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Marketing Playbook For **CREDIT UNIONS**

6 *Ways To* ***Outmaneuver*** Big Banks & Win



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Playbook Overview

A Value Proposition That Creates Challenges

Credit unions continue to grow their market share in areas like credit cards and auto loans, driven by a strategy of providing affordable credit. According to the Federal Reserve Board, credit unions held about 6% market share of total U.S. private depository and household lending as of the third quarter of 2024. Total assets in federally insured credit unions rose by \$82.0 billion, or 3.6 percent, to \$2.38 trillion in the second quarter of 2025; Cash also increased by \$2.3 billion, 1.2 percent, to \$192.0 billion. Even with these impressive gains, intense market competition continues to hinder the ability of these cooperative banking organizations to further accelerate their growth.

Despite their deep community roots and member-first philosophy, credit unions continue to face an uphill battle when competing with the scale and influence of large national banks. This struggle is not because they lack value, but because the market rewards scale, convenience, and technology—areas where big banks excel. While both serve consumer financial needs, the competitive landscape increasingly favors institutions with deep pockets. But market dynamics are changing. In the age of consolidation and reduction of choice, where the large players keep growing, credit unions can scale their membership by better promoting their unique value proposition across the communities they service.

The value derived by members of credit unions is undeniable. The member-owned and not-for-profit structure allows them to offer lower fees and better interest rates for their members. But this ethos of focusing on member value and savings, unlike traditional banks that prioritize maximizing revenue and shareholder profit, is also reason that many credit unions are unable to draw customers away from their current financial service institutions. Ensuring maximum member value limits their ability to generate the resources necessary to compete with the Goliaths.

Change The Rules Of The Game & Win!

Credit unions may not have billion-dollar marketing budgets, but they have something far more powerful: authenticity and community trust. As consumers have grown weary of impersonal service and profit-driven practices, credit unions have a unique opportunity to introduce humanity to a new form of banking. Credit unions need to change the rules of the game, stand apart, and make the best use of their resources to own their local market. That is how they can win.

The key isn't to *outspend* big banks — it's to *outmaneuver* them. By leveraging what makes them different, and exploiting gaps in big bank marketing strategies, credit unions can attract new audiences that crave connection and transparency in their financial institutions.

Continue Reading | [Learn How to Outmaneuver Big Banks & Dominate Your Market.](#)



How to Outmaneuver Big Bank Marketing Efforts & Accelerate Your Membership Growth

1 *Own Your Local Market Via SEO & Business Profile Optimization*

Big banks may dominate nationally — but credit unions can win locally, which is where it matters. The ultimate objective is to make your credit union the most visible and trusted financial brand within a 10–20-mile radius. When someone sends high-intent signals like searching, “Best auto loan rates near me” or “Credit union in [city],” ensure your institution always appears first.

Strategies That Work

Optimize Your Google Business Profile | Keep your profile robust and stay active with regular updates. Include photos, FAQs, service details, and updated offers. The more recent & frequent the content, the more you’ll be rewarded with organic traffic. Staying active is key.

Expand Use Of Member Testimonials | Testimonials and reviews play a huge factor in SEO. Deploy automated email journeys that incentivize detailed and location specific customer testimonials on your Google Business Profile. Incorporating these testimonials in highly visible locations on your web properties can also help boost membership conversation rates - studies have shown up to a 34% improvement in digital yield when utilizing customer testimonials effectively.

Use Hyperlocal Keywords Everywhere | Ensure your specific locations and service areas are included across your web content, meta descriptions, and targeted key words. (e.g., “mortgages in Raleigh NC”). Depending on market size and population concentrations in surrounding areas, it might make sense to build location-specific landing pages that include highly-localized content. Don’t ignore the large suburb one town over – give adjacent communities the attention they deserves.

Develop a Network of Localized Backlinks | Leverage the power of localized organizations such as your local chambers of commerce, local media, and nonprofits. Develop local partnerships that will share your content and link back to your web properties. Piggyback off their authority and community trust to grow your own. Stay involved and engaged.



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2 ***Deploy Hyperlocal & Omnichannel Performance Marketing Campaigns***

You can't outspend a big bank, but you can out-target them. Deploy campaigns that limit ad spend to only the locations where your potential members live — maximizing relevance and minimizing waste. Don't spray and pray, that's a big bank strategy. Additionally, always ensure integrations and tagging are deployed correctly. This allows learnings about audiences and conversion propensity to feed back in campaign optimizations, further improving your marketing ROI over time.

Strategies That Work

Paid Search Ads | Include target locations alongside high-intent queries like "Low-interest car loans [city]." You can also deploy competitor conquering campaigns such as "[Bank competitor] home loans." Regardless of your strategy, always overlay geo targeting to ensure you're dollars focus exclusively on your specific service areas. This will eliminate potential waste.

Facebook & Instagram Ads | Targeting users based on specific life events, times when prospects are more likely to reevaluate all their financial service providers, is also a proven tactic. This includes changing jobs, recent engagement, new baby, or buying a new home. Ang again, limit delivery to specific zip codes within your service area.

YouTube Pre-Roll Ads | Target local audiences with storytelling-based campaigns. Highlighting real member stories in your creative is a great way to build a connection with the prospective member. There are also a wealth of interest and behavioral targeting capabilities available.

Connected TV | Avoid traditional TV investments. Just don't do it. This inventory is often overpriced, lacks robust audience targeting capabilities, and will almost always waste your budget by delivering beyond your ideal servicing area. Connected TV is a great way to reach local audiences across a wide range of channels and content. You're also able to target specific audience behaviors and attributes, including based on high-intent searches. This is a great way of ensuring your dollars and message only reach high-value prospects in your specific market.



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3

Reduce Your Reliance On Paid Marketing & Drive Organic Growth

Building a scalable and flourishing credit union in today's highly-competitive market requires tactics that can create organic membership growth engines. This is another way you can outmaneuver big banks that are competing in your market. While they spend millions to generate business, you can flourish organically.

Strategies That Work

Prioritize SEO Best Practices | SEO requires ongoing monitoring and adaptation. Do the work.

- Regularly review your site's performance using tools like Google Search Console and Google Analytics to isolate opportunities for improvement.
- Prioritize on-page SEO through quality content, strategic use of high-value keywords, and utilizing powerful meta tags. You'll be rewarded with higher rankings in search results.
- Improve your digital performance through the correct heading structures, optimized mobile experience, and general site speed.
- Implement structured data, adding schema markup to your site can help search engines understand the context of your content and can lead to more prominent search results.
- Use clear URL structures. Short and descriptive URLs that include keywords are easier for both users and search engines to understand.

Leverage Content For Robust Generative Search Optimization | Generative search optimization (GEO) is the process of tailoring your content to increase its visibility and likelihood of being used in AI-generated search results such as Google's AI overviews or ChatGPT. Because Large Language Models (LLMs) analyze content for coherence and narrative flow, effective GEO focuses on creating content that effectively answers user questions in a conversational context. Structure your content in a direct question and answer format whenever possible and incorporate strategically placed keywords. Taking this approach ensures that AI systems like ChatGPT and Gemini can easily find, process, and use your content. This can build your reputation as an expert and trusted local financial advisor, elevating your online authority score, and driving organic growth.



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4

Aggressively Reengage With Prospects & Existing Members

Think about your own journey when purchasing a product or service. Do you buy it right away? Probably not. Most site visitors will not convert during their first interaction with your brand, which is why your marketing efforts across the funnel need to be working cohesively to facilitate a prospect through to a membership signup.

Strategies That Work

Automate Personalized Email & SMS Journeys | Use marketing automations and communicate like a friend, not a bank. Leverage automated email and SMS journeys to stay top of mind with prospects & cross-sell to existing members. Personalization and timing are key — even small automation tools like HubSpot, Active Campaign, or Mailchimp can outperform large bank CRMs when done authentically. Consider automated journeys for key events or tactics like welcoming new members, introducing benefits, birthday or milestone messages, loan follow-ups (“Ready to refinance? Here’s what you could save.”), as well as abandonment reminders.

Leverage First-Party Data & Member Insights To Power Personalization | Credit unions have direct member relationships and trust—a goldmine in the age of data privacy. There are tools that can be used for a level of personalization and agility that big banks lack. Use your data to segment by life stage, not just product adoption (e.g., “young professionals,” “families,” “retirees”), recommend services proactively (“You might qualify for a lower loan rate”), and create lookalike audiences for paid ads based on the characteristics of your best members.

Retarget & Re-engage | Don’t forget to target your lower funnel abandoners aggressively. This tactic quietly converts browsers into borrowers and can keep you top of mind until they are ready to make the switch. You’ve already done the hard work of getting these leads into your funnel, capitalize on the opportunities already created. Mine for gold in your own backyard.

Ensure You Have A Modern Technology Stack | Technology has changed, recently and fast. Leveraging the right tools that streamline your marketing efforts is critical when you are trying to steal market share from well-funded competitors. You need to be nimble and cost effective. Revisit your current tools to ensure you are capitalizing on the newest targeting technology and automations to streamline your efforts, reduce costs, and increase efficiency.



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5

Don't Gauge Success Based On Surface-Level Metrics

It's unfortunate but many credit unions are still focused on surface-level metrics like clicks and views. Do the work to develop meaningful insights that measure the actual impact of your marketing dollars. Invest in attribution technologies and/or ensure your CRM & media buying platforms are fully integrated so that you can accurately measure marketing performance and ROI. If your agency is sending you surface level metrics, start shopping around for a new one immediately.

Strategies That Work

Know Your Cost Per Lead | Understanding your cost per lead is an important metric that helps you gauge the investment needed to draw someone into your funnel. When joined with other metrics, like conversion rates, you can begin to forecast growth and anticipated revenue based on various levels of marketing investment. Next work to isolate rates of attrition at each funnel stage. This can help you narrow down places where you can improve your yield through improved user experience, copy refinements, FAQs, and quick tips.

Monitor Your Acquisition Cost | Measure how much it costs you to drive a new member in the aggregate and then go deeper. If you have specific campaigns aimed at driving growth for specific products or services, calculate those acquisition costs as well. This can help you identify product profitability and help you identify places where you might need to improve your messaging for greater performance.

Determine Your Member Lifetime Value | Measure the average lifespan and total revenue generated via each member. This can help you forecast growth, retention, and attrition. You can then use that to develop other key metrics such as your allowable acquisition cost.

Live By Your Allowable Acquisition Cost | Once you have isolated your current acquisition cost, average membership timeline, & member lifetime value, you can isolate your allowable acquisition cost. This provides you an exact number of what you are willing to spend to generate a new member based on your anticipated revenue over the course of that person's membership. Use this key metric for monitoring your marketing ROI and gauging performance.



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6

Leverage Storytelling & Robust Content Resources To Build Trust

Positioning yourself as the trusted local financial coach, not just another lender, is key to driving membership growth. You can accomplish this by leveraging genuine membership stories in your marketing creatives and by developing a robust content hub that addresses real consumer needs.

Strategies That Work

Tell Member Stories Through Short-Form Videos | Credit unions shine when they tell real stories — and video is the perfect medium. Authentic, unscripted member experiences perform far better than corporate-style ads. Leverage the power of your current members to build trust among your prospects. Some tactics that work well include:

- Member testimonials (“We bought our first home thanks to [Credit Union Name]”)
- Behind-the-scenes clips of staff volunteering locally highlights your community involvement
- Quick explainer videos (“What makes credit unions different from banks?”)

Deploy A “Financial Wellness” Content Hub | This is another great way of positioning yourself as the trusted local financial advisor, not just another big impersonal lender. Traditional banks push products; credit unions can provide personalized guidance to members of their local community. Pair this strategy with the previously mentioned SEO optimizations covered in the Reduce Your Reliance On Paid Marketing & Drive Organic Growth section so people searching for financial help always find you first. Share your content across all your channels and leverage local partners to expand your reach through sharing and backlinking. Leverage SEO research to inspire content ideas based on what consumers are searching for. Here are some examples of high performing content to include in your resource hub.

- Interactive calculators (loan, savings, retirement)
- Self-guided courses on budgeting or first-time homebuying
- Articles, Blog posts, downloadable guides, & webinars on topics such as:
 - 5 Tips to Boost Your Credit Score Fast
 - Top 10 Ways To Prepare For Retirement
 - 5 Small Steps To Building A College Fund
 - How To Determine Your Risk Tolerance For Investing?



Summary

Leverage Your Strategic Advantages

While national banks compete on convenience and technology, credit unions can win if they better leverage their *authenticity, highlight their community connection, & take steps to maximize their marketing efficiency*. Digital marketing is the great equalizer — it gives small, mission-driven institutions the tools to punch far above their weight.

Remember

- ✓ **Act Locally But Think Digitally** | Own your market. Incorporate hyper-localization in everything you do and put out into the world, from campaign targeting and web copy, to customer testimonials and creatives. Your objective is to be the most visible and trusted financial brand in your market.
- ✓ **Use Your Resources Wisely** | Be ruthless when it comes to hunting down and eliminating waste. Ensure your campaigns, targeting, technology fees, and automated communications are as efficient and effective as possible. Worried about your ROI, trust your gut. There is probably a leak somewhere that needs to be repaired.
- ✓ **Reduce Your Reliance On Paid Media** | Create a hyperlocal organic growth engine for your organization. Leverage tools and deploy strategies that help you maximize growth through GEO/SEO, hyperlocal authority, and organic traffic generation. Let others battle it out in the paid marketing space while you enjoy the fruits of your labor in the form of accelerated organic growth
- ✓ **Capitalize Your Captured & Owned Audiences** | Use retargeting aggressively to stay top of mind with abandoners. You've already done the work to get them in the funnel, keep pushing them through. Deploy automated email and SMS communications to both prospects and existing members to drive new member growth and expand member adoption of services.
- ✓ **Measure What Matters** | Ensure you have a sophisticated attribution methodology for measuring the true impact of your marketing. Isolate key measurements, at various levels of granularity, that will ensure your ROI is where it needs to be. Monitor performance constantly.
- ✓ **Leverage Content & Storytelling** | Positioning yourself as the trusted local financial resource, and not just another lender, is a proven membership growth strategy. Leverage genuine membership stories that prospects can relate to and deploy robust content resources that directly respond to the needs of your prospects, members, and local community.



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