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### How LendingTree Plans to Rebrand in Tough Environment for Financial Cos.

Five Questions for CMO Darren Beck

by [Beth Snyder Bulik](#)  
Published: [July 13, 2009](#)



YORK, Pa. (AdAge.com) — Online lending pioneer LendingTree has weathered a tough couple of years in the mortgage and real-estate industry. But now the business, whose parent Tree.com spun off from IAC last year, is gearing up for a rebrand and a renewed marketing effort.



Next week, LendingTree will launch a \$40 million broad-based, multimedia marketing and advertising campaign that includes a tagline change, from the familiar "When Banks Compete, You Win" to "You to the Rescue." The new work, from longtime ad agency Mullen, also comes as LendingTree diversifies its offering portfolio from just mortgage and real-estate products to other categories such as insurance and education.

Leading the rebranding effort is Tree.com CMO Darren Beck, who has been at LendingTree for three years and previously held marketing positions at Capital One, Walmart, Harry & David and FranklinCovey. Mr. Beck is betting that not only is the timing right for the new messaging, but that consumers will respond well, thanks in part to LendingTree's solid reputation through the financial-industry turmoil.

**Ad Age:** The new campaign is about the expansion of the LendingTree business, right?

**Mr. Beck:** As part of IAC we could focus purely on mortgages, and IAC with all its various companies would be diversified enough to weather whatever economic or financial changes happened. Alone, however, we couldn't be solely reliant upon mortgage. So we started to look at other products.

At the same time, we have 28 million customers that have come through LendingTree, and a lot of them were saying, "Thanks so much for the help with my mortgage, but hey, what do I do about my 401(k)?" or "What do I do with my insurance?" So we have been trying to help them as well. We did that early on by providing a lot of advice, articles, that type of thing on our web site. What we're trying to do now is move beyond that and actually provide tools that will make it easier for people to figure out what's best for them in their specific situation. We've already launched our InsuranceTree product, we launched DegreeTree, which is about education, and we'll be launching more as the months come.

**Ad Age:** What's led up to the change in marketing?

**Mr. Beck:** We've been shifting quite a bit toward more ROI-focused marketing and advertising and away from just pure branding or sponsorship plays.

Back in the day, we may have done a home-page takeover that was more about just getting the brand name out there. Or we'd do TV spots that were only really focused on the brand. Over the last few years, we have shifted a little more to I would call the direct-response side. I like to call it branded response — which isn't necessarily a phrase I coined, but it fits. We still have a very strong brand and we still do things that a normal direct-response marketer would not do. However, we have shifted more into direct-response vehicles like direct mail, e-mail, advertising networks online, and pay-for-performance-type deals instead of just flat sponsorship.

**Ad Age:** How is the new marketing different, and what is it trying to accomplish?

**Mr. Beck:** The basics of what we're trying to accomplish are the same. LendingTree was founded with the idea of empowering consumers. CEO Doug Lebda founded the company out of his own frustration in trying to get a loan — there wasn't a lot of information, there wasn't a lot of help, it was hard to compare rates and it was hard to compare lenders.

The early commercials that everyone is familiar with [featuring] banks competing for your business — they were essentially a statement of consumer empowerment. It turned the table and put the consumer in the position of power in that transaction. What we're trying to do now is echo that general empowerment message, but do it in a way that really refocuses on the consumer as the one who is in charge and can handle anything.

**Ad Age:** Why the new tagline, "You to the Rescue?"

**Mr. Beck:** It's exactly that — when you need help in this day and age. People have been disillusioned by what they thought were trustworthy, reliable or very solid institutions or advisors they were relying on. People are becoming much more aware that they need to take control of their own financial situation, and really take an active role and be involved. "You to the Rescue" just echoes that sentiment for us.

It's not a question of anyone being an expert, it's a question of knowing that you have someone like LendingTree on your side providing a lot of the information to help you boil things down into bite-size pieces, and make sure you're getting the best deal.

**Ad Age:** Do you think there's a risk in going out with a financial marketing message right now, considering people's overall feelings about banking? Are you concerned about that and how do you deal with that?

**Mr. Beck:** Any time you do a new brand relaunch, there's a risk. But the time is right. I see that every time a company does a new launch — like when Pepsi changed its logo and all the product packaging, and there's all this [debate about whether it's good or bad]. That keeps me up at night — wondering if this is absolutely the right way to go.

But I'm always comforted by the fact that LendingTree has always been focused on consumer empowerment. I would be more worried if we were coming out with a message of "LendingTree will save you" or "We're where you need to turn. We're the ones to trust." That's not what we're saying. What we're saying is that you can do this yourself. We're still putting the control back in the consumer's hand.

### 3 Comments

By Rodney33 | FRISCO, TX [July 14, 2009 09:33:05 am](#)

A smart strategic decision to expand the service offering and update the communication platform.

The user experience doesn't connect with this messaging. Perhaps updates are in the works as the campaign rolls out?

When you go to the site you're on home lending site that nowhere on the nav bar has any link to any of the services beyond home lending.

A large block of copy reads Take Control Of Your Financial Destiny

- \* Make smart financial decisions with MoneyRight, our free personal finance tool
- \* Get competitive loan offers from our network of trusted lenders
- \* Conquer the loan process with interactive Loan Coach tools and calculators

[Permalink](#)

By Rodney33 | FRISCO, TX [July 14, 2009 09:53:01 am](#)

My apologies for post above, it was incomplete in thought and accidentally posted.

A smart strategic decision to expand the service offering and update the communication platform. All sound well thought out and should generate leads to the site.

But once at the site, lendingtree.com, the current web user experience doesn't connect well with this messaging. Perhaps updates are in the works as the campaign rolls out?

It appears you're on a home lending site, the other services on the navigation bar are minimal — Home, Refinance, Mortgage, Home Equity, Auto Loans, MoneyRight, Credit Cards, Credit Scores, Loan Coach, Advice & Calculators.

The new tag line at this point is not in place, a logo lock reads, "The All New Lending Tree."

A large block of copy in the middle right of the page reads, "Take Control Of Your Financial Destiny"

- \* Make smart financial decisions with MoneyRight, our free personal finance tool
- \* Get competitive loan offers from our network of trusted lenders
- \* Conquer the loan process with interactive Loan Coach tools and calculators?

I assume the site has gone through significant usability studies and is set up to optimize and close the sale.

Just from a cursory review, the user experience appears as a bit of a disconnect from the new marketing message. There could be several explainable reasons for it.

Rodney Mason, CMO  
Moosylvania  
The Great State Of Design  
[www.moosylvania.com](#)

[www.twitter.com/rodmoose](#)

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By Isinger | new york, NY [July 14, 2009 02:22:27 pm](#)

They need to become the un-bank.

Leslie Singer/CCO  
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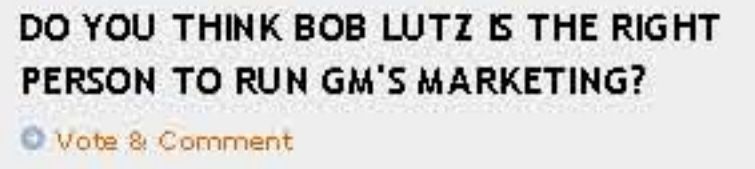
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