



**PLUMBING-HEATING-COOLING
CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION**

THE PHCC CONNECTION

COMMITTED TO A RESPONSIBLE FUTURE

It's a Matter of Knowing Howe

Award-winning plumbing contractor shares his successful marketing strategy



Bill Howe

All PHCC companies hope to become a household name. Achieving that prominence through creative marketing is one reason Bill Howe, president of San Diego-based Bill Howe Plumbing, Inc., was selected as the PHCC Contractor of the Year Award sponsored by Delta Faucet Company. The accomplishment was announced at PHCC's recent CONNECT 2011 conference.

Launching the brand

With more than 30 years in residential and commercial plumbing, Bill Howe Plumbing Inc.'s branding got its start one fateful day when Bill overheard a customer service representative answering the phone, "Can we help you? Because we know Howe!" Bill had suspected that the word play on his last name held creative marketing possibilities, but that incident proved it. Thus the company's branding began in earnest with the launch of a logo (Bill's caricature) and a jingle so catchy

that a competitor caught his own children singing it.

Today, the company's marketing tactics have gone high-tech. Coordinated by a staff marketing expert who works in conjunction with two advertising agencies, Bill Howe Plumbing spends \$85,000 per month for advertising that generates \$13-\$15 million per year in sales. Ads include 30- and 60-second television and radio spots, search engine and pay-per-click web campaigns, advertisements in online review websites such as Kudzu.com and Angie's List, and even old-fashioned Yellow Pages advertising that appeals to older customers. Bill strives to connect with customers and keep them: "I want to keep customers forever, not just once. I want their neighbors, their friends, their kids...word of mouth is what we create, and the result is a steady flow of referrals."

Indeed, the company receives an average of 160-180 calls per day, and as many as 220 calls during the peak of one recent advertising campaign. Using radio and television resources and on-air personalities to promote the company brand has been a successful strategy. For example, a three-month "Nowe and Later" campaign used commercials and radio personalities to encourage listeners to text "plumber" to a certain number to qualify for a discount coupon and sports tickets.

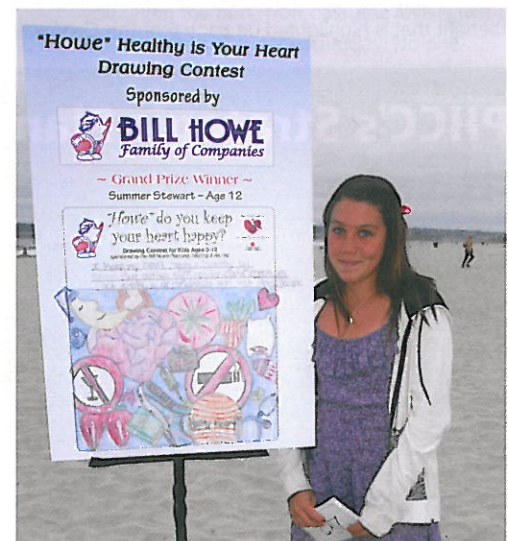
Cause Marketing

Cause marketing has proven highly effective, says Bill, because it provides excellent public exposure while giving back to the community. "It's not always about plumbing," he says. "Sometimes it's about being a part of the community and simply being 'out there'." He cites a recent "Howe Healthy Is Your Heart?"

campaign that benefitted the American Heart Association (AHA). Targeted at 5-12 year olds, the campaign distributed flyers to local department and grocery stores encouraging children to draw their impressions of what a healthy heart looks like. Bill's wife, Tina, and an Ambassador from the AHA appeared on TV to promote the contest. The winners received Toys 'R Us gift cards and had their designs featured on posters placed throughout San Diego.

Don't be afraid to be known

When asked about his overall marketing strategy, Bill says, "If you want the public to come to you versus the other guy, you need to perform quality work, obviously, but you also need a strong public presence. Even small companies can find creative ways to make their name known. Sit down and brainstorm with your staff or utilize the expertise of a marketing professional. I guarantee that will be money well spent."



A drawing contest (winner in photo) was one of Howe's effective cause marketing campaigns.

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