

Saving an American Industry

*American Forest & Paper Association
2006 Ogilvy Award Case Study*



By the mid 1990's, after decades of relentless negative focus on industry forest management practices by environmental groups, local, state and federal regulators/legislators and the media, the American forest and paper industry stood on the brink of losing its social, political and economic "license to operate" within the United States.

Issues the Industry Was Facing

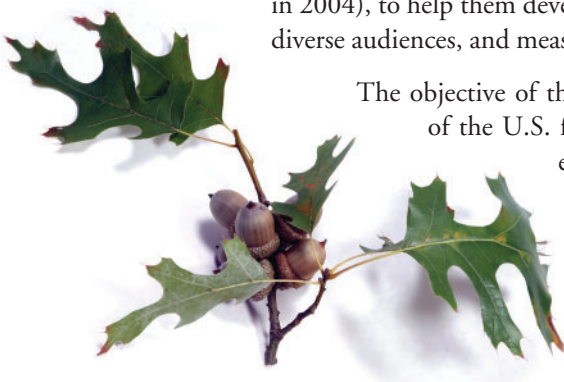
1. In 1998, public perceptions of the industry were predominantly negative, with a majority of Americans in national surveys saying on balance that the forest and paper products industry had caused environmental problems, and only a minority saying the industry had solved problems.
2. Bowing to pressure from environmentalist groups supported by a majority of American citizens, the federal government had enacted numerous laws and regulations aimed at curtailing or even eliminating logging activity.
3. Environmental regulations were raising the costs of producing wood and paper products domestically, driving customers to purchase from foreign producers and/or to limit purchases or switch to alternative materials. Major business customers were developing policies of buying and selling only lumber that met the "FSC" certification standard, a restrictive forestry program endorsed by many environmental groups.

An industry study projected that unless these and other trends changed, the industry would suffer annual revenue losses of \$20 to \$31 billion.

At one of our early planning meetings, the CEO of one of the nation's largest forest products companies said, "If something doesn't dramatically change, I predict that within 10 years this industry will cease to exist in this country."

In 1997, the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA), the national trade association of the forest, paper, and wood products industry, turned to WirthlinWorldwide®, (which merged with Harris Interactive in 2004), to help them develop a positioning for the industry, communicate it effectively to a number of diverse audiences, and measure the effectiveness of the campaign through ongoing tracking studies.

The objective of the AF&PA marketing campaign was nothing less than to ensure the survival of the U.S. forest and paper products industry, which ships \$263 billion in products each year and employs more than one million Americans with an annual payroll of \$61 billion. The daunting task ahead was to convince legislators, regulators, customers, the general public, and even environmentalists, that "responsible environmental stewardship" should entail active, thoughtful management of the forests, including responsible logging and production.



Further, the campaign had to demonstrate that the industry is a responsible environmental steward, as demonstrated by its commitment to technology and the science of forest management, so it could ensure its “license to operate.”

Shaping the strategy

Before it could change people’s attitudes toward the industry, AF&PA needed to understand why people felt the way they did about forests and nature. Using our **VISTA (Values in Strategy Assessment)** methodology, we conducted a large-scale qualitative study among the industry’s core stakeholders (government officials, regulators, and environmentalists). We learned that people’s definition of “responsible environmental stewardship” rests on the deeply-held personal values of “preserving forest habitats for future generations” and “preserving life through the protection of wildlife habitats.”

The industry needed to show that it shares these values. After all, the industry wants—in fact its existence depends on—the same thing the environmentalists were asking for... preservation of forests for future generations and wildlife habitat protection. But it was not enough to produce an ad saying “we believe in preserving forests” or “we care about animals.” The emotional appeal must be supported by facts, and VISTA showed exactly how to link the two together. It’s a proven fact that forests are much healthier when they are actively managed, which includes cutting trees, planting new ones, fighting disease, etc. Only the forest products industry has the equipment, manpower, and economic incentive to manage America’s forests on a large enough scale. Linking that rational argument with the emotional appeal gave us our key message: By managing the forests responsibly, the industry helps preserve our forests for future generations, and in the process protect vital habitats for wildlife.



Rebuilding the Brand: The Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®)

The best way for the forest and paper industry to regain credibility and stave off the threat of further regulation was to convince the right people that it had not only the ability, but the commitment, to regulate itself. The industry already had an extensive program of self regulation in place. Since 1994, the industry has had a program known as the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI).

AF&PA members are required as a condition of membership to follow SFI standards, which include such provisions as replanting more trees than are harvested and submitting operations to independent inspection and certification. The problem was that few people knew about SFI. Only 10% of business customers surveyed in 1999 said they had even a moderate understanding of the program.

And so SFI became the “brand” behind which the industry would unite to collectively tell its story through advertising and other communications. The campaign would achieve its goals to the extent that it could increase awareness, understanding, and credibility of the SFI program.

Before launching the campaign, we wanted to strengthen the SFI program, to make sure it included all the elements that the VISTA and other research had shown were important to stakeholders. The research team designed and conducted a large conjoint study to help AF&PA refine the SFI program. This method was used to optimize the five pillars of the program (plan standards, governance, certification, continuous improvement, and communications).

The result was a newly “repositioned” SFI, a comprehensive system of principles, objectives and performance measures developed by foresters, conservationists and scientists, that combines the perpetual growing and harvesting of trees with the protection of wildlife, plants, soil and water quality.

Getting the Word Out:

Utilizing the research-driven positioning and re-branded Sustainable Forestry Initiative, the AF&PA developed a targeted campaign. The B2B target audience for this campaign, as well as limited budget, dictated the selection of print as the primary medium for advertising. The first wave of the campaign was carried in the trade press, which was later extended to general business magazines and newspapers.

A few TV spots were also developed, targeted to specific localities where this issue is especially active. Dr. Patrick Moore, co-founder of Greenpeace, appeared in some of these ads. Focus group research identified him as a highly credible spokesperson, and ads with him speaking in defense of the forest and paper industry proved highly effective.

The association also utilized an online campaign, media kits and sales kits focused on this issue and solution, to arm the member company's sales people when environmental questions arise.

The same research-based communication strategy and research-refined messages used in the campaign have also been used to inform the Association's lobbying efforts. The Senior Consultants from the research team, worked with AF&PA to train industry lobbyists how to talk credibly and persuasively to Federal and state legislators about these issues.

The Association often encounters vocal criticism from environmental groups, but using the facts and the research-developed messages, the critics are easily silenced.

Developing Executions

The VISTA research results provided the roadmap that guided the development of creative executions. Surveys were conducted to test the appeal of specific wordings. Focus groups and other forms of message testing research were used to refine these into powerful ads that work.



The key message, that the industry supports the same goal the public has of preserving forests for future generations, comes through loud and clear in these headlines from the print campaign:

When forest products are your business, planting 1.7 million trees every day is a smart investment.

Our forests will be around for generations to come... the SFI program is your assurance.

Conservationists wanted to plant more trees.

The Forest Products Industry wanted to plant more trees.

(After much debate, they decided to plant more trees.)

The print campaign has received numerous awards, including recognition from *Architectural Review*, and *US Ad Review*.

The Result

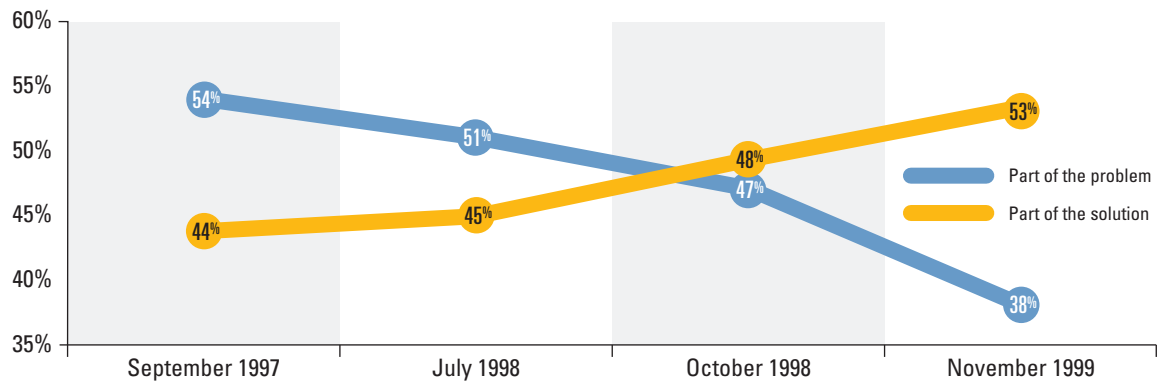
Harris Interactive has conducted numerous tracking studies to gauge the effectiveness of the SFI campaign and provide feedback for ongoing adjustments. Through the course of these tracking studies, the AF&PA monitored impressive results in its target markets, among legislators, business customers, and the general business community. Continued tracking of business results and stakeholder perceptions has shown that the AF&PA has accomplished significant goals.

Business Results

- Established the Sustainable Forestry Initiative as a highly respected and recognized forest certification program.
- Increased the lumber harvested from public lands consistently each year since 2001 from an all time low of 1.53 billion board feet in 2001 to 2.5 billion board feet in 2005.

- Reversed anti-SFI procurement policies from retail organizations. As an example, Home Depot® has re-written its policy to include SFI, and no major paper or wood products customer has adopted an anti-SFI procurement policy since the campaign began.
- Contributed to overturning restrictive legislation. The mistaken belief that the best way to protect the forests is to leave them alone had led to laws such as the “Roadless Rule,” which prohibited the creation and maintenance of logging roads on 1/3 of the nation’s forest lands. The SFI campaign educated people to the fact that active management of the forests is essential to responsible environmental stewardship, prompting a reversal of these laws.

Compared to 1997, the industry is far more likely to be seen as part of the *solution*



WirthlinWorldwide Study, 1999

Perceptions Among Business Consumers:

- A January 2005 study confirmed that principles of SFI are now well understood: 88% trust this industry to use environmentally responsible practices; 80% say the people in this industry truly care about protecting the environment, 68% say this industry should not be handicapped by excessive laws and regulation, 64% believe this industry is committed to technology to reduce environmental impact.

Perceptions Among Legislators

- In August 2005, 53% of Congress viewed the industry as part of the solution to protecting natural resources and the environment, up 9 points from just 2 years prior.

Perceptions Among General Public

- Shifts in public opinion give business customers the confidence that their retail customers will buy SFI certified products, and legislators the confidence that their constituents support the principles of SFI. In 2003, only 39% of the general public viewed the industry as part of the problem when it comes to managing our natural resources and protecting our environment, down from 54% in 1997. In 2005, 58% trusted this industry to use environmentally responsible practices; 46% said the people in this industry truly care about protecting the environment, 48% said this industry should not be handicapped by excessive laws and regulation, 58% believed this industry is committed to technology to reduce environmental impact.