

2006... We're Growing in the Right Direction

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NEED/OPPORTUNITY

The British Columbia Automobile Association (BCAA) has more than 765,000 members and is the largest member services organization in the province of British Columbia, Canada.

BCAA fulfills its mission through three interrelated business lines: 1) BCAA Road Assist & Membership Services, 2) BCAA Travel Agency and 3) BCAA Insurance Agency. The competitive landscape in which BCAA operates has demanded many changes in recent years, most notably a move from a nonprofit to a profit-driven mindset.

Starting in 2000, BCAA provided every employee an annual corporate plan booklet on the organization's goals, priorities, success measures and initiatives. A tool used in October staff meetings to kick off the new business year (BCAA's business year is October to September), the booklet introduced employees to BCAA's annual financial and performance goals, thereby setting the stage for achieving those goals and increasing profitability. All employees participate in the October meetings, and the booklet was initially well received and understood. However, annual surveys revealed some disturbing trends:

- Employees were gradually feeling overwhelmed by the growing amount of information in the booklet.
- Employees' understanding of BCAA's business goals and plans was decreasing as the booklet grew.
- Employees, including management, were increasingly failing to refer to the booklet as a planning and decision making guide after the October staff meeting.

Clearly, the company needed to rethink this booklet and its role in aligning employees with BCAA's business goals year-round. In addition, an exciting new challenge presented itself. In April of 2005, BCAA's senior management formed a new five-year vision for BCAA: *Growth—Bold, Aggressive, Smart*. To help BCAA grow and achieve its new vision—including an annual CDN\$15-million operating profit by 2010—the company needed to inform and create understanding among employees of BCAA's new goals and direction.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

Because all BCAA employees have a role in the organization achieving its goals, the company considered all of BCAA's 1,000-plus employees as the primary audience. BCAA employees are widely dispersed across the province:

- Sixty percent of employees work in BCAA's 24 sales centres, where agents rely all day, every day on at least one desktop calendar to sell travel, insurance policies, car rentals, etc. Prior to developing the company's own calendar, agents used calendars provided and branded by BCAA's travel and insurance suppliers.
- Six percent of employees are management who used the booklet as a planning resource through the year. When consulted, they generally expressed a preference for a portable tool to take to meetings.

- BCAA's fleet of 90 tow truck drivers requires easily portable communication tools. Like the sales agents, they use calendars on a daily basis.
- The average length of service is nine years for staff and 11 years for management. Annual engagement surveys consistently show that employees are intensely proud to work for BCAA, and they're correspondingly proud of their length of service.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

To help BCAA grow and achieve an annual CDN\$15-million operating profit by 2010, the company needed to rethink the corporate plan booklet as a tool to align employees to the organization's business plan and operating goals. In doing so, the company decided to convert the booklet into a 12-month calendar, with the following primary objectives:

- Increase the number of employees who say they receive "just the right amount of information" about BCAA's business goals and plans. The growing amount of information in the booklet was doing more than making some staff feel "overwhelmed." It was impeding understanding, and this negative trend needed to be reversed.
- Increase the number of employees who "strongly agree" that they've obtained a "clear explanation of BCAA's business goals and plans."
- At least 85 percent of employees say they are more likely to keep and refer to the calendar than previous corporate plan booklets.
- At least 85 percent of employees say the calendar is an effective information source on BCAA's business goals, priorities and initiatives.

Solution Overview

BCAA's manager of employee communications developed a multifaceted internal communication strategy to launch BCAA's new Vision 2010; this entry is just one tactic of that strategy. With full executive support, the manager planned the launch of Vision 2010 through 47 interactive staff meetings. The theme of all communications, including the calendar, was "Road Trip 2010." Senior management was sold on the idea of converting the corporate plan booklet into a 12-month calendar by presenting past survey results, a calendar prototype and information on the staff's current calendar use.

Unlike a booklet that could easily end up gathering dust on a shelf, a portable, desktop-style BCAA calendar could easily fit into employees' work lives. More important, it could address very practical needs for staff. Tow truck drivers need a portable calendar to track their shifts, and the sales agents regularly used desktop calendars to serve members and sell BCAA travel and insurance products. But before settling on the idea of producing a calendar, the manager of employee communications visited employees with a prototype and spent time with employees to see how they used calendars. This research determined details such as the calendar's dimensions and the addition of preview months. Because agents were uncomfortable with the possibility of customers reading BCAA's goals on the flip side of a calendar page, all business plan content was separated from the 12-month calendar pages.

In keeping with the "Road Trip 2010" theme, the calendar features a "postcard" from the president and CEO, outlining the publication's key messages that BCAA 2006 fiscal year will be a very special year for two reasons:

- BCAA is embarking on a journey to grow within five years. The vision for 2010 is: *Growth—Bold, Aggressive, Smart*. The company's commitment is to remain true to its values.
- BCAA will also celebrate its 100th anniversary and honour employees celebrating their personal BCAA milestones this year.

Following the president's message, the calendar outlines specific goals, priorities and initiatives at the corporate and divisional levels. To reverse the trend of information overload experienced with the booklet, strict limits were placed on the number of initiatives in each divisional plan, and significant effort was made to convert "business speak" into plain language to increase levels of understanding.

As noted earlier, annual engagement surveys indicate that employees have strong feelings of pride for their length of service. To acknowledge this fact and BCAA's 100th anniversary, the calendar of 12 months features 12 employees by their employment anniversary month. Each employee's accompanying quote reflects the spirit of BCAA's mission, vision or values to reinforce the message that while the company is growing, it won't change who they are or what they stand for. The calendar's cover pulls the road trip and anniversary ideas together by picturing an employee's child (representing the next generation of employees and the company's bright future) "at the roadside" of Highway 99, on the eve of BCAA's 100th anniversary.

The calendar was a core reference tool for employees during the interactive, face-to-face Road Trip 2010 meetings held in the October of 2005. Typically, the annual October staff meeting involved simple distribution and review of the corporate plan booklet, but the new meeting required employees to use the calendar in conjunction with an illustrated learning map depicting BCAA's "road trip" to 2010. During the meeting, employees interacted with the map in small groups and together reviewed the calendar's contents. Meeting facilitators provided context for relevant divisional goals. Every employee left the meeting with their personal copy of the calendar.

While managing this project, the manager of employee communications collaborated closely with Forwards Communication on the calendar's visual theme and copy. Forwards provided design, photography and production support.

Implementation and Challenges

Budget and time line: Total costs for copywriting, design, original photography, two-colour printing and bindery were CDN\$21,687 (including taxes). Initial planning and concept development began in June 2005. Writing and production took place from August through October. The 12-month calendar was distributed in October to coincide with the start of BCAA's business year and the launch of BCAA's 2010 Vision. Most staff meetings were completed by mid-December; however, poor winter weather for air travel delayed one staff meeting to January 2006. As a result, surveying extended to the end of January 2006.

Challenges: Due to a relatively modest photography budget, location photography was not an option. Instead, an in-studio approach was used, projecting stock images of British Columbia scenes onto a backdrop, and photographing each employee in the foreground with a road sign.

MEASUREMENT/EVALUATION

At the end of each staff meeting, employees were asked to complete a survey. More than 70 percent responded, for one of the highest-ever survey response rates. The survey results revealed that the company achieved its objectives:

- The percentage of employees who said the calendar provided “just the right amount of information” increased from 86 percent to 93 percent, reversing a negative trend with the booklet. As anticipated, improving the score in this area correlated with improving employee understanding.
- The percentage of employees who “strongly agreed” that they obtained a “clear explanation of BCAA’s business goals and plans” increased from 24 percent to 33 percent. Another 61 percent of employees “agreed” for a total positive rating of 94 percent.
- Exceeding the target of 85 percent, 86 percent of employees said they are more likely to keep and refer to the calendar.
- Exceeding the target of 85 percent, 93 percent of employees said the calendar is an effective information source on BCAA’s business goals, priorities and initiatives.

BCAA achieved a record-breaking, year-end profit of CDN\$6.3 million in 2006, although this project’s successful outcome can’t take direct credit for improving BCAA’s financial results. This achievement means BCAA is already well on its way to achieving its 2010 goal for a CDN\$15 million annual operating profit.