



# Meaningful Marketing

by Marisa Hirsch

**What started out as a marketing plan quickly became something more at Sun State Lumber and Truss, Prescott, AZ.**

A big part of growing a business is making connections and building relationships, but doing so successfully requires creativity—especially when industry conditions aren't at their best. If you can get creative and charitable at the same time...well, all the better. That's the conclusion reached by Sun State Lumber and Truss in Prescott, AZ, and that's how non-profit organization Buck Up for Wounded Warriors was born.

Carl Smith, salesman, was one of the employees involved in the formation of this combination marketing/fundraising program, which raises money for a charitable organization called Wounded Warrior Project (WWP). The idea began to take shape following the owners' request that Sun State get involved in Prescott Frontier Days, Inc.'s® World's Oldest Rodeo®—a top-notch weeklong annual event—as a way to get their name out into the local community.

"You can't set up a booth at the rodeo on July 4th and try to sell lumber and trusses," said Smith. "You'll be sitting there by yourself. So we tried to figure out what we could do to get our name out there, and also say 'Hey, Sun State is here, we're part of the community and we care about it.'"

**Above:** The Buck Up group, veterans, and current members of the military prepare to begin the Military Appreciation Presentation. (Photo courtesy of A Portrait Park by J.)

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## Thorough Research, Sound Decisions

The World's Oldest Rodeo is, according to Smith, about the biggest thing that goes on in central Arizona. This year, it ran from June 25 to July 5. Getting involved in such an event is a sure way to familiarize the locals with a company.

Besides Smith, the main Buck Up team includes Drew Danforth, technical representative, and Shannon Purdy, sales and office support. Together, the three of them run both Sun State's Prescott location and Buck Up for Wounded Warriors (see inset for website). After realizing they needed a better way to participate in the rodeo besides a sales booth, Smith and Danforth naturally drifted to what they were interested in. Their idea was to hold a fundraiser at the rodeo, with the proceeds going to support soldiers returning from tours of duty.

As they began to research potential organizations to raise funds for, they made an unpleasant discovery: some non-profits that claim to support military personnel don't hold up their end of a deal very well. Fortunately, the team did find at least one organization they felt very good working to support.

"We picked the Wounded Warrior Project because of how well they are run and their reputation," Smith said. "They are able to provide services from right after a guy gets injured on a battle field to when he comes back and is trying to find a job. They've got a range of different outreach programs. Most of [the organizations] don't. A lot of them will get a few things of lotion and sun block, say they'll get it over to Iraq and Afghanistan, and a lot of the stuff never makes it over there."

Danforth also referred to WWP's good record and how it played into the team's decision to support the project. "We wanted [an organization] that was actually raising money for the veterans and helping them out—and not paying their top dogs their life salaries," he said. "We wanted them to be returning a greater percentage of money to the veterans."

Established in 2003, WWP's mission is to honor and empower wounded warriors. According to the project's website (see inset for website), they do this by raising awareness and enlisting the public's aid for the needs of severely injured service-men and women, helping severely injured service members aid and assist each

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According to the non-profit organization's website ([www.homes-forourtroops.org](http://www.homes-forourtroops.org)), it exists to assist severely injured servicemen and women and their immediate families by raising donations of money, building materials and professional labor. They then coordinate the process of building a new home or adapting an existing home for handicapped accessibility. The finished home is given to a veteran—all at no cost to him or her.

People or companies interested in donating can give materials, labor or money via the website. General donations may be given, or a particular project can be chosen to donate to. This allows material donations to be directed toward a project in a specific area—provided one is currently in progress.

For more information about donating to Homes For Our Troops, visit [www.homesforourtroops.org](http://www.homesforourtroops.org).



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other, and providing unique, direct programs and services to meet the needs of severely injured service members.

Buck Up for Wounded Warriors exists as a separate non-profit that raises money for WWP. The name, which was Purdy's idea, is a play on the rodeo event. The initial plan was to raise money all the way up until the rodeo's conclusion on July 5. As attendees entered the rodeo venue, they do so through a tent of vendors. This was where Buck Up had a booth set up to explain their efforts and to accept donations.

## In Search of Support

Danforth and Smith both have connections to the military, which contributed to the decision to choose a related charitable cause. Danforth served as a Marine from 1994 to 1999, and Smith has family members who have served. In fact, Smith said the current situation often reminds him of what he heard growing up when Vietnam veterans were returning home.

"It was the era when [my dad] had a lot of friends that came back from Vietnam," Smith said. "I was raised [with the belief] that you do whatever you can do for these guys. They served your country. It's come full circle now. I'm watching kids come back and they can't find a job."

The Prescott employees run Buck Up much the way they

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The Buck Up Fourth of July parade group included members of the Marines, Army and Air Force. (Photo courtesy of A Portrait Park by J.)

run their place of work—as a team. After forming Buck Up, they enlisted the help of other local businesses and secured several sponsors. Two sponsors who went above and beyond to be part of the team are Tricia Lewis of Lewis Marketing & Public Relations, who worked with Buck Up from its inception to craft a marketing campaign, and Laura Williams of Green Elephant, creator of Buck Up's website. All sponsors' logos were printed on Buck Up t-shirts which, along with hats, are available to those who donate.

Smith said that he and Danforth have spent many months talking about their cause to anyone who will listen. In the months leading up to the rodeo, they met with the rotary club, the town council and the mayor, and worked with a sponsoring radio station to organize some stand-alone events leading up to the rodeo. One event that

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Once Sun State Lumber and Truss decided they wanted to be part of Prescott Frontier Days, Inc.'s® World's Oldest Rodeo®, they were faced with an obstacle: money. Most businesses pay to be sponsors of the event; that's how they participate and get their names out via the rodeo. Sun State needed to find another way...there just wasn't money to be a financial sponsor.

So Carl Smith, salesman, worked out a unique deal with the rodeo. Instead of writing a check, Sun State led an effort to remodel the rodeo's ticket booth free of charge. With help from many other local businesses, Sun State worked for several months to make the ticket booth into a fresh structure complete with rodeo character. In this way, Sun State was able to support a local event, network with other businesses, and promote their own—and all in a tough economy. (Photos courtesy of Carl Smith.)





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Buck Up attended was a home show in May. "We had a very good response there," said Smith. "People would come up and say things like 'I don't usually wear t-shirts or a hat, but I want to give you the money.'"

Another person who answered Smith's request for endorsement and participation was Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz. Back in February, Smith sent a letter inquiring if McCain would be willing to attend the Fourth of July festivities and be part of Buck Up's efforts. The response he initially received stated that McCain's July schedule wouldn't be organized until May, and he mostly abandoned hope at that time. But then, at the very end of May, Smith received notification that the senator would both endorse Buck Up and ride in the July Fourth rodeo-affiliated parade. McCain joined the parade that morning as part of Buck Up's group, which also included military representatives.



On July 4, sponsoring radio station Shine 90.9 FM broadcasted live from Buck Up's booth in the vendor tent, and the military also had booths. Then, before the evening rodeo started, Buck Up for Wounded Warriors put on a military appreciation presentation as a way to culminate their fundraising efforts and to express their gratitude for members of the military.

The presentation began with a Wounded Warrior video being projected as people filtered to their seats to watch the sold-out show. At first, Smith thought they would fail to catch the crowd's attention. "I heard the video start, and was looking up at the stands and thinking...half the people are here and no one's paying attention. Then, about a minute into the video, the stands were almost full. It was pretty quiet and everyone was kind of locked into the video."

Immediately after the video stopped, the rodeo announcer began explaining the Buck Up cause and introducing people as they approached the crowd for the ceremony. First came a flat bed truck carrying two veterans with disabilities and Buck Up volunteers, which was escorted by members of the Army. Following the truck were two Marines driving a Hummer H3. Smith said that as the group came into the crowd's view, people began standing up, removing their hats and clapping. As they drew front and center, the announcer began telling the stories of the veterans with disabilities. Then, as the Marines exited the Hummer and marched toward the crowd, the announcer explained that they'd both been injured in



Drew Danforth, Sen. John McCain and Carl Smith at the Prescott Frontier Days® Fourth of July parade. Buck Up presented the senator with a commemorative custom Buck Up knife. (Photo courtesy of A Portrait Park by J.)

combat and had reenlisted. "After that, the whole crowd was on its feet cheering and clapping," Smith said.

"I talked to several people who told me that there were a lot of people with 'sweaty eyes.' I also talked to the Marines and to the veterans with disabilities. All four told us it was very hard to maintain their composure. The gratitude those guys had for the way they were honored by the crowd blew them away."

The military appreciation presentation was repeated at that evening's rodeo (which was also sold out), and was received equally enthusiastically by that crowd. "It was very moving to see 4,000 people get on their feet and applaud these guys

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## Find Out More

- To learn more about Buck Up, or to donate (and receive a hat or t-shirt) visit [www.buckupforwoundedwarriors.com](http://www.buckupforwoundedwarriors.com).
- If you'd like to read more about Wounded Warrior Project, go to [www.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org).
- To read about The World's Oldest Rodeo, visit [www.worlds-oldestrideo.com](http://www.worlds-oldestrideo.com).

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until we were out of view," said Smith.

The official check was written and delivered to Wounded Warrior Project nearer to the end of July, after Sun State had totaled up the final amount of donations and finished with July projects.

### More to Come

Sun State's business made Buck Up for Wounded Warriors' fundraising efforts possible. "They gave us the tools to make all this happen," said Smith. "We learned that you can't just say 'Hey, we want to raise money and help out.' We had to create a professional team, including marketing, legal, accounting and website."

Sun State's fundraising efforts seem to be starting to pay off business-wise. Smith said the company got a lot of exposure through the rodeo, and has started to get some phone calls from

it. "The whole idea started off as getting our name out there, so hopefully that pays off," he said. "But as far as [our efforts] being rewarding and honoring these people, that part came off perfectly—better than we thought it would."

Danforth said that although the effort has been a lot of work, he's enjoyed being part of it and seeing the positive response from the community. That, and the cause itself, makes the work worthwhile. "We wanted to give back to men and women that serve the country," he said.

When Buck Up was first moving from an idea to reality, the Sun State team thought fundraising efforts would cease after the rodeo. The check would be written and delivered, the Sun State name would be well-known locally, and business would go back to just business. That's changed now. By the time the rodeo rolled around, the group had already decided to continue raising funds after its conclusion. They've now launched a Buck Up chapter in Montana that will work to help with veteran housing and education, and are also considering efforts in California. (They have contacts in both states.) Current fundraisers in the works are a golf outing and a poker run in October 2009, and a benefit dinner in February 2010. They'll also likely raise funds for the 2010 World's Oldest Rodeo.

"We originally thought it would stop July 4," Smith said. "But we realized, as we met people and heard their stories, that there's no good reason to stop. How can you?" **SBC**



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