
Case Studies | Green Marketing

Client

Blue Ridge Electric Membership Corporation
Lenoir, NC

Target Audience

72,000 Blue Ridge members

Objective

To create a “green” sub-brand and communicate the importance of energy efficiency and money savings to Blue Ridge Electric’s members.

Challenges

In 2007, North Carolina passed the North Carolina Energy Legislation (SB3) law promoting the development of renewable energy and energy efficiency through the implementation of a Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Portfolio Standard (REPS). Under this new law, 10 percent of energy delivered by rural electric cooperatives and municipal electric suppliers must be supplied through renewable energy resources or saved through energy-efficiency measures (in addition to 12 percent for investor-owned utilities).

Understanding Blue Ridge members were unfamiliar with the REPS requirements, the cooperative chose to meet the state-mandated standards not only through products, but also through energy-efficiency education. The communications objective was to help members understand that the initiative would let them save energy and money while contributing to ensuring a healthier planet for future generations. To successfully engage members in reducing energy consumption, Blue Ridge wanted to actively and emotionally interest all its members in being more energy-conscious.

Solution

The first phase of the project focused strategically on brand identity, including naming and positioning. From the options presented by Gotham, Blue Ridge selected “GreenSmart” as the name for the family of energy-efficiency programs. Since the name would appear in print ads and on websites, it was important that it graphically echo the existing corporate logo. To accomplish that, Gotham designed the GreenSmart logo to incorporate a globe, and an earth-friendly green and blue color scheme.

For positioning, Blue Ridge chose “Together we make a world of difference.” Guiding that selection was the corporate goal of helping Blue Ridge members feel they are a viable part of the green movement. The introduction of GreenSmart to the Blue Ridge membership was

through a series of full-color print ads featuring words formed from images of the new logo, a plant and a CFL (compact fluorescent light bulb). The series ran black-and-white in local newspapers, and color ads appeared in Carolina Country Magazine, which was direct-delivered to Blue Ridge members. Gotham crafted radio spots with a parallel concept to reinforce the print message across the target market.

Blue Ridge launched the GreenSmart initiative with discounted sales of CFLs to members. Gotham supported the launch by designing retail packaging and backers, as well as internal and external signage for Blue Ridge district offices. A well-attended GreenSmart Festival held in Boone featured many earth-conscious vendors promoting energy-efficiency ideas and techniques to consumers.

Results

It took just a year for the combined efforts of Blue Ridge and Gotham to build GreenSmart brand awareness and the core energy-efficiency message within the Blue Ridge Electric membership. The effort to communicate the importance of energy-efficiency among Blue Ridge's membership is ongoing. Through the GreenSmart initiative, Blue Ridge members are being educated to save money through modified energy usage patterns, which also contributed to higher member satisfaction than the industry standard for electric cooperatives. Retail sales through Blue Ridge District Offices for CFLs, water-heater wraps and other GreenSmart products are above targeted goals, also indicating members are responding well to this effort.