

**2009 NCSHA Award Nomination – New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority  
Communications – Creative Media  
MFA’s “Housing New Mexico” Rebranding Campaign**

*“When you buy your first home, you’re not just making an investment that will pay off years down the road. You’re making an investment that will pay off the moment your kids first walk in the door and say ‘we’re home.’” – TV script from MFA’s Housing New Mexico rebranding campaign*

Since its creation in 1975, the New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority has struggled to develop a simple, yet meaningful message that conveys who we are and what we do. Prospective borrowers, elected officials, media and business leaders throughout the state have had at best a vague awareness – and often no awareness – of our existence.

The situation worsened significantly in 2006 when scandals rocked two New Mexico agencies with similar-sounding names. The Region III Housing Authority was allegedly involved in illegal activity that resulted in the former director’s criminal indictment this summer. And late last year, the New Mexico Finance Authority was investigated in connection with a pay-to-play scandal. Within a two-month period, the state’s largest newspaper printed two articles and two editorials that incorrectly named the New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority as the agency involved in the questionable activities. Newspapers, radio and television stations across the state repeated the mistake. The confusion undermined our credibility with the public and elected officials and took a toll on our staff. We were now in a full-blown image crisis.

Compounding matters, the Mortgage Finance Authority’s logo, an abstract brick-red color house that was perceived to be warm and earthy when it was designed a number of years ago, now evoked the idea of “being in the red.” With the current economic situation and declining housing markets, it was an especially damaging image. The logo was stiff and rigid with no tag line, making us appear to be bureaucratic and unapproachable to the New Mexico families we wanted to serve.

Finally, our web site was large, cumbersome and very difficult to navigate. Its design had not been updated for seven years and was inconsistent with our other marketing and collateral materials. In an April survey, respondents consistently rated our web site as poor. One person said she would “rather eat cinder block” than try to find information on the site.

### **Campaign Overview and Objective**

We set about to find a way to educate people about who we were, to become more approachable, to differentiate ourselves from other agencies and to position ourselves as New Mexico’s housing experts. To accomplish those goals, we decided to develop a message that spoke to the emotional aspects of buying and owning a home. We determined to simplify the language in our printed materials to make it more accessible to everyone, particularly the end user. We aimed to present a more consistent, simple look in all our marketing and collateral materials in order to project a stable, reliable image.

With MFA bond counsel and attorneys’ approval, we set aside funds within a single family bond issue for marketing purposes and used these funds to hire an advertising agency. Another company was hired to redesign our web site. Because funds were limited, we did much of the work in-house, including copy writing, programming and collateral design. Our campaign includes:

- **Name recognition:** Because we could not change our name without an amendment to our statute, we branded ourselves as “MFA.” Eliminating the words that are similar to other agencies has reduced the name confusion and made us easier to identify.
- **Tagline:** “Housing New Mexico” The simple descriptor illustrates what we do in a friendly, non-bureaucratic way.

- **Logo:** We literally put a roof over people’s heads. The iconic look can be interpreted in several ways: A roof over a person, a keyhole, an upward arrow. All of these are positive images of safety, home and new beginnings. The color is calm, soothing, and symbolizes New Mexico’s culture and heritage.
- **TV ads:** Three ads were shot by a well-known director. We featured a multi-ethnic family, a single mom with her son and a couple expecting their first child standing in snow, rain and wind. At the end of each ad, the roof logo appears over the heads of the actors, visually protecting them from the elements. The result is an emotional, compelling visual illustration of what home means.
- **Web site:** Our old site was organized by MFA departments, which made it fairly easy for staff to understand but challenging for other users. Our new site is divided by end-user category, making it much easier to navigate. All of the text was rewritten in less bureaucratic language, menu options were streamlined, and we incorporated photos of real MFA clients and partners throughout the site, bringing a warmer look to the pages. We also switched to a very user-friendly content management system that is updated by staff members from each department instead of one webmaster.
- **Collateral materials:** We rewrote and redesigned all MFA marketing materials with our new look and logo. The result is a consistent, simple look that projects a solid, dependable image.
- **Signage:** We installed four new signs on our property and replaced two existing ones. We redesigned all the construction and weatherization signage with easy-to-read signs that clearly identify MFA.

### **Innovation**

The MFA rebranding and marketing campaign is innovative because it visually illustrates the safety and comfort a home can provide. Like Nike’s “swoosh” logo, the MFA roof logo is iconic and easily identifiable. The logo transcends language and creates an emotional response. In a time of upheaval in the housing market, this campaign reminds us of what is good about home and associates those positive feelings with our organization.

*“When you buy your first home, you’re not just getting a place for her to come home to after school. You’re getting a place for her to come home to at 2:00 am when she knows she’s grounded, over the summer when she’s in college and for all those holidays when she’ll have kids of her own.”*  
 – TV script from MFA’s Housing New Mexico rebranding campaign

The financing of the rebranding campaign was also innovative. Rather than trying to find cash in our stretched budget, we structured a single family bond issue to accommodate campaign expenses, essentially giving ourselves a 30-year, interest-free loan to finance the campaign.

### **Reaching our Audience and Achieving Measurable Results**

The statewide media campaign targeted our primary home-buying market: non-homeowner adults, ages 25-49, skewing female, with household incomes of \$40,000 or less. The following is an overview of the four-week media flight that ran from May 18 through June 14.

- Broadcast television: An estimated 2,901,000 views, 58 percent in primetime
- Cable television: Approximately 87,582 views
- Cinema: An estimated minimum 286,605 views spread among pre-movie advertising spots, lobby posters and lobby displays
- Newspaper: Seven advertorials on home buying in the *Sunday Albuquerque Journal*
- Online: 289,417 banner ad presentations on local news sites with a click-through rate of .19 percent – more than 50 percent higher than the average rate
- PSA: Free announcements aired approximately 175,164 times

One of the measures of our campaign’s success has been the dramatic increase in lending activity within our single-family mortgage revenue bond program. In the 10 months preceding the launch of the campaign, MFA released two bond issues for approximately \$83 million dollars. In the eight weeks since

the campaign launch, MFA has had a nearly six-fold increase in lending activity, resulting in two bond issues totaling \$90 million dollars.

The number of web site hits increased by 13 percent the first month it was live and continues to grow. Phone calls and lobby activity have increased by at least 10 percent. Earned media has doubled from an average of 10 stories a month to 20 with only two name corrections since the campaign began.

Our partners say they are grateful that we have responded to their requests to make our web site more accessible. Importantly, our lending partners say more an increasing number of clients are coming to them with some prior knowledge of MFA, which makes it easier for them to promote and use our products.

*“When you buy your first home, you’re not just taking the next logical step in the game of life. You’re taking your first step through the door that will welcome every person most important to you . . . even those you haven’t met.” – TV script from MFA’s Housing New Mexico rebranding campaign*

### **Providing Benefits that Outweigh Costs**

As our campaign developed, several organizations came forward to partner with us. The Home Builders Association of Central New Mexico and the REALTORS® Association New Mexico suggested and partially funded a joint eight-week series for new homebuyers in the Real Estate section of the state’s largest newspaper. The advertising agency donated some of their time. A local photographer and graphic

designer gave us reduced fees because they believe in our mission. A lending partner will largely finance a co-branding campaign this fall.

Another important benefit of this campaign has been its positive effect on the MFA staff. They report affirmative, unsolicited comments from friends and acquaintances about MFA and our ad campaign. It’s a big change from the blank stares or accusing looks they used to get when people asked the dreaded question, “So what do you do?”

### **Replicability**

We propose that most HFAs could structure a single family bond issue to fund a similar media campaign. Absent similar funding, several components of MFA’s campaign can be replicated at a very minimal cost:

- Communicate a message about home and housing that people can relate to on an emotional level
- Use federal stimulus funding as a news hook to increase the number of press releases and, ultimately, the amount of earned media
- Simplify written materials and target them to the end-user where appropriate
- Partner with other housing professionals to increase media leverage and share advertising costs
- PSA announcements

### **Achieving Strategic Objectives**

We believe we have achieved the goals we set at the beginning of this campaign: to educate people about who we are, to be more approachable, to differentiate ourselves from other state agencies, and to position ourselves as New Mexico’s housing experts. Our data show that we have greatly increased the general awareness and name recognition of MFA. Our media presence has expanded in a quantifiable way. We have strengthened our partnerships with key stakeholders and broadened our circle of influence with elected officials.

Most importantly, the numbers show that MFA’s rebranding and marketing campaign has helped more New Mexicans become homeowners. That means that we are on track to accomplish our mission to provide safe, affordable housing opportunities for all New Mexicans.