

NEWS RELEASE

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Rural Carriers' Long-Distance Marketing Strategy Provides Success Scenario That Telecommunications Giants Just Don't Implement

It's no secret that there's a push on to encourage customers to switch long-distance carriers. From television campaigns to money-back enticements, there is little that the bigger long-distance companies won't do to lure customers into their corral. But there is one advantage to gaining this audience many rural telcos have that the giant technology conglomerates can't match, and that is trust and loyalty among a known customer-base.

For small, rural companies, competing in this world can be difficult. But at least one small company in South Carolina has not only competed successfully, but has won over nearly 100 percent of its customer base to its long-distance service – with a strategy built on the trust dynamics of competitive marketing.

Danny Dandridge, general manager for Palmetto Rural Telephone and PTC Long Distance, reports that the local long-distance company has achieved 80 percent penetration in intralata long distance, and 70 percent penetration in interlata long distance.

“Part of our success, I believe, is that we kept things simple with two simple plans,” he said. “We really highlighted the fact that there were no other fees associated with our plans, which was a real plus to our long distance service.”

The marketing campaign that PTC Long Distance undertook, working with the telecommunications industry's Nashville-based strategists Chaz Taylor Inc. (CTI), consisted of those simple messages in venues where customers were sure to pay attention. By way of customer publications that were part of the monthly billing dynamic, and local radio, the message came through strong.

“In creating the campaign for PTC Long Distance, we recognized the importance of stressing the real life advantages over those so-called savings that the bigger guys were purporting to offer,” said Charlene Taylor, president and creative director of CTI. “By focusing on the two or three important factors, and in venues that we believed would get the most attention, we were able to help PTC Long Distance not only reach their penetration goals, but surpass them.”

The consistency of the message for long-distance service was another of the key elements in the success of this campaign effort. Through publications and follow-up messages, a consistent theme resonated with customers. Taylor said that CTI has developed relationships with clients like Dandridge, in providing regular reports and recommendations that focus on consistency of a message. That type of strategy of strong relationships is something that CTI believes in strongly, Taylor said.

Working with Dandridge, CTI prepared articles for its customer publications examining the real advantages of local long-distance. In conjunction with the messages being read by customers, CTI also developed unique radio spots that were unlike other radio commercials being broadcast at the time, and reportedly caused customers to stop and listen. Combined, the messages read and heard confirmed the information for the customer and helped in their decision to switch to PTC Long Distance.

“I attribute much of our success to a consistent customer communication program,” Dandridge said. “The use of strategically positioned messages created an awareness and stimulated word of mouth.

“CTI is also good to emphasize the visual impact of marketing campaigns with office signage to bring key elements forward to our service representatives, who I believe are key in making folks aware of our long-distance service and its advantages,” Dandridge added.

Taylor said that maintaining the key point focus in the campaign, and then reinforcing it with customer service representative/marketing information, made the campaign even more effective.

“The formula in this case was to tell the real story of PTC Long Distance, in a format and language that every customer could relate to and really believe,” she said. “Once the real value of local long-distance is heard and understood, the next step is to switch. And that is what happened for PTC Long Distance.”