



# 31 Ideas to Improve Your Marketing

by Mark Arnold

Author of multiple books, including "Marked For Success: Daily Ideas to Help Your Financial Institution Succeed," "Think Huge: Elevating Your Life and Your Business" and "My Best Service Ever."

## Introduction

Author Jeff Walker says, “The very nature of our communications and daily lives has changed radically in just a few short years...we live in a world where the ‘marketing fog’ grows thicker with each passing day.”

The reality is people are bombarded daily with marketing messages. Most consumers receive on average 3,500 marketing messages per day. All those messages lead to some pretty serious fog. And if you are a credit union or bank, that fog only gets worse because most people view banking as boring, tedious and a pain.

To successfully promote your loans, checking accounts and deposit products you must cut through a thick fog. As financial marketers, we’re always looking for quick and easy ways to improve.

So how can you overcome the marketing fog? You have to improve your marketing,

This down-and-dirty Tip Sheet is designed to provide 30 quick suggestions to immediately improve your marketing. Some of the tips are obvious, some are no-brainers; and all are short and hopefully helpful.



“The biggest thing is that you guys cater to each credit union or financial institution and it’s not this canned campaign or this canned training program. There’s too many of those out there. Or, if a company thinks they’ve perfected one system, they try to roll it out at every credit union. On The Mark Strategies is not that. You guys really do cater to each institution individually and it just makes sense what you do.”

**Mindy Uitterdyk, Vice President Marketing,  
UniWyo Federal Credit Union**



# 31 Ideas to Improve Your Marketing

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## Tell stories

People hate marketing but they love a good story. Rather than “push” a used auto loan promotion via your rate tell stories about your members or customers who financed a used car for their college bound student. Tell a story about a family who used an unsecured loan from your institution to adopt their kids. Show pictures of real people using your real products. Stop marketing and start telling stories.

2

## Give content

People hate sales pitches but they love relevant information. So give it to them. Show them how to calculate their debt ratio, how to save \$50 a month or how to structure a budget. Today’s consumer craves information (not a sales pitch). So give it to them. Stop marketing and start giving content.

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## Personalize messages

People hate mass messages but they love personalization. As Seth Godin once said, “no one wants e-mail, but everyone wants me-mail.” As a financial institution, you now have tons of data on your members/customers (where they shop, how much money they make, what debt they carry, etc.). So use that big data to your advantage by crafting individualized communication. Stop marketing to the masses and start sending unique messages (like you are talking directly to them).

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## Target the niche, not the all

Stop marketing to all your customers or members. Focus on the ones that are the most profitable, the most likely to use your services and the ones that are your raving fans. Rather than send one piece to every prospect, use your database and MCIF tools to send multiple pieces to a select few. A small micro list is often better than a large macro list.

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## Promote benefits and not features

It’s an old adage but very true: features tell and benefits sell. Make your marketing about them and not you. Look at every one of your marketing items from the end-users view. The rate and terms are less important than how it saves the consumer time and money. Emphasizing your benefits is better than droning on about your features.



“I think Taylor is phenomenal. It was important to have someone like him speak to our executive team about marketing and branding. I have shared this information with them in the past from Mark and Taylor’s articles, but they needed to hear it from an expert. That was very valuable.”

**Kristina Morgan, Vice President,  
HR and Marketing  
Nymeo Credit Union**





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## Gain staff support

You can't do marketing in a vacuum. No matter how creative your design is, it's your front-line staff that often closes the sale. So make sure you give them selling tools and garner their feedback prior to a campaign launch. Involving staff is better than declaring from on high your marketing edicts.

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## Cut the copy

It doesn't matter what piece you are producing, just say it in fewer words. The attention spans of consumers today are less than goldfish. One trend identified recently is the concept of glanceable content. People are consuming more information than ever before, just in smaller bites. In other words, they are "glancing" at it. To increase your marketing's effectiveness, reduce how much you are saying.

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## Use video

Marketing is no longer about brochures, direct mail pieces and newsletters. It is now about video tools such YouTube. The number one search engine for people under the age of 30 is not Google: it's YouTube. Make sure your website has short testimonial clips, educational videos and interactive features. People are not reading; they are watching. To increase your marketing's effectiveness, use more video.

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## Measure and report your results

"What's the ROI of our marketing?" Do you ever get that question or something similar? If you do, you better be able to answer it. You should calculate the return every one of your promotions brings (even if it didn't quite have the results you were seeking). When those budget battles erupt (and they do), the more data you can provide the better you'll be. You can check out our resource page to help get you started. To increase your marketing's effectiveness, demonstrate how marketing is positively impacting the bottom line.



"I believe the marketing audit was super helpful. We really got a lot of valuable insight and we have a lot of action steps from it. Having that fresh set of eyes and outside perspective helped us make some valuable procedure changes that have benefitted our organization. I researched other organizations and for our size credit union, no other organization even comes close to offering the services On The Mark Strategies provides in its marketing audit." "

**Helen Gibson, VP of Marketing & Education,  
Denver Community Credit Union**





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## Get an outsider's view of marketing

We are often too close to our own marketing to see ways to improve it. Sometimes we even have a few blind spots about our campaigns or pieces. As Jay Curtis, CEO of Frist Credit Union said recently, "The marketing audit gave us great feedback on where we need to focus our energies to grow and better serve our members. Having a fresh set of eyes on all your materials is a great way to better your brand." To learn more about how a marketing audit can improve your credit union or bank, call Mark Arnold at 214-538-4147 or e-mail him at mark@markarnold.com. To increase your marketing's effectiveness, get a second set of eyes on it.

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## Avoid promoting the flavor of the month

The days of a traditional marketing calendar are long gone. Rather than pushing deposits in Q1, home improvement loans in Q2, auto loans in Q3 and holiday promotions in Q4 it's much more effective to promote your brand 24/7. If your employees feel they are "pushing" products on consumers rather than matching needs your marketing is doomed. To increase your marketing's effectiveness, it's best to emphasize brand over product.

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## Use e-mail

Yes, mobile and social media are hot. But people still read and respond to e-mail offers. It is one of the best mediums to reach the most consumers. But as with "cut the copy," keep those e-mails short and sweet.

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## Emphasize the visual

Make the visual element the most prominent part of your promotion. As mentioned above, people are scanning rather than reading. Your visual should strongly support your writing.



"As soon as I was hired in, Mark and his team were already on board. He made sure as I came in to the marketing department as the sole person in the marketing department, that I had the foundation needed, a very broad yet thorough foundation, so I understood our marketing strategies. And if I ever had a question, it was always easy to get in communication with him."

**Lynette Hazzelton, Director of Marketing,  
Heart of Louisiana**



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## Take risks

This is marketing for crying out loud. Don't be so conservative. Don't worry about offending your board of directors (and remember that your board is not your target audience).

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## Use testimonials

Make capturing testimonials a routine part of your marketing. Place consumer testimonials on all your marketing pieces (website, newsletter, direct mail, e-mails, etc.). Don't tell consumers how great you are: let others do that for you.

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## Ditch brochures

No one reads your brochures. And your staff tends to use them as crutches rather than engaging in conversations. At the very least reduce how many brochures you have,

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## Focus your social media

Focus your social media efforts on two or three channels max. If your website has icons for Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, etc. that is way too many. Pick the ones that best reflect your target audiences.

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## De-clutter your website

Clean the clutter on your website. Do you really need ALL that information? Make it clean and crisp. Too many times every department or partner wants their information on your home page. That area is critical real estate so make sure you value it accordingly.

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## Shorten your promotions

Reducing the length of your promotions can actually increase their effectiveness. Two months? Too long. The ideal length for any promotion (loan, deposit, etc.) is six weeks.

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## Frequency trumps size

Remember the importance of frequency. It's more important to hit a smaller audience multiple times than a larger audience only once.



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## Avoid doing too much

This is a classic mistake many marketers make. Most marketers are over-achievers and want to do it all. Eventually that mindset will burn you and your financial institution. When a CEO asks to promote a certain product or push a particular project, we always say, “yes.” Even if we have 10 other things on our “To Do” list. You can’t keep adding project after project without something suffering. The solution: prioritize (try saying, “which one of these other promotions or projects do you want me to put aside?”)

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## Wow consumers

Member or customer service is just the basics today. To truly engage members you must “wow” them. In other words, provide some type of experience that gets them talking about your credit union. You must make your credit union or bank memorable. “Wow” examples could include water bottle in the drive-through on a hot day, walking a consumer to their car with an umbrella in the rain, having fresh cookies in the lobby and giving gift cards on Black Friday.

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## Use staff incentives judiciously

Staff incentives (paying staff or doing giveaways) during a promotion can increase your bottom line results. However, don’t use incentives all the time or your staff will come to expect them. Using staff incentives every now and then can give an extra “bang” or “pop.”

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## Use as many appropriate components as possible

Most promotions include things like direct mail pieces, lobby posters, statement inserts, e-mails, etc. While you want to use as many mediums as possible to reach your target audience you don’t necessarily have to use all of them. Why not? Because they all might not be appropriate for your target audience. Your target audience will dictate the components.

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## Get multiple bids (on all projects)

Reducing a promotion’s expense increases your return on investment (ROI). So you want to haggle, haggle, haggle with printers and designers. Just knowing you are shopping around may make your vendors a little more eager to please. Remember, all prices are negotiable.

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## Use black and white occasionally

Sometimes black and white (done really well) can stand out amidst the color. While studies show color increases effectiveness a black and white piece can be extremely effective. This also saves you money (and increase ROI). You don’t necessarily use black and white all the time, but a judicious use can be positive.

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## Avoid death by committee

Involving others in marketing is a good thing, but to a point. If you continue to add multiple suggestions it could dilute your marketing.

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## Don't let the CEO be the marketing director

This one is hard. But you have to grow a backbone. If your marketing is edgy, the CEO should be a little uncomfortable (and that's okay).

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## Own the circle

There are many things we want to own in life: a car, a home, a pet. As a bank or credit union there are also things we want to own: success, profitability, and our customers' or members' business.

For financial institutions, there is something else we should strive to own: the circle. While there are many potential target audiences (generational, income, race, etc.) one strategy banks and credit unions can employ is a geographical one. And that's where "owning the circle" comes into play.

With each one of your branch locations, draw a circle around it. You can make that circle three miles, four miles or even five miles but draw it. And for marketing purposes, you should "own" everything in that circle.

Examples of items you should own in your branch circle include the following:

- Small businesses
- Home owner associations
- Neighborhoods
- Billboards
- Movie theatre and mall advertising
- Gas station kiosks
- Schools (elementary and high schools)
- Community events

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## Avoid clip art

It's cheesy, looks cheap, and makes you come across as a mom and pop shop. Invest \$25 in a good picture rather than using something from clip art.

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## Avoid placing text over images

When you put text over an image you make the wording hard to read. Let the picture speak for itself and make sure any text is around, above or below the image.



## Conclusion

As I mentioned in the introduction, marketing is changing. And your credit union's and bank's marketing must change. My hope is that this Tipsheet gave you fresh ideas when it comes to marketing.

I know marketing your credit union and bank can be overwhelming at times, but it doesn't have to be. On the Mark Strategies has helped numerous credit unions and banks market themselves, and we can help you too. Our services include:

- Strategic Planning
- Marketing Audits
- Branding

If you need help marketing your financial institution, please contact us to see how we can elevate your marketing to the next level.

### Contact Information

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**About the Author.** Mark Arnold, CCUE, is an acclaimed speaker, brand expert and strategic planner. Mark speaks regularly to audiences around the country on branding, marketing, strategy, leadership, personal growth and generational issues. With over 20 years experience in the financial services industry, Mark's breadth of knowledge covers areas such as marketing, business development, human resources, training, and sales.



He is also Founder and President of On the Mark Strategies a company specializing in branding, strategic planning and marketing audits. Not a mere consulting firm, On the Mark Strategies leads, guides and blazes trails for credit union and bank success. Some of the services On the Mark Strategies provides include branding, strategic planning and marketing audits.

Mark is the author of multiple books, including "Marked For Success: Daily Ideas to Help Your Financial Institution Succeed," "Think Huge: Elevating Your Life and Your Business" and "My Best Service Ever."

His blog ([markarnold.com/blog](http://markarnold.com/blog)) has been recognized as one of the top 20 blogs in the country for financial marketing.