



“Better Banking. Naturally.” - Elephant Magazine – December 2007

by Jason Bauer

The phone rang. That’s how it started. On the other end was a credit union colleague I had never met from a small town in Oregon. She was eager to speak with me. By her definition, we were one of the foremost leaders of the “Go Green” movement in the nation for credit unions. I laughed...out loud even. It was comical to me.

We had dabbled in offering eco-friendly based incentives to our members, but it was anything but earth-shattering. It was just another marketing tactic. We were ahead of the eco-curve in our market, and had recently received some industry-wide press for our solar panel addition. The attention was nice, but Boulder Valley Credit Union – a foremost leader in the “Green” movement? That’s when it clicked. Why not us? For many of our managers and employees, living in an eco-conscious manner was nothing new. We practiced it individually, but had never thought of doing so as a whole. Why not become fully eco-conscious in every decision we make as an organization? Why not set the example for every other financial institution in Boulder and Colorado? It was time for a financial institution that was willing to do more than just “green-wash” their market. It was time for a truly eco-conscious alternative to meet the banking needs of Boulder County and do so for the right reasons. For Boulder Valley Credit Union this is not a marketing gimmick or a novelty promotion. This is who we are, how we choose to do business, and we are doing it simply because...it’s the right thing to do.

Two weeks after that phone call, everything changed with how we made decisions internally. It wasn’t about what was cheaper but instead about what was “greener.” We made plans to add additional solar panels to our main branch location as well as panels at our other branches next year. We forged partnerships with Eco-Cycle as well as countless eco-conscious charities and eco-friendly businesses. We made the responsible business decision to *increase* our operating expenses by paying more for eco-friendly office supplies as well as committing to print 100% of our marketing materials on recycled paper using soy or corn based inks.

But our efforts didn’t stop there. This is far more than just offering our members better rates on eco-auto loans or solar panels additions – this is about awareness and education. Not just for our members and staff of employees, but for other banks and credit unions. We committed to giving EVERY new member that signs up at BVCU on an ongoing and permanent basis an energy-efficient light bulb. It’s our free toaster. But it is also so much more. If every household in America changed out one light bulb to one of these, it would be the equivalent to taking 800,000 cars off the road. That’s a pretty powerful statement, and one we will be making to every new member of the credit union. It’s about education, awareness, and commitment.

We recently received certification through Partners for Clean Environment (PACE) in Boulder. They were just as excited as we were. The PACE representative’s response was, “Finally...a financial institution in Boulder!” BVCU is the first PACE certified bank or credit union in Boulder County which is something we are very proud of.

But all of this is only part of the story. The tip of the melting iceberg, if you will. We grow greener each and every day. We forge new eco-partnerships, introduce new eco-offerings, and make a few eco-changes daily in our organization now. Even the toilet paper has been affected. All of this for the greater good, and because we feel it's the right thing to do. Oh...and there is that one other small reason.

The next time the phone rings, and a random unknown colleague is on the other end...I don't want to laugh out loud this time. Beaming with "green" pride suits me much better.

Jason Bauer is the Vice President of Marketing at Boulder Valley Credit Union. Boulder Valley Credit Union provides a wide range of financial products and services while incorporating eco-conscious practices into their day-to-day operations. The credit union is owned by its members and provides checking accounts, savings, mortgages, loans, credit cards, financial planning, and many other banking services at better rates and with less fees than a bank. For a listing of their eco-conscious accomplishments, offerings, and partnerships visit www.WeCareColorado.com or www.bvcu.org.

