

The Birmingham News

Friday, July 4, 2008

Volume 121

MONEY

Bank ads poke fun at Canadian rival RBC

Superior plays up local angle

By **MICHAEL TOMBERLIN**
News staff writer

You ain't from around here, are you, eh?

That's the sentiment behind a new advertising campaign by Birmingham-based Superior Bank that uses Canadian stereotypes to poke fun at rival RBC Bank, the Raleigh, N.C.-based U.S. arm of the Royal Bank of Canada. RBC this year acquired Alabama National Bancorp., which operated First American Bank, Superior's across-the-street competitor.

In a television spot from the campaign created by Birmingham's White Sky Agency, a Mountie, a moose and a hockey player serve as tellers. The Mountie returns for print ads and billboards. In radio ads, a teller tries to persuade a customer the bank is made up of "local Canabamians just like you."

Comic relief from banking woes

While Superior clearly is trying to pick off First American customers, Marvin Scott, president of Superior, said the campaign's comic touches provide a little relief from the banking industry's well-documented difficulties.

"As an industry we are in a very tough time and from time to time you have to stop and just have some fun," he said.

RBC, however, is not laughing.

"We think the advertising is showing poor taste," said Jamie Averette Mitchell, a RBC spokeswoman. "We are proud to be part of RBC, the fifth largest financial institution in North America."

Scott said the campaign highlights a tumultuous time for Birmingham's banking industry, which has been rocked by buyouts and mergers.

"If you went back two years and imagined that AmSouth would be gone, First American would be gone, Compass would be owned by a Spanish bank, SouthTrust would be gone, and on and on -- it would have been unbelievable," Scott said.

"But because of the banking world we live in today, a number of institutions like Superior have the opportunity to position themselves essentially as the 'local bank making local decisions.' That's the message we were trying to communicate."

That is not a new approach. Banks have been using the "local" angle for years to distinguish themselves from out-of-town or out-of-state operators. Plus, bank mergers often bring out campaigns aimed at disaffected customers.

"This is a strategy that has been used in other contexts -- reminding cus-



SPECIAL

Birmingham's Superior Bank takes aim at their competitor's north-of-the-border owners in an advertising campaign that features a TV spot showing Canadian stereotypes—a Mountie, a hockey player and a moose.

SEE NEXT PAGE

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

tomers of being a local bank,” said Betsy Holloway, a marketing and brand strategy professor at Samford University’s Brock School of Business. “This is generally an effective strategy, especially with a long-term relationship customers are likely to have with a business like a bank.”

Julie White, who as principal with the White Sky Agency served as the creative director for the campaign, said there was concern over using Canadian stereotypes in the ads. She said care was taken to make sure the ads didn’t look like they were attacking anyone.

“Comedy is built on stock, stereotypical characters - the nerdy teen, the lovable-but-clueless husband, the ditzy blonde, the tells-it-like-it-is senior citizen,” White said. “We’re not attacking Canada or its citizens. We’re using their stock characters to make a point that our bank is local.”

Samford’s Holloway said the campaign may help both Superior and RBC stand out from what has become a sea of confusion in the city’s banking world. She also wonders how many consumers have followed the banking ownership changes close enough to fully understand the joke.

White said Superior already has realized one goal of the campaign -- raising its profile.

EMAIL: mtomberlin@bhamnews.com