your CU just south of bordering greatness?

by Kelley Parks

In case you ever wondered, there are 71 outdoor boards for the world famous tourist trap, South of the Border, along the southbound side of Interstate 95 between Virginia and the South Carolina border. How do I know this? When I was a kid, it was a tradition for my brother and me to count the brightly colored, uniquely branded billboards on our Chevy Chase-style road trip vacations to Disney World. It marked the halfway point from our house to the mouse.

There's nothing quite like an onslaught of humorous outdoor ads against a prosaic pine tree-lined skyline to build a kid's anticipation. It's brilliant

because by the time you get there, you'll buy anything. And I mean anything. How else can I explain all the tacky, overpriced, useless plastic, whosits that have come into my possession after years of visiting Pedro's Wonderland.

So, here are some great marketing lessons learned from the world famous tourist trap:

Be bright in a sea of blah: Just like brightly colored billboards that stand out against the skyline, credit unions have a similar opportunity. So few financial institutions are truly unique and bold in their messages since the norm is that financial marketing should be safe, boring and gray. The world craves bravery.

Tell a story that builds anticipation: Would one or two or ten billboards have the same effect? I doubt it. They have uniquely positioned their marketing so it builds anticipation and tells their story in 10 words or less over a four hour stretch of road. As credit unions, how often do we depend on the one ad or campaign to tell our story. Great marketing builds on itself and makes people want to talk about it.

Have a sense of humor: What I love about Pedro is that he pokes fun at himself for all his quirks. After all, it's a filthy tourist trap, but at least he's real about it. What quirks do you have that members find endearing and refreshingly human? Do you give lollipops to kids of all ages? Is it fun to stand in line? Is Bob the Loan Officer's tattoo the exact color of money? Does Betty the Teller claim she can remember your name after one transaction? Maybe it's time to embrace who we really are instead of the air-brushed version.

Be consistent and iconic: After reading 71 of Pedro's silly slapstick messages, you know exactly what to expect when you pull off the exit. Since we've traveled 200 miles together, Pedro becomes like a personal friend who has invited me to his home. He was polite with his introduction, made me laugh over and over, so asking me to dinner isn't out of the question. So, who is your credit union's spokesperson? And is the tone consistent across all mediums from forms to signs so members know exactly what to expect when they walk through your doors?

And while we're at it, maybe we can find a creative new use for repos?

Anger management: when tellers get “flipped off”

by Kent Dicken

A 68-year-old man “flipped off” the tellers inside as he walked (?) through the drive-thru of Kingsport CU last week, then was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct, according to a post on the Credit Union Journal website. Apparently this was not as uncommon as you might think, as the tellers told police it was “an every day occurrence” and (he) “scares the tellers to the point that they usually roll up their drive-thru windows.”

While chuckling about the visual, I started thinking about other stories I’ve seen recently about people who are ticked off at their credit union. They didn’t demonstrate it with raised middle fingers, but instead vented on their blogs. Now I have no idea whether any of these blogs are truthful, but it does show the power of the web as medium. While the old man made his opinions known, it really only affected those people within eyesight. Anything online has a world wide reach, and you never know who is reading them. For example, I have a Google alert set for anything that has “credit union marketing” in the wording, which is how I ran across these two blogs.

Now before you protest that none of this would happen at your credit union, we all know that you can’t keep everyone happy. And there’s something in our national character that causes us to rebel against authority when feeling oppressed. All it really takes is one unhappy but resourceful member and the power of social networking to add a complication to your job. Even if that person doesn’t blog, there’s an awful lot of sites out there for people to express their opinion – which means keeping up with them is near impossible. All those sites make it easy for people to influence others’ opinions, no matter where they are from. Plus, negative comments can seem to live forever online.

So what do you do? Allow your branch staff to be human, not just by-the-book-rule-followers. You can’t stop someone from complaining, but you can listen to what they say. You may not be able to control the events or decisions made previously that started the problem, but

you can take steps to correct them or bring them to the attention of someone who can.

And if you are that someone who can, stop making rules that feel arbitrary and unfair to your members. Be more transparent about what you do and why. Because the rules have changed, and your members are in charge of your reputation.

Stolen thunder

by Brian Wringer

What would you do if you could start a brand-new credit union entirely from scratch? What sort of bold new brand position could you stake out with absolutely no baggage from the past to haunt you? How would you change the way things get done?

There's a new bank around that, at least from a pure marketing standpoint, has taken a brilliant position. And the first thing that struck me was sadness and outrage that a credit union hadn't already taken this position.

I'm talking about Ally. Of course, we'll leave aside some serious concerns about their financial position – born from the ashes of GMAC, Ally has sparked some furious controversy and debate. And that's putting it mildly. Just ignore all that for now. Go look around their site and admire the simplicity and power of their brand position, and how well it's followed through. Nothing is just a phrase plastered next to the logo – every claim is for real, and no aspect of the site or the bank's products, policies, or functioning is untouched. Everything aligns. I think there's a lot to learn here.

A few of the positioning phrases that pop to mind for me – again, why aren't these owned by credit unions?

- We're not sneaky (WOW! What a simple, direct, and powerful differentiator!)
- 24/7 Access to a human (HOLY COW! Another home run! Any CUs want to step up?)

- We're on your side (note the smack talk about other banks)
- We're willing to say and do what other banks can't and won't
- We're different – the “unbank”, the bank that's not going to act like a bank
- You're getting a good deal
- We're open, transparent (note that they've posted the nasty letter from the ABA in its entirety, along with their response)
- We get it, you can trust us, we're real
- We're “internetty” (nothing to hide, informal, real)
- We think and talk like you do – we use plain language
- We're new, a new way of doing business
- Yeah, we're serious.

Hats off to the Ally marketers. Seriously.

Ally might be using TARP funds to buy deposits right now, but if they can stay true to this amazing vision and market their way out of the GMAC hole, watch out. I think they just might pull it off.

In the meantime, perhaps it's time to sharpen up your brand positioning knives. “Friendly Service and Great Rates for Podunk Valley” ain't gonna cut it any more.

One question that will change your credit union

by Kelley Parks

One of my favorite vendors asked if he could borrow an hour of my time in exchange for lunch. He said, "I promise I'm not selling anything. I just have a burning question I need to ask you." Free Lunch? No selling? I'm all yours!

His question was, **"I enjoy working with you. How do I meet more people like you?"** I was so flattered, I babbled on and on about credit union events, websites, resources and product ideas to help him connect with "my people". From that conversation, he ended up creating a product made just for CU Business Development.

Similarly, when iDiz was about to launch their Webidiz product, I got a personal email from them asking me what my wishlist would be if they developed it. My honest expectation was that they would take the ideas, maybe implement some of them that were cost-effective and chuck the others because it was "too hard". But much to my surprise, just like Santa, they delivered on everything I asked for – even the borderline crazy stuff. They made it happen because they wanted to make me (and Marketing Directors like me) exceedingly happy.

What a wild concept: **Ask someone you serve to help you shape your business. A win for them and a win for you.**

Inspired by this idea, I picked up the phone one afternoon and called one of our best members. I simply said, "You are a one of my favorite members. You have your car loan, mortgage, checking account and your kids have their accounts here. I want to attract more people like you. How do I do that?" She was so flattered by my question, she went on and on about the clubs she belongs to, product enhancements she wished we'd implement and little things we could do to be better. I got more from that single conversation than I have in 8 years of cold surveys and lunch-induced focus groups. Since then, I've considered her my own personal marketing advisor. Like a litmus test, I run everything I do by her, and she's honest - sometimes brutally honest.

When I look back on years of wasted survey paper, I think what stopped me from this conversation was that I was trying to accommodate 30,000 people, not just one. After all, how can one person understand the complex and diverse needs of 30,000? But by serving this one member way beyond her wildest expectations, I get the opportunity to serve lots of people just like her way beyond their wildest expectations.

So, to make your credit union better, ask one very valuable member one very powerful question: **How can I serve YOU better?**

When branding goes flat

by Kent Dicken

A logo is often only a small part of your brand, and updating a logo is generally a good idea when done well. The exception would be changing a logo that has a long history or high recognition factor. Pepsi is rolling out a new look for both their logo and product line later this year or early next. The new logo is a *slight* improvement over their old logo (which always reminded me of a plastic fishing bobber), but when you are a consumer goods company, part of your brand is your packaging.

What are they thinking?

The new Pepsi can now looks like a knock-off of itself. Why would a well-known brand take a hatchet to their appearance? Why would they practically ignore the name of the product by using a small, boring typeface that is overwhelmed by a giant modified logo? At least they did something interesting with the Sierra Mist typography. But do you think they could have designed a worse type treatment than the Mountain Dew packaging? Good grief!

Understand, I'm no Pepsi fan (maybe Brian should have posted this since he is a Diet Pepsi devotee); in fact, I've sworn off all sodas in a futile attempt to not get any fatter. But as a marketer, I understand brand loyalty and the strong allegiance regular users of a product attain after

untold experiences with the brand. Pepsi drinkers usually would rather do without than drink that other cola product.

So what will this do to the true Pepsi believers? My guess is that this packaging version will go away faster than most incarnations because it won't ring true to what the brand means to their core audience. While this logo version may be similar enough to their old one to connect to their fans, this packaging seems to cheapen their brand. It truly looks like a design by committee.

Am I saying that every logo is sacred and nothing should be updated? Heavens, no. There's a bunch of real ugly logos, brochures, signs and web sites out there that need to be redesigned. But they need to be designed to connect with the brand of the company, not just arbitrarily tweaked, then slapped on a letterhead, ad, web site, or building.

So, if you are considering updating your logo or identity, be sure to take the time to understand your brand first. Talk to your true believers and find out what rings true about your credit union. Be a champion for good design that builds a new look based on that knowledge.

And never design by committee.

A banking revolution: yawning optional

by Kelley Parks

You know how the conversation goes... I work for a credit union. We're kind of like banks, but not really - yada yada yada...I love what I do.

I probably need to work a bit more on my elevator speech, but thankfully most people are polite enough not to yawn in my presence. I'll admit I was always a little jealous of my brother who owned a web company that imported humidors from China when he was 15. He rarely got the same blank stares I endure at parties. Unfortunately, no matter how much I adore what I do and the unwavering passion I feel for the credit union movement, it's pretty difficult to bypass the stigma of the entire financial

services industry: Banking is Boring. Actually I dare say to most consumers it's beyond boring; it's a chore and a commodity as interesting as dental floss.

Whoever made the rule that banking has to be boring anyway?

In fact when I look around at the competition, it seems to me that our industry is screaming for a revolution, an opportunity for a few to break away from the herd, and challenge this age old mantra. Rather than looking up and down the street at other financial institutions and saying, "me too", why not take a stab at the real competition: the local mall, the coffee shop, and the boutique electronics store. They've all learned how to take commodity items, give them panache and, in turn, win over our members' minds and wallets.

And why can't banking be a fun experience so that good financial habits are actually entertaining or have similar social cachet? Could balancing a checkbook be an online game as fun as Guitar Hero or as trendy as shopping at Pottery Barn? And why can't saving give you the same high as spending? As credit unions, can we find the secret emotional connection we have with Starbucks? Spending \$4 on a cup of Joe is a boost to any Monday morning. Can we make saving that \$4 have the same exhilaration? What if we had hand held devices to manage our finances as amusing as Gameboys or iPhones?

So one day when we meet in an elevator, and I tell you I work for a credit union, do me a favor and at least pretend to be interested, ok?

Good isn't good enough

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by Kent Dicken

If you fly on a plane and get to your destination safe and on time, you don't tell anyone. The only time anyone talks about flying is when something horrible happens, such as the communication software malfunction yesterday that delayed 646 flights across the US (see image). Even if an airline does everything right, no one is going to recommend an airline that simply does what is expected of them.

The same thing can be said about your credit union. You may be providing a good mix of products with very good service, but it still might not be good enough for your members to talk about you. And **current members are your best referral source** for new members, which, if you are like most credit unions, is what you truly need to grow right now.

So how do you get members to talk you up?

You can't just be "Good" or even "Very Good" if you want members to recommend you. You have to be "Remarkable," according to Seth Godin, author of *Purple Cow* (and what seems like an entire library of other quick-reading, helpful books), because "ideas that are remarkable are much more likely to spread than ideas that aren't."

So how do you figure out what is remarkable about your credit union? Talk to your core audience.

Godin writes in *Purple Cow* about how the band Pearl Jam reached out to their core fans and ended up building an entirely different system of getting their music distributed. Instead of releasing the occasional studio album, sold in stores, with radio stations playing one or two songs, Pearl Jam released 72 live albums in just two years through their web site to the people that enjoyed them the most, and who were most likely to share their music with friends. And they turned a profit on all 72 albums.

Talk to the 20% of your members who use you the most, and are probably the most profitable members as well. If you don't have them on an email list, start building that list. They will be able to tell you why you got their business instead of your competition. Use that information to develop something even more remarkable, get it to your top 20%, and maybe even give them a way and a reason to recommend you to others.

Understanding branding

by Kent Dicken

According to Wikipedia, a brand is *“a symbolic embodiment of all the information connected to a company, product or service...which may be developed to represent implicit values, ideas, and even personality.”*

For a long time, **Branding** was just the logo and/or the name. Need a new brand? Slap a new logo/name on it and somehow it becomes a totally different, “New and Improved” Whatever.

But that’s a pretty narrow view of branding. Depending on who you talk to, branding can be almost anything. And everything. Google it, and you’ll find as many definitions and variations on the word as you care to click: brand experience, brand promise, brand value, brand personality, brand monopoly, brand equity, brand image, brand recognition, brand franchise, brand development, etc., etc.

As a credit union marketer, you are probably the one charged with the task of managing your CU’s branding. But with all of these terms being thrown around, how do you know what is more important and what to focus on?

Try to think of Branding as the main category and there are five sub-categories that you need to zero in on:

1. A logo and name are only one part of your brand. Combine those elements with the use of fonts, color schemes, symbols, and even sounds, and you have your **Brand Identity**. These are all the unique components that are recognizable to the general public, that differentiate you from your competitors. Brand Identity is also sometimes used to represent how the brand owner wants the brand to be perceived. (*Note: Add human character traits in order to help differentiate, and you have **Brand Personality** – a component of, or option to, Brand Identity.*) You have control over these elements.
2. The psychological connections of information and expectations that people make when thinking about your CU forms your **Brand Image**. Think of this as your reputation, and be aware that it may be different

among members and non-members. Often the biggest challenge for Marketing is the gap between Brand Identity and Brand Image; how you want your brand to be seen vs. how it is actually perceived. You have no direct control over this, but you can manage the other points listed here, thereby influencing the Brand Image.

3. Every point of contact, experience and interaction with your credit union is the **Brand Experience**. This relationship with your member is what truly defines your brand. Great experiences can produce advocates. Not-so-great experiences can create complainers, who are often more prolific in spreading the word. This is where the entire CU staff works for Marketing, so be a good leader.
4. Setting expectations from any interaction with the brand is the **Brand Promise**. These are sometimes condensed into a tag line, and sometimes listed out in a type of mission statement on values and beliefs. And of course the content of your marketing will communicate, shape, reflect, and refine the Brand Promise on an ongoing basis.
5. **Brand Loyalty** is the commitment your members have to your CU, usually demonstrated more by use of multiple services than by length of membership, and which becomes even more obvious when they become CU "evangelists," spreading the word to non-members. This may be the ultimate goal of brand marketing.

The greatest financial institution in the world



Will Facebook replace SEGs? (and other fun ideas)

by Kent Dicken

I had the pleasure of participating in BarCampBank Chicago last week with some great credit union people from at least three states, including the Illinois and Michigan state leagues, CUNA, and even one lonely person from a community bank. There was no set agenda, the topics were determined by the group, you literally moved in and out of the discussions, and there was never a lull in the conversation – nicely organized chaos.

Here are just a few of the topics covered:

Is it better for credit unions to provide pay day lending services?

If so, how many times do you let someone roll over a loan in order to keep them from going back to the pay day lender down the street?

Should compliance be part of the creative process? Risk management is supposed to manage risk, not delay or diminish it so much that ideas end up dying. Involve compliance at the beginning of your projects so that they are on the same deadline path as you are.

CEOs should think of social media as another teller. Just as tellers are both personal and professional, you should have a real person (or multiple people) manage your Twitter and Facebook accounts with that same personality and attention. Management trusts tellers to be human, and people online want real, not corporate.

Approach social media as sweat equity. It takes a lot of work, but your credit union needs a presence – if nothing else, to reply to comments and complaints that were always out there, but now are even more public. When you can show you care in that same public space, that PR becomes even more valuable.

Sometimes it is better to ask forgiveness than to ask for permission when it comes to social media as part of your marketing mix.

Will larger CUs start providing the back office support for smaller CUs that will allow them to stay alive? Back in the early 1980s there was something like 88 basis points separation between \$100M CUs and \$1B CUs. Today that has grown to 150 basis points. Will small CUs survive?

Does your board reflect your membership? Or do your Board's decisions show up in the membership mix? If the Board is older, and the focus is on products that are important to an older market, then don't be surprised if your membership age reflects that focus. It's important to think succession planning and diversity for your Board.

If Mickey can do it... CUNA trains CUs in the Ritz Carlton customer experience strategy that Disney has adopted. Ritz concierges apparently have the leeway to provide "wow" service to any guest. Disney looks at every level of every experience that they control that determines whether a guest has a good experience, and asks staff to provide that extra 1% more to make up hundreds of "Little Wows" – which is how you get little folded towel animals on your bed at their resorts.

Who's going to pay for a national campaign? Probably not CUNA, since they already spend all dues monies for CU advocacy in Washington, and pay for the Madison office through fee income.

Will affiliations replace SEGs? Will connections with socially responsible organizations provide a national resurgence of credit unions? Or will they become the basis for nation-wide credit unions? Could AAA or the Sierra Club form a credit union since they already have dues paying members? What about the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation? Can you (*shudder*) imagine a Facebook Credit Union?

The 10 commandments of credit union marketing

by Kelley Parks

I found this stone tablet, dusted it off and thought I'd share. It looked important enough since it was chiseled in stone and all.

I. Thou Shalt not Forget Thy History:

Credit unions were founded for a reason. Are we still true to that original mission? There's a powerful legacy there worth knowing and living. It's a holy grail worth protecting.

II. Thou Shalt Play Nice with Other Credit Unions:

Cooperatives work best when they work cooperatively, so don't be evil.

III. Thou Shalt Look Out for Thy Members' Best Interests:

Never forget where members sit on the organizational chart. We are ultimately accountable to them. All of them. Yes, even that one.

IV. Thou Shalt be a Good Steward of Thy Members' Money:

So, let's not waste it on frivolous whose-its and what-nots that don't bring value. What has a coozie done for you lately?

V. Thou Shalt not View Marketing as a Department:

If the staff roll their eyes when a member asks about a promotion, it fails. Everyone from the Call Center to the Clerk is in marketing. And everything is marketing, from the sign on the door to the microscopic mouse type disclosure.

VII. Thou Shalt Be a Good Listener:

Know what's most important to members. And then, delightfully exceed expectations on those few things, rather than marginally delivering everything.

VIII. Thou Shalt Be Relevant and Remarkable:

And while we're at it, let's be consistent.

IX. Thou Shalt Remember that Marketing is an Investment, not an Expense:

So, be thrifty and invest wisely just as we preach to our members. Be creative, but without compromising quality. Stretch each and every dollar.

X. Thou Shalt Beware of Anything Written in Stone:

Make your own rules, and then challenge them often.

A social purpose can serve more than one purpose

by Kent Dicken

63% of people in the U.S. would recommend a brand that supports a good cause, according to the 3rd annual Edelman *goodpurpose* Consumer Study. That number was only 47% in 2008, representing a major shift in consumer attitudes in one year.

The Edelman study also found that, despite the recession, 85% of Americans are willing to change their consumption if it can “make the world a better place to live.” Although personal donations to charities are down (51%), people have been donating more of their own time to supporting good causes, and 65% look to brands/companies to “make it easier for them to make a difference.”

This difference in attitude isn't confined to the U. S., as the goodpurpose study surveyed 6000 people in 10 countries. “People all over the world are now wearing, driving, eating, and living their social purpose as sustained engagement with good causes becomes a new criterion for social status and good social behavior,” according to Mitch Markson, president of Edelman's brand consulting group and founder of goodpurpose.

As a result, Markson believes that **brand loyalty can actually grow during a tough economy** – if companies can connect to this shift toward social purpose, and if the connection rings true with the core values of the brand itself. It must be authentic, and it must be more than

simply writing a check. It must be an integral part of your day-to-day business.

“Companies that become catalysts for social change and respond to rising consumer expectations that they and their brands help make the world a better place will not only survive, but also thrive, in ways their competitors will not,” said Markson. “Even better, consumers will want to share their support for these brands with others.”

People are passionate. People are involved. Credit Unions need to be.

The CFO: not just the face on your dartboard



by Kelley Parks

I had a notoriously nefarious relationship with my CFO. He and I were constantly picking on each other like brother and sister. From fake spiders in his Wall Street Journal to stolen office possessions taken to conferences to some classic public humiliation, it was a never-ending battle of wits.

As much as I hate to admit it, while he was constantly picking on my marketing math, touchy feely presentations and crazy ideas, he challenged me to become a better, more accountable steward of my members' money.

And sometimes his passion for the bottom line could accompany my passion for our brand in a rare accord. So, here are some empowering lessons worth taking the time to learn from your favorite bean-counter:

The State of the Economy: There is no one in the credit union more glued to the pulse of the economy than a CFO. He could tell me the unemployment rate, the state of the housing market and somehow had a telepathic connection to Ben Bernanke himself. Best of all, he could help predict how the economy would affect the demand for our services.

Product Profitability: Not all products and services are created equal. So how do you bring in the income of one to provide the additional benefits of another? He could help decide where it made sense to concentrate efforts in order to provide members with a healthy and efficient return on their money.

Key Metrics that Matter: While there is an alphabet soup of metrics to memorize, it's important to know what the credit union uses to truly measure its health. What keeps him up at night, and what role does marketing play in the big picture?

Historical Perspective: My CFO was a data junkie and faithfully kept years of brass tacks that date back prior to his birth. It's interesting to see how history has repeated itself over and over, and how product trends that supported life cycle hunches could form the basis of a good argument for innovation. It was not only fascinating information, but it helped tell the credit union's story.

Return on Investment: Though we may have disagreed on how to calculate it, he was a great resource to know the true yield on products – information that helped support the case that marketing can be a grand investment, not just a line item expense.

Of course, while I was in his office learning from him, it was also a great opportunity to teach him the long term benefits of a strongly differentiated brand, an engaged staff, and a good marketing strategy. And a chance to steal his calculator for my next big prank.

The 5 Rs of working on a management team

by Kelley Parks

It certainly takes a small village to raise a credit union. On our management team we had leaders from Compliance, Lending, Member Service, Marketing, Human Resources and Finance. This produced a dynamic cocktail of contrasting perspectives and divergent ideas for my brave and resilient CEO to manage.

By far the most challenging part of my job was working on this management team. Now don't get me wrong, I had a great team full of talented, compassionate, amazing leaders who genuinely look out for the best interests of our credit union. The problem was that we all see the credit union through entirely different lenses. Therefore, conflict was inevitable.

So, in an attempt to navigate through the challenges of our different perspectives, and well...to survive management meetings, I have read several books on personality. While different authors classify them different ways, when it comes down to it there seem to be four basic personality types that most people fall into:

Research People: Logical, factual, take their time to make decisions, need order

Relationship People: Caring, empathetic, accommodating, thrive on relationships

Revolutionary People: Tend to challenge the status quo, creative, dramatic, enthusiastic

Rules People: Like structure and time lines, making decisions and rules

While we're all combinations of these types, the needs and concerns of each is entirely different. After all, "logical research" types need details to make decisions. "People" people want to know how the idea will affect others. "Creative revolutionary" types want to make sure the idea will stand out. And "rules" people need to know how to make sure everyone stays on task. If you miss addressing any of these concerns, you have created an adversary. And diverse senior leadership teams are chock full of each type.

So, how do you turn adversaries into allies? It has taken me nearly a decade of getting my knees capped to realize what may seem obvious: you have to look through the lens of each of your teammates and anticipate their concerns and make sure you address all of them.

Research: What is the logic behind the idea? Are you solving a specific problem and how do you know members need it?

Relationships: How will you get the rest of the credit union engaged? How will this build relationships with members?

Revolutionary: Is the idea unique and different? How will you get members to pay attention and choose this solution?

Rules: Is the idea compliant? What are the goals? What's the time line and who is responsible for what?

Leaving out any of these almost instantly produces anxiety for someone on the management team. Therefore, research, relationships, rules and revolutionary thinking can be the ingredients of a successful pitch to management.

And together they can also build a solid campaign that will produce the fifth (and perhaps most important) "R" - **Return On Investment.**

Cutting marketing will not save you



by Kent Dicken

No doubt that CUs have had to tighten their belts and look for ways to cut costs this year, especially with the economy and the additional expenses of NCUA's PCA proposal. It certainly seems to be the right time for cutting fat, and unfortunately it seems that the marketing line in the budget is looking like it needs to lose a few pounds.

We have even see some extreme cases where credit unions have downsized or even eliminated their marketing departments. Now, I don't understand this move at all. Cutting marketing will not save a CU. **In fact, marketing may be the only thing that can save it.**

Marketing is the oil that allows the CU machine to work. Without a continual source of new members and product awareness, the CU machine will slowly wear down and grind to a halt. Without new members, new loans and new deposits, current members become a finite resource. When they leave, or hear about a better deal down the street from a competitor still marketing, it puts that much more strain on those members who are left, as income for the CU continues to drop and margins become ever tighter.

Can a Board really be that ignorant about how marketing works? Hasn't anyone heard or read anything about marketing in a recession? Surely they can understand when Harvard Business School says that companies that do more marketing in a recession maintain their share and often gain the most at the expense of those that are not marketing. Or perhaps they can take a lesson from Moxie's historical decision to cut their marketing in the 1930s, which resulted in losing market share to their competitor, Coca Cola, who continued to advertise.

Or is this lack of understanding of marketing simply because marketers don't do enough to toot their own horn and teach Management and the Board about their importance? It's probable that marketers are too busy marketing the credit union to market themselves internally. But if so, how can you expect management to see the value in what you do, when no one has pointed it out to them?

Maybe it's time for a little shameless self-promotion. In fact, make sure marketing gets in front of the Board on a regular basis. Be accountable, with ROI numbers to go along with your shiny direct mail and mini-web site. Teach them the importance of marketing and how it fits into the success of the credit union, and your budget might actually grow fatter.

Too many cooks



by Brian Wringer

Credit unions are cooperatives, right? The more the merrier. One for all and all for one. People helping people. These are all wonderful philosophies, and they're the drivers behind the success of credit unions. Everyone contributes, everyone has a voice.

But this communal spirit also makes credit union marketing particularly vulnerable to watery, scattered messages, plain vanilla creative (*Great rates and friendly service!*), and strangulation by fine print. Marketing by committee invariably turns bold, focused, and clear into tepid and murky. Worst of all, it reduces effectiveness and simply wastes time and money.

So how does a credit union marketer resist the call of, well, everyone else?

Live the brand – If you're in marketing, it's your job to live your brand. Develop a deep, instinctive, everyday understanding of what makes the CU different and special, and how that applies in real life to every audience. Live and understand the voice and personality of the credit union. Understand what you *are*, and more importantly, what you are *not*.

Strategy over here, creative over there – When you're talking with your CEO, CFO, or anyone else, talk strategy and results. Instead of just asking for feedback or approval on a marketing piece, first explain how and why you're targeting a specific audience, the potential and projected ROI. Then show the creative and explain why it will be effective. In other words, draw a line between strategy and creative execution.

Use your special powers – You're not marketing to people just like you or the other folks at the credit union, right? Understanding this distinction and successfully marketing to people who aren't like you is the hardest part of a marketer's job. But try to remember that making this leap is nearly impossible for many non-marketers. (*The most common result of marketing to yourself is an ad with a gigantic rate at the top.*) Explain how the target audience is different to anyone else who comes in contact with the marketing pieces in terms they can understand.

Be polished – Showing incomplete or draft creative invites people to focus on irrelevant details and proofing rather than strategy. Make sure everything that leaves your hands is fully proofed, will pass compliance, and is as close to a finished product as possible.

Seek specific input – When you ask for blanket feedback ("Um, is this OK?"), you invite nitpicking on details. Ask specific questions based on areas of expertise. For example, "In the second sentence, do we need to spell out Annual Percentage Rate?"

Finagle fine print – Make sure you develop your own working understanding of the regulations governing advertising – if you rely completely on a compliance officer, every message will end up buried in clouds of fine print. Look at it this way – money wasted on weak marketing stuffed with fine print is another kind of risk, and it's usually far more real than the risks most fine print is intended to guard against.

The greatest financial institution in the world

by Kelley Parks

There are often defining moments in your career. Whether you get laid off, move to a new city, start a business, or otherwise change jobs, leaps of faith produce overwhelming amounts of anxiety. But then there are moments when you realize you have landed exactly where you are supposed to be. This was mine.

It was my first day and to say I was nervous was an understatement. I was commuting 5 hours to Richmond from Charlotte each week. I gave up an upwardly mobile job I loved and left my husband behind to sell our home so I could be in Richmond to help with ailing family members. Here I was, the first ever marketer for a manufacturer's credit union. And I had no idea what a credit union was, let alone how to market one.

I remember sitting across the desk from our VP of Operations, Karen. I asked her if I could see the credit union's brochures. She tilted her head confused and said, "Kelley, that's why we hired you. We don't have any brochures." "Oh! But we have this!" She pulled out a plain burgundy folder. Inside was a hodge podge of the standard marbled CUNA disclosure forms stuffed haphazardly alongside a white sheet of copy paper. At the top of the paper were words I could barely make out, since it was obviously a copy of a copy of a copy. But I'm almost certain it said, **"Welcome to the Greatest Financial Institution in the World."**

I'll admit I was quite taken aback by this statement. Here this credit union had no brochures, and had gone 40 years without a glance in the mirror. But it didn't take me long to realize what made them so great. And it had nothing to do with a lack of flashy collateral or its laissez faire attitude on marketing and appearance. Being great was a state of mind, an expectation of everyone in the organization.

They put my office in the lobby because they wanted me to witness the magic that happens inside a credit union branch each day. The problem with this was that I was often mistaken as the Branch Manager. One

day a member came in and sat in the office and before I could open my mouth to say, "Oh sorry - I'm just the marketer. I don't have access to your account." He began pouring his heart out about his terrible day. Stunned, I just sat and listened. Then, he told me that he came to the credit union because he knew his day would get better. I smiled and suddenly got an idea. I snapped his picture and told him I was going to make him a star.

I put him on the front cover of our very first brochure. And inside the cover, I put the words, "Welcome to the Greatest Financial Institution in the World."

The moral of the story is that you can never truly judge a book by its cover or in this case the lack of covers. And our jobs as credit union marketers is to take this rare gem we've been handed and simply buff it so it shines.

A shout out

by Kelley Parks

We had a silly little tradition at my credit union. Whenever an employee noticed someone going out of their way to help a member they would generate an email and send it out to the entire staff. Some were silly, some were serious, but each displays what's inherently good about our credit union.

As a bonus, our CEO would respond to each and every shout-out with a reply to the entire staff about how the email exhibits our brand. Even though at performance review time the proportion of shout-outs strangely skyrockets, they were usually genuine and heart-felt. It was an opportunity to show public appreciation, and at my credit union receiving a shout out is nearly like an Oscar to an actress sans the red carpet snarky judgment by Joan Rivers. Some even came with an acceptance speech, but unfortunately there is no music to cue the end of the performance.

I think what's even better about the shout-out itself is its origin. You see we tried all types of incentive programs to buy the staff's motivation - coupons, bonuses, gifts, you name it. But you can never truly buy

enthusiasm. Service minded people simply enjoy the feeling that comes from helping other people. It's either part of your character or it's not. And a little unexpected recognition helps reinforce what comes naturally and makes that enthusiasm contagious. Best of all, at a time when budgets are being slashed and raises are nil, calling out someone's performance publicly costs nothing.

So, in honor of the Shout-Out, here's mine....

- To my good boss for keeping our brand alive with each and every email
- To my coworkers for recognizing and calling out what's great about our credit union
- To iDiz for the opportunity to talk about it
- And to you for taking the time to read it

Shout-outs can be contagious. So please pass one on.

CU Creationism vs. Darwinism: do you believe?

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by Kelley Parks

Draw a line in the sand, run to your corner, and pick a flag to wave. Are you a Credit Union Creationist or Darwinist?

The Creationist: Say "customer" in her presence and she'll quickly correct you. It's not an industry, it's a movement. In her mind, bankers are deviant evil-doers just lurking around the corner to prey on her member. She speaks the CU gospel, not only to her staff, but to neighbors, friends, and anyone who will listen - even those who don't. If you don't belong to a credit union, she has a sermon ready in hand. (You will be healed! OUT "for-profit" demons!) Most everyone in her life is a credit union member. They were likely converted thanks to her. If you work for another credit union, she'll share with you her business plan, her deepest secrets and

quite possibly the shirt from her back. Madison, WI is the Holy Land and taxation is the apocalypse. The bumper sticker on her car reads "What Would Filene Do?" She believes that the good and purity of credit unions will save the financial world.

The Darwinist: He believes that if the credit union industry doesn't change, it will die of extinction like the dinosaur. He thinks credit unions are one heartbeat away from taxation and he's prepared for the moment. The sustainability of this industry is his favorite debate. The last time he ate Chapter chicken was in 1994 and he's quite proud of that fact. He thinks that credit union collaboration is fluffy and unnecessary. In fact, he'd rather sing Kumbaya at Girl Scout Camp. He eagerly watches the Call Reports of smaller credit unions with baited breath for his next merger opportunity and touts the merits of "economies of scale". Bank has never been a 4 letter word in his opinion, but he'll hang on to the benefits of this non-profit gig as long as possible. He sees the credit union almost like a stock company, where his real responsibility is to return the most profit to its owners - aka "the members". He watches ROA like a hawk, and believes only the best of the best will survive.

Want entertainment? Get these two in a room. I guarantee fireworks, bruises, tears or some combination thereof. And our movement or..uh.. industry is loaded with both. While I'll admit I probably fit the description of the CU Creationist, I think we can each stand to bend a little to the middle. Ultimately it will be our member-centric principles from our past combined with our willingness to adapt to the future that will make us sustainable in the end.

No matter which bandanna you choose to wear, I hope there is one fact we can all agree on come judgement day: The member deserves better.

Can I get an Amen?

What's beyond green?

by Brian Wringer

In a previous post, I mentioned the idea that “Green” business and marketing is just one type of applied ethics. Green fits right in to the credit union ethos, and there are many ways green can be expressed and marketed.

But what's beyond green? After all, credit unions don't consume all that much energy and goods compared to other types of businesses. Once you're carbon neutral (or better), then what?

Clear

One of the big trends in business is transparency – how open can you be with your employees, members, and the public? The main idea is that stakeholders will make better decisions with more information available. In large public corporations, transparency is also a way to help keep the board and executives honest – regulations require many different kinds of public disclosure.

As it happens, credit unions have been very transparent for years. Detailed financial info is available on NCUA's web site, but you need to have a background in finance to have any hope of understanding the numbers. And, of course, CU members could always run for a seat on the Board if they really want to get up close and personal.

What if credit unions offered to help members understand the financials in terms of the impact on the member? What if members received feedback once in a while on the impact of their membership on the credit union? There are risks, obviously, but maybe making the cooperative nature of the CU clearer would also help members feel more of a sense of ownership and belonging.

Rainbow

Credit union employees and management have always reflected the diverse nature of their membership better than just about any other business. Perhaps this could be turned into a competitive advantage and a point of difference – “We're You”.

In some places, CUs could even customize marketing and products to extend special invitations to certain groups – for example, mortgages for gay couples, marketing on the local Spanish language radio station and newspaper, or financial seminars targeted to retiring women.

CU for a Cause

CUs have always been heavily involved in their communities and helping the less fortunate. What if helping a good cause were built in to more CU products?

For example, perhaps members could divert the interest on their checking account into a fund for a worthy community purpose. Or maybe the income from a slightly higher car loan rate would help send bicycles to needy people in Africa. Cause marketing is hardly new, but CUs now have more flexibility than ever in designing products like these, and I bet we'll start seeing more and more examples.

Catch the cooperative spirit

by Kelley Parks

Seven and a half years ago I attended a League Marketing Workshop. I had just started working at the credit union. I didn't have a single brochure and had never done a promotion - nothing, nada, zip, zilch. As the first marketer at my credit union, I was charged with the task of creating it all from scratch. I was very young and quite frankly, scared to death - it wasn't easy being green.

I walked into the classroom, sat down in the second row, and made sure to have an empty chair in between myself and those around me. I thought that was the unspoken rule at conferences: dare not invade other people's space. I was mistaken. In walked this bubbly ball of energy who immediately bounded into this shelter of air I had barricaded around me. She asked who I was and where I came from and when I admitted how new I was to CUs, she gave me a big hug. And with the toothiest smile I'd ever seen exclaimed, "Welcome to Credit Union Land". She then proceeded to tell me that if I ever needed anything to call her, and gave me samples of her brochures.

When others heard us chatting, they turned around and said similar things to me, welcoming me to this fictitious place as mysterious as Narnia. One even made sure to sit down in the open seat right next to me as an unspoken gesture of “Hey, we’re in this together.” I had the fleeting thought that perhaps I had been abducted into some sort of religious cult. Coming from the sterile medical industry, I’ll admit hugging was a foreign business practice. Such gregarious and demonstrative signs of affection would have been frowned upon.

It was shocking. Here I sat in a room with 40 of my peers from all over the state, and they just all openly shared ideas. In fact, on the agenda, time was made specifically for this free exchange. My hand cramped from all the notes I took and in my head I even designed our first brochure. What was even more impressive is that I later learned that the energetic conference space-invader was from a CU that had branches in my backyard. In fact our offices were within miles of each other. I would have considered her my biggest competition if I hadn’t just had such a profound orientation. And now she remains a dear friend.

It’s funny to think about it now, because I have since steamrolled newbie colleagues with my enthusiasm a time or two. The passion people feel in this industry is absolutely contagious. What’s even more amazing to me is that the cooperative spirit is still alive in our “live, work, worship, breathe in this area” charters. It’s pretty special, and knowing that you can rely on an army of thousands is power second to none. When I hear outsiders say that the cooperative spirit is dead in CUs, I shake my head because I honestly witness its presence everyday. I see it on list-serves, at conferences, chapter meetings, and blogs just like this. It’s quiet, but the energy is still there, and the conversation is still going.

So, please pass it on.

