

Keep Your Home California Marketing Campaign

Persuading struggling California homeowners to pick up the phone and apply for as much as \$100,000 in free mortgage assistance seemed like an effortless task; little did we know just how difficult it would be to distribute nearly \$2 billion in federal funds to desperate homeowners on the verge of foreclosure.

BACKGROUND

As one of the states considered “Hardest Hit” by steep home price declines and unemployment, California was allocated \$1.9 billion in federal Hardest Hit funds to design, develop and deliver a set of foreclosure prevention programs that answered the specific needs of homeowners who seemed to be frozen in one of the worst real estate crises the state had ever experienced. The California Housing Finance Agency consulted with numerous community partners, foreclosure counselors, housing advocates, mortgage servicers and others directly involved in helping financially-stressed homeowners, and designed four separate programs under the umbrella of *Keep Your Home California* (KYHC).

Each of the programs address specific and current challenges that homeowners are facing in California – from unemployment to negative equity to falling behind on their mortgage payments. And, for homeowners who are out of options, a fourth program helps them make a graceful exit from their home to other safe, affordable housing.

OBJECTIVES

With the understanding that every dollar spent on marketing the Keep Your Home California programs meant one less dollar available to help struggling homeowners, there was agreement early on that all marketing efforts needed to be very efficiently and effectively invested. Conducting focus group research to determine the wants and needs of our large audience was clearly out of the question in terms of cost and timing; as an alternative, a Modeling and Profile study was conducted using data management tools through Experian.

Once we had a clear picture of our target audience, we started talking to them.

STRATEGIES

Public Relations/Earned Media

We discovered early on that Keep Your Home California press releases and the resulting news articles and television stories earned us some of the biggest spikes to call volume at the KYHC counseling center. Our aggressive media campaign, from prime-time television newscasts to Sunday newspapers, has reached a combined circulation of more than 22 million, generating an advertising equivalent value of an estimated \$925,000.

A summary of media activity during the last year includes:

- An estimated 900 stories in newspapers, television, radio, ethnic media and online news outlets from July 1, 2011 through June 2012.
- Major stories in daily metropolitan newspapers, including multiple reports in the *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *San Diego Union-Tribune*, *Sacramento Bee* and *San Jose Mercury-News*. Keep Your Home California was also cited in *USA TODAY*, the largest traditional newspaper in the country.
- Keep Your Home California appearances in newspapers serving the hardest-hit regions in the state, including the *Riverside Press-Enterprise*, *Stockton Record*, *Modesto Bee*, *Fresno Bee* and *Bakersfield Californian*.
- Connections with ethnic media as part of an effort to reach non-English-speaking residents. Stories about the program were featured in *La Opinion*, *Korea Daily*, *Korea World News*, *Sing Tao Daily* and *Viet Bao Daily News*.

Web Site

The initial Keep Your Home California web site and Spanish-language site, Conserva Tu Casa California, underwent major facelifts in design as well as content in August 2011. The new design allows homeowners to learn more about the four programs from an easy-to-understand home page with large, self-identifying links briefly describing the four programs and directing homeowners to the best one for them. A link to a six-minute “Welcome” video explaining the application process is on the left side of the homepage. In addition, homeowners can check the “eligibility” section, which includes links to income limits and a list of participating mortgage servicers. Another enhancement to both web sites is a collection of Success Stories from California homeowners who have used one of the four programs. Web visitors can read their testimonials about how their families are being helped through Keep Your Home California.

Direct Mail Partnership with California’s Employment Development Department

One of the main qualifying criteria for eligibility under our unemployment program is to be collecting benefits, and in March 2012 the state’s Employment Development Department (EDD) agreed to include a KYHC marketing flier in one of their mailings to 1.1 million EDD benefit recipients..At last count, over 35,000 calls were in direct response to the partnership mailing with EDD.

Outreach Events

Foreclosure prevention events and counseling sessions are held at every conceivable venue and in just about every city in California. Keep Your Home California has had a presence at 202 of these events and has shared vital information with individuals and families desperate for advice and counseling to help them stay in their homes.

Television Call-In Shows

A 15-hour program on November 17, 2011 with Sacramento NBC Affiliate KCRA offered a special call-in opportunity for viewers that resulted in more than 1,500 calls to the station. During the day, KCRA conducted 55 separate, live segments about Keep Your Home California, resulting in hundreds of thousands of dollars in ad-equivalent value. KCRA offered this incredible opportunity for Keep Your Home California for free as a public service.

Public Service Announcements

Through a special agreement with the California Broadcasters Association, KYHC ran a set of English and Spanish public service announcements on television stations in the key markets of Sacramento, Stockton, Modesto, Fresno, Visalia, Bakersfield, Palm Springs, Los Angeles and San Diego. These spots ran at a fraction of the cost of normal advertising and always aired between the hours of 5:00 a.m. and midnight.

Ethnic Broadcast Agreements

Television spots in Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Hindi/Punjabi, Hmong, Russian and Persian are also being broadcast on cable networks throughout Northern California through agreements with ethnic broadcast/outreach organizations. Since these organizations are committed to reaching their audience with foreclosure prevention information, the airtime is offered at deeply discounted rates.

Radio Traffic Sponsorships

An effective way to gain exposure to a broad base of consumers in a short amount of time is through traffic sponsorships. These are live or pre-recorded 10- or 15-second spots that immediately follow a radio traffic report. The audience reach for traffic sponsorships was expanded in January 2012 by working with all three radio networks, Metro Traffic, Entercom and Clear Channel.

Mobile Messaging

To reach many of the text-savvy crowd, KYHC created a text message bounce-back system. Smart phone users can simply text the word “HOME” or “CASA” to 55678 to receive information and the web site URL for Keep Your Home California or Conserva Tu Casa California.

Social Media

Whether they like to “friend” or “tweet,” interested homeowners can catch up with the latest KYHC news 24 hours a day via Facebook, with tweets on Twitter and through a weekly blog. Keep Your Home California also provides videos on YouTube.

Theater Advertising

Knowing from our Experian research that our target audience enjoys the big screen, we double-featured our public service announcements that we’d broadcast on television stations earlier in the year and projected the spots in theaters, targeting the hardest hit areas of the state in terms of foreclosure rates: Riverside, Bakersfield, Stockton, Modesto and Merced.

Billboards

Some of the busiest highways in California, Interstate 5 and Highway 99, happen to run through some of the highest foreclosure areas: Stockton, Modesto and Merced. From July through September 2011, dozens of giant billboards along these high traffic highways displayed Keep Your Home California advertisements with appealing visuals and contact information. Spanish versions directed Spanish-speaking individuals to the Conserva Tu Casa California web site.

Bus Tails

Beginning in late June 2012, hundreds of LA Metro buses will serve as traveling billboards for Keep Your Home California. Using silhouette figures with a retro theme, these catchy ads encourage drivers and riders to find out how they might be able to receive as much as \$100,000 in mortgage assistance.

RESULTS

When the marketing campaign for Keep Your Home California was getting up to speed in the summer of 2011, calls to the counseling center were averaging 600 to 700 a day. Total allocated funds were in the realm of \$100 million with about 5,500 homeowners either receiving funding or in process to receive funding. After one year of innovative, aggressive, cost-effective marketing, the counseling center now logs about 1,200 to 2,500 calls daily, has allocated over \$520 million and has helped or is in the process of helping more than 23,000 California families who are struggling financially and desperately trying to hold on to their home.

Our message is getting through to the people who need to hear it; and the cost to reach our audience has intentionally been invested judiciously. For instance, 15 hours of television broadcast time for our KCRA-TV Call-In show in November had a market value of \$307,000; the show cost us absolutely nothing and yet we received 1,500 homeowner calls in one day as a result and seven months later, we’re still fielding inquiries from KCRA viewers. Our mobile messaging campaign costs \$600 per month and we receive about 900 inbound texts monthly from interested parties. One of our ethnic television campaigns broadcasts 42 spots per week in six different languages for a monthly investment of only \$2,300 and a value of nearly \$70,000. Our earned media campaign is valued at nearly \$1 million and reaches tens of thousands of homeowners through television, radio and national newspapers.

We feel honored that the United States Treasury entrusted us with this funding to help struggling California homeowners; we have every intention of continuing to use our marketing investment wisely.

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NCSHA 2012 Appendix List

1. Earned Media Coverage
2. Keep Your Home California and Conserva Tu Casa Home Page Designs
3. Direct Mail partnership with California Employment Development Department
4. KCRA-TV 15-Hour Call-In Show
5. Public Service Announcements Through CA Broadcasters Association
6. Ethnic Outreach via Television Commercials
7. Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, Blog, YouTube
8. Central Valley Billboards
9. LA Metro Bus Tail Advertisements