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Richmond Savings Image Campaign

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Money is serious business. This case shows how humour can take deadly aim with spectacular results.

Richmond Savings is Canada's third largest credit union, and in 1991 the company developed an aggressive 10 year plan. It called for the membership and asset base to more than double by 2001; and for the company's unaided awareness to reach 25% vs. the existing benchmark of 5%. This would be easier said than done. Research showed that:

- Credit unions were generally seen as inferior to banks.
- Credit union members tended to be extremely loyal to their institutions.
- Whether at banks or credit unions, customers were extremely reluctant to change their arrangements, even if service was highly unsatisfactory.

Even so, we decided to focus on dissatisfied bank customers. We started by developing a positioning line. It became a rallying cry for employees; a promise to consumers; and a challenge to the big banks: 'We're not a bank. We're better.' This was more than a slogan. It became the standard by which all advertising and customer service was measured.

The advertising campaign has always been distinctly un bank-like, and has run in print, outdoor, radio, and recently cyberspace. We launched in 1993, empathizing with the frustration of dealing with banks. In 1995, we introduced the fictional Humungous Bank. And in 1997, we launched ads as if they were FROM Humungous Bank. All this spoofing has caught the eye of the local media, resulting in over \$300,000 worth of editorial coverage.

Over 1993-1997, results have been extremely gratifying. Membership is up 54%. Assets under administration have doubled. Unaided awareness has reached 16%, triple the 1991 level. Aided awareness has jumped from 67% to 83% – remarkable given that Richmond Savings has only a 7% share of voice of financial advertising. Richmond Savings was also awarded Marketer of the Year in 1996 by the B.C. Chapter of the American Marketing Association. And Kirk Lawrie, the Richmond Savings CEO, was honoured in 1997 as Marketing Executive of the Year.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

British Columbia is home to the top five credit unions in Canada. In 1991, Richmond Savings stood at #3, with eight branches, \$1.2 billion in assets under administration, and 49,500 members. Marketing focused on current members, and membership was stagnant. Unaided awareness stood at 5% in the main area of business, the Lower Mainland of B.C.

In 1991, Richmond Savings developed an aggressive 10-year plan. Targets by 2001 were: Membership of 100,000; Assets of \$2.8 billion; Unaided awareness of 25%. Two issues surfaced as concerns:

- While Richmond Savings offered outstanding, unique products and services, advertising had been sporadic and it lacked confidence. Spending was also practically non-existent compared to the big banks.

- Richmond Savings had extremely low awareness.

The Marketing Department set the goal to build a distinct brand identity for Richmond Savings, with a number of objectives:¹

- Generate awareness and name recognition in the Lower Mainland.
- Differentiate Richmond Savings from other financial institutions.
- Strongly define and portray confidence in the products, services, and customer benefits.
- Ensure that the internal culture and external image were congruent.

ADVERTISING STRATEGY

The first decision was the target audience. We knew we would not be able to double the business with existing members alone, and that other credit union members tended to be loyal. That left customers of the big banks. Research showed that at any given time about 15% of them were frustrated or dissatisfied with the service they were getting.

Unfortunately, many of them also thought credit unions were inferior to banks. And bank customers – satisfied or not – were more likely to change their doctor, lawyer or dentist than switch financial institutions. They felt the hassle was just too great, and they saw little real advantage in changing.

Even so, we decided to focus on dissatisfied bank customers. They would be the most receptive because of the low service levels, bureaucratic policies, and a 'we're always right and you're not' attitude. And as the campaign evolved, there would be no shortage of additional hot points, such as service charges and exorbitant profits.²

A Positioning Line

We developed a line to trigger bank frustrations and deliver a promise:

'We're not a bank. We're better.'

This was a rallying cry for the organization, and a tagline for all effort. But it was more than a slogan. It measured all advertising and customer service standards. If a bank did something a certain way, we would not.

Campaign Overview

The campaign started in 1993, and continues through 1997. Media has included daily and community newspapers, king size busboards, radio, and most recently, the Internet

Creative broke the mold and spoofed the big banks. This was a risk. But it paid off handsomely.³

The advertising always focused on financial advice and information; the foundation of the relationship between Richmond Savings and its members. They have a personal Financial Advisor; and all get a monthly newsletter. A monthly statement consolidates all their holdings—making their financial picture easier to assess. As a result, Richmond Savings has one of the highest assets-per-member ratios in North America.

Print and Outdoor

The campaign launched in fall 1993 in community newspapers, with householder brochures and exterior bus king-sized posters. Creative used cheeky headlines and icons like 'red tape' and 'pigs flying' to empathize with bank frustrations. White space and user-friendly copy epitomized the difference at Richmond Savings.

Radio

In spring 1995 we introduced the fictional Humungous Bank via radio. The spots were deadly funny, to build awareness and acceptance. The hapless customer is zapped by the patronizing and unyielding Humungous

Bank, and we pay off the message with the Richmond Savings benefit.

Then, in 1997, we pushed further. We didn't just portray the Humungous Bank: We ran commercials as if they were FROM the Humungous Bank.⁴

Other Media

In 1997, we treated daily newspaper readers to ads from the Humungous Bank too. And that same spring we launched the Humungous Bank website on the Internet – www.Humungous.com –an interactive encounter with Humungous Bank, with a coded link to the Richmond Savings site.

Internal Media

The campaign has been fully translated to the branch. From personalized service to branch design, everything supports 'We're not a bank. We're better.' Even recruitment advertising reflects the attitude.⁵

Spin-Off Value

The campaign has led to more media awareness than was ever anticipated. Humungous Bank has become part of the vernacular (articles supplied). Media attention has been worth \$300,000 of editorial coverage. (see [Figure 1](#))

RESULTS

These are exemplary. The table shows the performance against the ten-year plan:

TABLE 1

	1991	1996	% Change
Assets under administration	\$1.2 billion	\$2.4 billion	+100%
Membership	49,500	76,000	+54%
Unaided Awareness*	5%	16%	+220%

* Of Richmond Savings in the Lower Mainland

More broadly, the campaign has led to a province-wide shift in credit union advertising. Local credit unions have started to position themselves as alternatives to the big banks.

The trade association (Credit Union Central of B.C.) launched a province-wide awareness campaign in 1995, with the theme 'Your bank's not going to change. Maybe you should.'

In 1996, Richmond Savings was honoured as Marketer of the Year by the B.C. Chapter of the American Marketing Association. In 1997, Kirk Lawrie, CEO of Richmond Savings, was honoured as Marketing Executive of the Year by the Sales and Marketing Executives Association of Vancouver. In addition, the Humungous Bank website has been deluged. There were over 13,000 visits in the first month alone, with a 25% crossover to the Richmond Savings site. The site has been named 'Hot Site of the Day' by three search engines, including 'USA Today' and 'Too Cool'.

ISOLATING ADVERTISING AS THE VARIABLE

Before the campaign launch, membership was static. Over the course of the campaign there have been no separate membership drives or promotions that would have affected results. (Internal systems, processes and branch design have been re-tooled, but this was to fulfill the advertising promise.)

In 1995, Richmond Savings opened three new branches outside Richmond. Since opening, these branches have more than doubled their projections, indicating strong consumer awareness and acceptance that can only have come from the advertising.

Finally, advertising spending has not been a factor. Since the campaign launch in 1993, the image budget has been basically static in the \$750,000 range. Meanwhile, big-bank advertising has been increasing, keeping the Richmond Savings share of voice no higher than 7%.

CONCLUSION

This is a David and Goliath story where David wins again. It broke (or more exactly shattered) the conventions for its category, with great insight and well-deserved success.

ENDNOTES

1. David versus Goliath.
2. Digging for Insight. Using dissatisfaction with banks, despite consumer inertia.
3. Breaking conventions. Using humour and negative sell in a 'serious' category.
4. Opportunism after launch. Evolving to the Humungous Bank.
5. Integration. Taking positioning into every part of the marketing mix.

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NOTES & EXHIBITS

FIGURE 1: RICHMOND SAVINGS RADIO 'ADVICE'

SFX:	Phone ring. Pickup
TELLER:	Humungous Bank. Your money is our money.
MAN:	Hi. Who should I talk to get some advice, please?
TELLER:	Have you tried the psychic hotline?
MAN:	No, no, I want to talk to someone about financial advice
TELLER:	If it's about a loan or a mortgage, that would be Mr. Noway.
MAN:	I've already talked to him. And I talked to someone else about term deposits.
TELLER:	Then who do you want to speak to sir?
MAN:	I don't know! Someone who can help me with an overall plan.
TELLER:	We don't sell overalls, sir. This is a bank
MAN:	Ah, that's very funny. See, I already talked to three different people from three different departments. I just don't think they've talked to each other. Ever.
TELLER:	They're on separate floors, sir.

:ANNOUNCER: At Richmond Saving, we believe you should be able to get financial advice from your financial institution. That's why all our customers have their very own Financial Adviser. One person to help you sort everything out.

MAN: Look, I need some advice. Should I pay down my mortgage? Or add to my RRSP? I mean, don't you have someone who understands the big picture?

TELLER: You mean one man who offers you advice base on an intimate knowledge of your financial situation?

MAN Yes?

TELLER: No.

MAN: Okay. Thank you very much for your time.
