

BENCHMARKING FILES—SARAH McADAMS**Less worrying,
more pondering**

SunCom Wireless gets employees thinking—and talking—about its new brand

Why aren't cookies called bakies—considering that you bake them, not cook them?

We have no idea, but it's something to ponder. And giving customers time to ponder such things is at the crux of SunCom Wireless's new branding campaign.

Earlier this year, the Southeast wireless carrier announced a brand evolution. Gone was the "truth in wireless." In its place were "WorryLess Wireless" and "Ponderables" (otherwise known as "questions that make you go 'hmm'").

To be clear, the company didn't really do away with the truth.

"Truth in Wireless' was a powerful and simple promise to our customers," says Paige Layne, corporate communications manager for the Charlotte, N.C. carrier. "However, we felt the time was right to evolve the brand to something that better illustrated our deep commitment to service, benefits and a more liberating customer experience."

Plus, "we wanted something fun and innovative that really demonstrated we are a wireless company committed to doing things differently," she adds.

Backed by offerings like unlimited calls and minutes and instant savings instead of rebates, the WorryLess Wireless campaign featured a host of new marketing and advertising components. But the company knew that before the message was delivered to customers, it needed to sell its internal audience.

"For the external launch to be successful, we needed to have our associates invested in the refreshed brand and get their buy-in," Layne says. "If we have them on board, they will be our biggest advocates in the community. It's like hiring 1,500 marketing and sales people to support the launch."

Thus, SunCom hired Raleigh, N.C., communication firm capstrat to help engage its employees ("associates" in SunCom-speak) in the branding process.

"Capstrat worked with SunCom to identify and focus on their primary internal communications objective: to engage their associates in the brand, not just inform them about the evolution," says David Chatham, account director at capstrat.

The way to do that, he says, was to create opportunities for employees to "interact" with the brand, each other and with company leadership.

"This provided them ownership of and connection to the brand," he explains.

Employees ponder the brand—and lots of random other stuff

In addition to more traditional communications tools like e-mail messages and brand promise cards, capstrat worked with SunCom to develop a Web microsite that helped communicate the new brand, the strategy behind the evolution and what it all means to employees. The site provided tools like brand guidelines, FAQs, communications from leadership as well as ways for employees to submit questions and comments.

The site has been the most effective tool in the campaign, Layne says.

"The brand Web site became on of the most-visited sites on our intranet as soon as it was launched, averaging more than three visits per associate since it was launched in June," she says, adding that "it was also helpful to have executives talking about the launch and supporting it, which they did through Brand Champion Summits, voicemails and other communication."

Some executives also submitted Ponderables and contributed pictures of what they considered WorryLess lifestyle—as part of a companywide contest called Ponderables Payoff.

A "ponderable of the day" was chosen throughout the duration of the contest and placed on the internal WorryLess Wireless Web site.

In total, the company received more than 1,300 ponderables from employees, "which is incredible when you consider we have 1,600 associates," Layne says.

A panel of judges narrowed the finalists list to five, which soon will be judged by SunCom employees a la "American Idol." The top three vote getters will receive incentive packages that include cash prizes and a trip to view the filming of the next WorryLess Wireless television spot.

Early anecdotal feedback has been very positive externally as well. "The ponderables campaign seems to have caught the public's imagination," she says.

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Did you ever wonder ... ?

These are some of the most "pondered" thoughts submitted by employees:

Why do you park on a driveway and drive on a parkway?

Why do they call them apartments when they are all together?

Why do you put two cents in when you only get a penny for your thoughts?

Should vegetarians eat animal crackers?

If Jimmy cracked corn and no one cared, why did someone write a song about it?

Why do we have noses that run and feet that smell?

Why does Hawaii have interstate highways?

If nothing sticks to Teflon, how do they get it to stick to the frying pan?

Why are there no "B" batteries?

Why do they call them buildings if they've already been built?