

Partnering Local and National Power

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by Brenda Kleinjan

FOR NEARLY A DECADE, THE TOUCHSTONE ENERGY® Cooperatives brand has been appearing at cooperatives nationwide.

Developed as a national brand, it denotes electric cooperatives dedicated to four core values of operation – core values that have been an inherent part of electric cooperatives for decades.

Touchstone Energy is a national alliance of local, consumer-owned electric cooperatives providing high standards of service to customers large and small. More than 600 Touchstone Energy cooperatives in 45 states are delivering energy and energy solutions to more than 17 million customers every day. Touchstone Energy cooperatives serve their members with integrity, accountability, innovation and a longstanding commitment to communities.

In the tri-state area of the Dakotas and Minnesota, 85 cooperatives are part of the

Touchstone Energy Cooperatives brand.

“As we all grow older, we lose some of our very first consumer-members, the ones who remember what it was like when there wasn’t any electricity,” said Loren Noess, manager of Central Electric Cooperative, a Touchstone Energy cooperative located in Mitchell, S.D., and a member of the national board that oversees the Touchstone Energy brand development.

Connecting with those members with a brand that stresses both the local and national strengths associated with electric cooperatives is important.

Touchstone Energy cooperatives use the resources of a national network and take advantage of economies of scale to enhance their unique relationships with each of its local member-owners. They provide high standards of service to all customers – residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural.

The national brand of Touchstone Energy allows local electric cooperatives to:

- Communicate and represent the electric cooperatives’ unique characteristics in a changing marketplace where these values and differences matter more each day
- Emphasize the significance of each electric cooperative’s local presence and unique ties to the community, but offers the advantages of a nationwide network to bring added value and benefit to all consumers
- Team up with respected national partners like Discovery Channel School, the American Football Coaches Association and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to provide programs that local cooperatives can use to enhance the quality of life in the communities they serve
- Delivers valuable employee education programs that equip employees with the skills to communicate the cooperative difference and provide top-notch customer service
- Provides the tools to evaluate and improve consumer satisfaction
- Offers an array of services and programs to enhance cooperative relationships with business and residential customers

The brand has been delivering on its promises. Its national advertising campaigns have received accolades while tools such as the Touchstone Energy Home Energy Savings Guide have proven to be valuable assets for members.

“The ‘Straight Talk’ campaign has pushed the Touchstone Energy brand to its highest level when it comes to communicating with the members of our nation’s electric cooperatives,” said Touchstone Energy chief operating officer Jim Bausell. “Receiving the 2006 Silver Inkwell awards is proof that our co-ops and our staff continue to raise the bar in creating best-in-class advertising and communications materials,” he said.

The Silver Inkwell awards were given by the Washington, D.C., chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators.

While the advertising campaigns are among the more visible efforts of the brand, the alliance of cooperatives also brings high-quality resources to local communities. In recent years, local electric cooperatives have placed the Touchstone Energy/Discovery Channel “Get Charged!” kits in elementary schools. The kits are an educational resource that teachers

can use to teach about electricity and energy, while meeting federal “No Child Left Behind” standards.

Homeowners are also able to take advantage of the Touchstone Energy Home Energy Audit, an online assessment of your home’s energy use and ways to help cut your energy costs.

“We’re able to expand our local resources and utilize all these national resources without having to invest in additional employees. Just as your local hardware store couldn’t exist without the assets and tools their national organization provides, a similar relationship exists between the local cooperative and this national initiative,” said Tom Green, director of communications at Northern Electric Cooperative in Bath, S.D., and Lake Region Electric Association in Webster, S.D. Green serves on one of the six national committees that gives input to the Touchstone Energy board of directors.

As independent, individual cooperatives, co-ops have engendered the trust and loyalty of millions of customers. They have earned it by performing well as individual co-ops; and sustain it by performing well as a national alliance with a strong brand identity.

On a more local basis, electric cooperatives join together under the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives banner at state and regional events such as DakotaFest and FarmFest each August, Badlands Circuit rodeos and state and regional fairs. By gathering under one banner, individual, local cooperatives can work together under one visible and recognizable logo that its members recognize and associate with the cooperative they own.

“The local cooperative is still the entity the member works with everyday, but our toolbox just got a whole lot bigger,” said Green.

For more information, visit your cooperative’s Web site and click the Touchstone Energy link or visit www.touchstoneenergy.coop.



**Touchstone Energy®
Cooperatives**

Opposite: This image is from the national “Straight Talk” campaign for Touchstone Energy. Photo by Touchstone Energy Cooperatives