

CREDIT UNION JOURNAL

A Look at the State of CU Marketing

Credit Union Journal | Monday, March 22, 2010

By Ray Birch

TEMPE, Ariz.-During 2009, marketing budgets at credit unions declined by an estimated 13% across the country. Yet in 2010 CUNA's Marketing and Business Development Council will hand out more advertising awards than the association has in recent memory.

Those statistics support what CU marketers and advertising firms told [Credit Union Journal](#) about the current state of credit union marketing-budget pressure is forcing credit unions to be more effective and creative with marketing.

For the most part CU advertising has become edgier, especially in media targeted toward younger age groups. Humor is deployed far more often, as is in-house produced video that is uploaded to [YouTube](#), allowing credit unions to overcome a long-time budget obstacle, an inability to use TV.

"I feel strongly that being crunched by the economy and all the (NCUSIF) assessments have pushed marketing departments to get more results," stated [Nicolette Lemmon](#), president of [LemmonTree Marketing Group](#). "But at the same time there is this push for results. Senior management is much more risk-averse due to the economy. So we have this push-pull."

In Longview, Wash., [Amy Davis](#), VP-marketing at the \$540-million Red Canoe CU, said the current environment has prompted marketers to "put on their thinking caps and get more creative. We're being challenged to do things outside the norm, find new business relationships, and explore avenues like social media."

What is really occurring, stressed [Anne Legg](#), VP-marketing for the \$162-million Cabrillo CU in San Diego, is that CU marketing is in a state of transition, moving from connecting with consumers via a monologue to having a dialogue. "For a long time we have been pushing messages and marketing information to members and audiences important to our growth. Now we are moving to an engagement style of marketing-using Web 2.0 and social media-to have real conversations with members."

Whether the credit union is cutting back on marketing funds or adding to them, CU marketing, across the board, is now more results-driven than ever, believes Rene' McKee VP-marketing and community relations for the \$1.7-billion California Coast CU in San Diego. "It used to be we could do a lot of brand awareness. Nowadays that's not the case. We have to do response-marketing. We have to drive people in the door-we all need loans."

[Tyler Disburg](#), chief administrative officer at the \$60-million Montana First CU, in Missoula, Mont., noted, "More than ever I have to be adaptable, and ready to change my plans without a great deal of notice. In the good old days you could count on running the auto promotion in January, then home equity and February and March, and so on."

[Disburg](#) had to switch things up last year after three employers in town went under, and ads focused more on the use of loans for necessities, rather than a new car or a trip.

[Carla Bailey](#), VP-marketing strategist for Marquis, Plano, Texas, added, "Credit unions are evaluating existing programs and using only what has worked, which is leading to fewer promotions. And when you have less to work with, you have to do more with it. Less fluff, basically."

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