

Marketing Delivers Membership ROI in Texas

By Aaron Cox and Chris Wallace



THE TEXAS STATE CHAMBER

The future of the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM) was in jeopardy. With thousands of Texas jobs potentially on the line, the Texas Association of Business (TAB) knew it had to act – and quickly – to represent the state and its member businesses on this contentious issue. Using time-tested membership marketing strategies, TAB rallied members and lobbied elected leaders to protect Texas jobs and the Texas economy.

To accomplish its mission, TAB first evaluated the issue at hand to get a better idea of the best strategy to use for the campaign. In this case, the issue was protecting the lifeblood of the Texas economy: exports. In the Lone Star State, exports are a \$33 billion industry, representing 135,000 jobs, many of which were essentially created by EXIM.

How could TAB play a role in educating its members, local chambers of commerce and the broader community about a federal issue that was so vital to the state's economy? While many businesses supported EXIM's reauthorization, key members of Congress were skeptical.

The Texas Association of Business identified marketing opportunities – essentially vehicles for delivering the message and grabbing the attention of Congress, especially those from Texas and congressional leaders who didn't support reauthorization.

TAB used local/state/national publications, chamber-hosted events and regular member communication – such as its website, social media and email newsletters – to deliver its #EXIM-4JOBS message.

With the message – Reauthorize EXIM and implement necessary reform – developed and marketing opportunities identified, TAB moved to identify the audience(s) it would target, starting with who would be most affected by EXIM's expired charter. Supplier companies, both large and small businesses, and their employees would quickly be impacted by the lack of

EXIM support. Producing one-fifth of the nation's exports, Texas businesses depend on the bank, which provides loan guarantees and export credit insurance.

The statewide organization aligned its messaging with other pro-business groups, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Texas Association of Manufacturers. TAB also used the power of partnerships to rally support from local chamber of commerce partners in key congressional districts. The message was delivered at key times – around key votes in the House and Senate, action from opposition groups and release of major media stories that complemented TAB's message – and used vehicles including editorial board meetings, press conferences and forums with members of Congress. All efforts were designed to raise awareness, create engagement and influence leaders.

Rounding out its work, TAB evaluated the effectiveness of the campaign, and in short, it was a success. President Obama signed into law EXIM's reauthorization charter on Dec. 4, 2015. Thousands of export-focused jobs and businesses in Texas were protected. Efforts by the Texas Association of Business and countless other organizations from coast-to-coast resulted in necessary protection and reform for the 80-year-old Export-Import Bank of the United States. As a result of its efforts, TAB was also awarded the EXIM Bank Chairman's Award for the campaign.

The success of this campaign is a testament to the time-tested marketing wheel – need analysis, audience identification, message creation and delivery and evaluation – as an effective tool for chambers of commerce to tell their story and provide tangible ROI for members.



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