

NEWS RELEASE

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For more information, call:

**Sheila Davis
Chaz Taylor Inc.
615-292-0063**

Rural Telco Shines In Tough Wireless Market

Key Wireless Marketing Campaign Earns National Service Industry Marketing Award

Nashville, TN – Promoting enhanced wireless service in rural South Carolina was a challenge for Piedmont Rural Telephone based out of Laurens, S.C.. That challenge was met with a new marketing campaign that captured the attention of customers as well as an award for excellence.

Partnering with Nashville-based Chaz Taylor, Inc. (CTI), marketing and communications strategists for the independent telecommunications industry, PRTC received the Services Industry Advertising Awards (SIAA) honor in the Total Advertising Campaign category for their “Have A Ball” wireless campaign that introduced their branded Cingular product with an added twist. This is the first national awards program from SIAA to specifically recognize the achievements of the service industry, focussing on ‘service’ as the new product of the 21st Century.

“Rural customers are in search of a wireless provider that can keep them connected throughout their rural areas, basically an all-terrain wireless provider,” said Charlene Taylor, president and creative director of CTI. “The main goal of this campaign was to introduce PRTC Wireless to Laurens, and to develop a reputation for maintaining a wireless connection to customers, even in areas where wireless was previously unavailable.”

Winners were chosen from nearly 1,000 entries. Awards were given in various groups, based on different aspects of service. The “Have a Ball” Wireless Campaign won a top Gold Award in the Utility group, competing against providers like Verizon, that have considerably more resources and much larger budgets than PRTC.

“Being a service provider ourselves, anytime we receive an award, we not only feel it reflects all the effort of our team here in Nashville, but also the effort of our clients,” said Charlene Taylor, creative director for CTI. “It’s inspiring to see PRTC’s willingness led by its manager, Jim Wilder, to take the steps necessary to stay ahead of today’s rapid and ever-changing world of technology. This can be very challenging in the rural environments they serve.”

She added that this particular campaign was designed to support the initial introduction of wireless services while also highlighting the partnership with the national provider ‘Cingular’. The achievement of the campaign demonstrates that having a simple, creative, powerful message is still key in communicating with rural customers.

Wilder, PRTC general manager, said that recognizing its marketing campaign strategy shows that rural providers can compete in any arena.

“The goal of this campaign, working with Chaz Taylor Inc., was to engage our potential wireless customer who probably uses one of the bigger wireless providers,” Wilder said. “We worked together to develop a campaign that fit our community, our lifestyle, and our interests that are unique to our service area. The message that the local network can and does provide the kind of service that they may think only the bigger guys can provide came through loud and clear. Our wireless sign-ups increased considerably during the “Have A Ball” campaign.”

In considering the marketing strategies for rural telcos like PRTC, Taylor said that the bigger guys often make the mistake of generalizing the consumer.

“During the planning stages of this campaign, we spent a lot of time researching and considering who we are talking to,” Taylor said. “Our clients have an amazing capacity for, and dedication to, a level of service that is not typically found among the ‘giant’ providers who dominate the markets of larger metro areas. We recognized that there is a new age group that gravitates to new innovations and supports investment in the local network. This is substantial income that builds the networks, and one that marketing and research must address. The ‘Have A Ball’ campaign spoke to that generation specifically, while also demonstrating that the local network truly is a full-service provider to those folks who use a different wireless company. It reached all aspects of the community.”

The campaign included:

- a series of “fun” and sports-oriented billboards designed to reach a wide, mobile audience
- unique newspaper ads
- vehicle decals
- press releases that were issued to the local newspaper as new towers were erected in the Laurens area, emphasizing PRTCComm’s mission to be the best coverage provider in Laurens County
- features in PRTC’s customer newsletter
- point of purchase signage in PRTC wireless stores
- an Identity Folder to house key Cingular information and product information as customers came into the store

“All the elements worked together to reinforce the message that wireless service is better than ever, and ready to work for whatever lifestyle you have,” Taylor said.

Since 1986, CTI has provided an extensive range of strategic marketing services and products to independent telecom service providers across the United States.