

# What Credit Unions Can Learn from the NFL's Pittsburgh Steelers

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As the 2009 NFL season hits its stride a lot of people are starting to ask why there is a large group of teams clustered at the bottom of the rankings. These are professional teams. They all have talented, athletic, good players. They all have experienced coaching staffs, excellent training facilities and least most have a devoted fan base. So, what's the problem?

The most successful team in the NFL in terms of Super Bowl wins is my hometown team the Pittsburgh Steelers. The Steelers won their record-setting sixth Super Bowl last season and they are making another run at it this year. Many people believe that the Steelers' secret weapon is the Steeler culture. They are not a team of individual stars; they are an organization committed to teamwork and to winning.

You could say that the Steelers have a strong brand identity and a shared brand vision throughout the team, the Steelers organization and their widespread fan base. Everyone knows what they stand for and what they're fighting for.

What does it take to develop this kind of brand strategy throughout any type of organization, including a credit union?

## **One Easy Answer, No Simple Solution**

The answer is simple. The implementation is anything but simple. It takes leadership that communicates the brand strategy every day. That type of leadership creates unity and energizes an organization. The teams at the bottom of the heap this year suffer from a lack of unity and a disjointed brand vision.

Of course some teams stumble due to injuries, distracted key players and other unforeseen events-just as many financial institutions have stumbled due to the weakened economy. Yet some credit unions have found their footing and they are positioning themselves for future success.

When the 2009 season comes to an end and one team hoists the Vince Lombardi Trophy at the Super Bowl you can bet that the winning team members, coaches and management will all talk about how that team bonded in an extraordinary way to win the trophy for each other and their fans. And you'll hear the same at the conclusion of the World Series, as a hockey team takes possession of the Stanley Cup, or as a high school team picks up a state basketball title. Champions work together toward a common goal.

Brands are built by strong leaders who know how to build successful teams. It's as true in a credit union as it is in the NFL or any organization. If you don't understand your brand strategy how can you expect your people-and certainly your members-to understand what sets your credit union apart?

Establishing clear brand value, communicating that message throughout the organization and membership, and ultimately educating the marketplace is how your credit union can have a championship season year after year. Like the NFL this year, the financial services marketplace has more than its share of institutions clustered at the bottom, confused about what to do next. Which means the marketplace is wide open for teams who know who they are, what they want, and who are hell bent on success.

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