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**Entrant's Organization:** ImageStudio Creative Communications Inc.

**Title of Entry:** *What's Your Recipe for Retirement?* Resource Kit

**Division and Category:** Division 3: Communication Creative, Category 21: Publication Design

**Client's Organization:** British Columbia Automobile Association

**Time Period of Project:** September 2007 – April 2008

**Brief Description:** An employee resource kit about BCAA's pension plan and retirement planning, with each employees' pension benefit statement and information tailored to their age and life stage.

## PROJECT SUMMARY

With more than 793,000 members and an operating profit of \$5.7 million in 2007, the British Columbia Automobile Association (BCAA) is the largest member services organization of its kind in BC and the fourth largest CAA-affiliated association in Canada. Since 2007 BCAA has been ranked as one of *Canada's 50 Best Employers* in a list published by the *Globe & Mail's Report on Business (ROB)* magazine. The ranking is based on an annual engagement survey of employees—one that nearly 90 per cent of BCAA employees participate in. For BCAA, sustaining or improving its ranking on this list and maintaining high engagement scores is a key business strategy for recruiting and retaining high performing employees. Attracting—and keeping—talented people who share BCAA's vision for growth is critical to achieving the organization's operating profit goals.

To become more competitive in its employee recruitment and retention efforts, BCAA examined the results from the engagement survey that was completed in June 2007 (called the 2008 survey in *ROB Magazine*) to determine which areas needed improvement—pension communications was identified as a key area. Only 56 percent of BCAA employees said BCAA's communications helped them understand BCAA's defined benefit and voluntary pension plans. Further investigation, in the form of an internal benchmarking survey sent to all employees in September 2007, indicated that employee interest in pension and retirement planning was high. The survey's response rate—58 percent of employees took part—was almost twice BCAA's typical employee response rate. The results revealed that 95 percent of employees had given a lot of thought to retirement planning but just over half said they were doing something about it. Additionally, just over half of employees said they felt they understood what BCAA's pension plan offered to them and only one third of employees knew where to find more information. The results highlighted the importance of the issue and that employees did not have the knowledge and resources needed to make proactive decisions about pension and retirement planning.

An evaluation of existing communications showed that BCAA did have several sources of pension plan information available to employees. These included: employees' annual personal pension benefits statement which summarizes the value of their pension benefits if they stay at BCAA until retirement; the Pension Benefits Handbook which provides full details about the plan; a section on the employee Intranet; and free access to online tools and calculators from one of BCAA's pension fund managers. However, these materials were difficult to find and were mostly written in technical language that was difficult to read and understand for a lay audience. In the survey, employees identified the pension and benefits statement as their number one source of pension information. The communications team identified this as a prime opportunity to improve pension communications by developing a clear, accessible and effective communications tool—the resource kit—as a means of supporting BCAA's employee recruitment and retention efforts.

## INTENDED AUDIENCES

**Primary Audience:** This resource kit was targeted at the 95 percent of BCAA employees who were members of the pension plan are eligible for the plan. BCAA has 1,200 employees—almost 75 percent are women—who work in 27 sales centres across BC, two call centres in the Metro Vancouver, and on the road assisting stranded motorists.

**Demographics and Characteristics:** The results of the 2007 pension survey revealed that employees' age had a large impact on their understanding and attitudes related to pension and retirement planning. The respondents fell into three age groups which mirrors the demographic of BCAA employees as a whole: a) 30 percent were between the ages of 25 and 34; b) 33 percent were between the ages of 35 and 44 c) 32 percent were between the ages of 45 and 54 and d) 9 percent were older than 55. Younger employees were more likely to have a low level of understanding of what BCAA's pension plan provides to them and delay active saving. Older employees were more likely to say they were relying on BCAA's pension plan and were taking a more active role in saving for retirement. Experience has shown that employees love fresh, fun visuals and employee photos. Previous experience with pension communications has also shown that printed materials that employees can take home and review with their families are effective. Most employees are serving customers directly in the sales centres or on the road and so they have limited time and varied computer access to review pension and retirement information during their working hours.

## OBJECTIVES

The overall communications goal was to help BCAA improve employee perceptions of BCAA's Pension Communications and to help BCAA sustain or improve its employee engagement scores and position on *ROB's 50 Best Employers* list. This goal directly addressed BCAA's business strategy of being identified as one of Canada's 50 Best Employers in order to recruit and retain employees as a means of achieving its operating profit goals.

## **Our specific objectives were to:**

1. Increase the number of BCAA employees who say:
  - a) they understand what BCAA's pension plan provides to them, from 52 percent to 62 percent.
  - b) information about BCAA's pension and retirement planning is easy to find, from 32 percent to 42 percent.
2. Assess the effectiveness of the resource kit by establishing a baseline for the number of employees who say:
  - a) they read the resource kit.
  - b) the resource kit was effective in improving understanding of BCAA's pension plan.

## **KEY MESSAGES/THEME**

Working with BCAA's communications department and Forwards Communication as a partner in the creative direction and design we came up with a concept to create a printed resource kit entitled, *What's Your Recipe for Retirement?*, that was distributed to the approximately 1,140 employees who were part of the pension plan or would become members of the plan in the next year. Each employee received their resource kit in personally addressed sealed envelopes through internal mail to ensure the privacy of their pension benefit statement. The resource kit was the cornerstone of a larger program that included print, face to face and online communications. As the main print component, the kit was used to launch and promote two major related initiatives: an interactive seminar series and a new, in-depth section of the Intranet about BCAA's pension plan and retirement planning.

Instead of using cliched images associated with pension and retirement planning, we came up with a bread-making and recipe theme to help increase employees' understanding of the major principles of retirement planning and to make the subject more accessible. *Baking bread* and *planning for retirement* both require planning, happen over time, and the result is very rewarding. The recipe metaphor helped emphasize the key message that retirement planning is based on employees' individual needs, life-styles and incomes and that BCAA's pension plan is one ingredient in their individual plan.

## **CREATIVE RATIONALE**

**Make it Fresh and Funky:** Eye-catching design and strong use of employee photos were all chosen to improve employee perceptions of BCAA's pension and retirement communications. The pocket folder provided a format that consolidated the insert pages and the special dye-cut file-folder style label enabled employees to continue to use the resource kit as retirement folder in their home or office files. The large photos on the cover of the kit and throughout the insert pages represented BCAA's main employee age groups, business units, and staff and management employees from Head Office, Sales Centres and Road Assist groups.

**Make it Easy:** Since many employees said they did not understand what BCAA's pension plan provides to them the content of the resource kit was written and designed to make information easy to read, understand and find.

**Make it All About Them:** To help employees learn about retirement planning based on their life stage, the team developed three different insert pages targeted to BCAA employees three main ages groups, entitled: "*If you are in your 20s ...*" "*If you are in your 30s and 40s...*" and "*If you are in your 50s and 60s...*". These age groups were chosen based on employee data from the survey results and research from financial and retirement planning resources. All content was verified for accuracy by professional actuaries to ensure that employees were receiving appropriate information.

## **RESULTS**

**Time line and Budget:** Research for the project began with the employee benchmarking survey in September 2007 and budget approval was received from BCAA's Pension Committee in November 2007. Development began in January, 2008 and the resource kit was distributed to employees in April 2008. The production budget included: Consultation, Brainstorming, Planning, Art Direction, and Graphic Design, \$6,468; Photography \$900; Printing \$6,198.

**Impact and Effectiveness:** The projected impact on the business need was that the resource kit would improve BCAA employees perception of BCAA's pension and retirement communications. All elements of the resource kit were a significant departure from previous pension communications employees had received. This solution was effective in meeting the project's stated business objectives as the resource kit made information easy to read, understand, and accessible.

**Quantifiable Outcomes:** An employee survey was conducted in May 2008, after the distribution of the resource kit. 31 per cent responded and the results far surpassed our specific objectives.

1. a) 92 percent of employees said they understand what BCAA's pension plan provides—an increase from 52 percent.  
b) 88 percent of employees said BCAA's pension and retirement information is easy to find—an increase from 32 percent.
2. a) 62 percent of employees said they read the resource kit.  
b) 91 percent of employees said the resource kit was effective.

**Business Results:** BCAA's overall business results were positive in 2008 but with some challenges. BCAA exceeded its goals with an operating profit of \$10.1 million, an increase from \$5.7 million in 2007. Additionally, BCAA was named one of *Canada's 50 Best Employers* by the *Globe and Mail's Report on Business* magazine for the third year in a row. However, its overall position on the list dropped from 26 to 43, and employee engagement decreased from 74 to 69 points. This was due largely to a major re-structuring initiative in BCAA's travel business as a response to turbulence in the North American travel industry. At the same time, however, employee perceptions of pension communications greatly improved: 69 percent said BCAA was doing a good job of communicating pension and retirement information, an increase from 56 percent the year before. Although we can't give the resource kit full credit, that BCAA retained its Best Employer status and exceeded its operating profit goals suggests there is a correlation between employees' positive response to the resource kit, improved perception of pension communications, and BCAA's overall growth and success.