Branding for nonprofit organizations

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BRANDING FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

By
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A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in Public Relations
Rowan University
2001
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Approved by ____________________________

Date Approved 5-28-01
ABSTRACT

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2001

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In the world, 546,000 nonprofit organizations all compete for the same thing: time and money. With the ease of Internet philanthropic giving, traditional nonprofit organizations must change with the times or be left in the wake. In an age of constant message bombardment, nonprofits must continually reinvent themselves to avoid getting lost in the crowd. Today, many nonprofits have found branding is the answer.

To determine the importance of nonprofit branding, the author reviewed all available literature and interviewed a senior-level manager at United Way of America. In addition, the author performed a literature review of all materials obtained from the United Way. The author intends this thesis to be used as guidelines for nonprofits considering a branding initiative.

This thesis presents a review of all available literature and a United Way case study. The author found three key elements critical to branding. These elements include: researching key audiences and their attitudes toward the organization, preparing the
organization and its internal audiences, and managing and delivering consistent messages. United Way is used as an example of a nonprofit that was successful in branding. Literature and the United Way case stress the importance of performing research to assess key audiences and their attitudes toward the organization. Branding is about delivering on promises; research and preparation allow nonprofits to create promises and deliver them consistently.
Nonprofit organizations face the modern challenge of innovating business practices to stand out. This thesis looks to incorporate branding, often associated with corporate business strategy, into the nonprofit sector. The author reviewed all available literature and a United Way case study. Both stress the importance of researching key audiences and their attitudes toward the organization, preparing the organization and its internal audiences, and managing and delivering consistent messages.
Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank my fiancé and best friend, Joe Costal, for his constant love, support and encouragement. Without his inspiration and constant willingness to listen to me whine, I would never have finished! I am so grateful to have such a talented, caring, selfless person to anchor me when clouds are stormy and help me soar when there are beautiful skies.

I would also like to thank Dr. Bagin for believing in me and letting me go off on tangents with my topic! It was just at the point when I thought I was going over the edge that I found the inspiration I needed.

I would like to thank my family (Mom, Dad, Chuck, Kelli, Steve, Courtney, Ryan, Colleen, Mike, Connor, Suzanne and Dan—I had to mention them all!) for their love and support! I also want to thank my “little sister,” Marissa Costal, for letting me borrow her laptop all year to do my thesis!

A great big thank you to Jeanette Iversen Rattle, without whom I wouldn’t have half my research!

I would also like to thank Mike Wargo from United Way of America for taking the time to personally help me with this thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank my two bosses, George Brelsford and Annette McCully, for allowing me to work on my thesis during my assistantship and for listening to me. I couldn’t ask for better friends!
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Chapter One

Introduction

On July 4, 1776, the United States of America formally declared its independence from Great Britain. To set itself apart from all other countries, especially its oppressive parent country, America began building its own image. A flag was created and became the logo. The Declaration of Independence was written and became the mission statement. Our forefathers saw the importance of image. These image tools were all they had, no goods or services to sell, just a promise to make good on their word, and a flag to identify with. Today, modern organizations still hold these truths to be self-evident, that all images are not created equal.

Background

Not long ago, it was normal for corporate giving to be kept secret. It was considered improper for corporations to draw attention to their gift giving. “Companies that wanted their grants to be visible were satisfied in seeing their name appear in modest seven-point type amid a sea of contributors listed in the opera program.” But now, it
would be like shooting oneself in the foot to contribute to a philanthropic cause without touting it to the public, at least in the interest of good press.

The old system of back scratching and arm twisting—which once kept the old boys giving—is dead. In the new era, corporate giving budgets won’t get past the new breed of cost-cutting managers unless they accept it as a necessary way to build the corporate image. The most savvy grant makers now ‘sell’ corporate giving to in-house decision-makers as a means to ignite a golden glow around the firm in ways unattainable through traditional advertising or even special event marketing.¹

**Purpose**

Public relations is vital to nonprofit organizations. Practitioners need to be extremely creative to attain the most awareness for the least amount of money. Branding, the hot new buzzword in the marketing world, has recently taken the nonprofit world by surprise. This thesis will uncover whether or not branding is a worthy endeavor to risk or just a risky endeavor.

If image is the public’s perception, and perception is reality, then how can a nonprofit portray a confident image without looking too polished and savvy? People’s perceptions are based on what they know—or think they know. Based on these perceptions, people buy, sell, vote, travel, invest and make every major life decision.² As David Ogilvy once said, “The customer is not stupid, she’s your wife.”³

Every nonprofit has an important message to convey, but the message alone will not put the donor check in the mail. According to Marketing Association’s Vice President Michael Faulkner, “Consumers are three times more likely to open your envelope if it’s a brand they’re familiar with... The reality is that, because of the level of expertise out

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there, consumers are more sophisticated about marketing and have higher expectations about how they want to be treated."\(^4\)

**Importance of this thesis**

The non-profit management literature largely ignores the public relations function, and public relations scholars rarely study non-profits. To illustrate: neither the subject of ‘communication’ nor ‘public relations’ appears in the index of Non-profit Management Literature’s last volume (volume 9, 1999). Similarly, the index of the last volume of Public Relations Review—one of only two scholarly journals dedicated to public relations—reveals no articles dealing exclusively with non-profits.\(^5\)

With so few scholarly works on the non-profit sector, practitioners are left to rely on their laurels for image generation and theory interpretation. While this is not a severe concern when a trained PR practitioner does the work, it becomes a greater issue when an untrained lobbyist or activist wears the hat of PR officer. Image generation becomes a game of press agentry and press events begin to resemble something from P.T. Barnum. The media and the public must trust the NPO, not feel swindled or tricked. “If you get slick and clever, or if you go cutesy, you might win [advertising industry] awards, but those campaigns generally don’t reap the desired response. Success comes with a much more down-to-earth, gritty, two-color simple statement about the need to be filled. The simple, direct appeal is what works.”\(^6\)

Today more nonprofit organizations are realizing the importance of differentiation. There are 546,000 nonprofit organizations\(^7\) in the world, all competing for the same thing: time and money. Nonprofits must continually reinvent themselves to

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remain in the competition. Unlike their for-profit counterparts, the only product nonprofits can sell is proof. Proof can be that children were saved or illiteracy decreased or homeless people were clothed. The world needs to know that it is a better place because of your organization. People need to feel that they are not just making a tax-deductible donation to just any organization, rather they are contributing to a greater good. "Members want to belong to an association that has the information and expertise they need, provided with an instant-gratification mindset and exceptional service."8

"Branding is about creating convictions." A brand represents a set of convictions, especially the image a brand creates in the mind of the customer. "Convictions of this type cannot be bought or sold; they must be earned."9

"The curious and, from a marketing point of view, challenging aspect of service industries is that services have no demonstrable, tangible points of difference that can trigger a customer's purchase decision in the traditional sense...A consumer can walk into a showroom and touch, kick, sit in and test drive or simply gaze lovingly at one or several [car] models."10

Nonprofits don't offer a money-back, satisfaction-guaranteed promise. Nonprofit "consumers" don't get a test drive. If you are going to get their money or time, you have to stand out! "Organizations have two seconds for the public to recognize the image of a

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cause; if it is longer, the nonprofit loses the impact. Touch points are short with the public.”

Branding in the nonprofit world “denotes a holistic marketing approach in which a group’s mission and image come together in ways that build allegiance among donors, clients, and the public at large. The branding idea has become especially popular as organizations seek to get ahead of their rivals in the race for public attention and revenue.”

Not only can branding bring in dollars and volunteers, but it also can help charities gain a greater voice in public-policy deliberations... When you have a focused identity and integrated communications, you’re seen as a player at the table.... If you don’t brand yourself, focus your message, integrate your message delivery, and use every means at your disposal to get your message out there, you are going to be lost in this message bombardment. Most non-profit institutions are a brand already. The question is whether they are defining, articulating, and managing it to their advantage.

Integrated communication is the common denominator in increasing awareness for nonprofits. “On tight budgets, [nonprofit organizations] often argue that trying to get media attention distracts them from doing the real work.... So they are left struggling to save the world in the dim light of obscurity and wondering why more people don’t value what they do.” Nonprofits have the challenge of operating like a corporation without the corporate budget. Nonprofits would have time to do all the things they wish to do if their brand were out there selling itself. Many nonprofits argue that branding is the answer!

Limitations

This thesis addressed branding for nonprofit organizations. While the basic tenants of branding are the same, this thesis does not cover branding for for-profit organizations. The author used one large nonprofit organization’s branding initiative to demonstrate the success of a branding project. Although this study is limited to one nonprofit’s branding experience, this organization’s information is extremely thorough and can be used as a prototype for many other nonprofit organizations. The author did not mean to imply that branding would be successful for every nonprofit organization. Nor did the author intend to imply that the guidelines and sources in this thesis are comprehensive. The material in this thesis was limited to the written sources and interviews available to the author.

Procedure

The Rowan University library provided most of the books necessary for the literature review of this thesis. A keyword search in the Rowan University computer catalog was conducted, using various combinations of the words nonprofit, branding, reputation, image, and advocacy.

An on-line search was also conducted using the above terms. Periodical information was accessed through VALE, ProQuest, newyorktimes.com, Dogpile.com, nonline.com, philanthropy.com, fdncenter.org, npxpress.com and nspre.org. The researcher used a master’s thesis from 1997 as a resource for this thesis. Jeannette L. Iversen’s thesis Company Logos’ Contribution to Corporate Image. Her bibliography was used as a source database.
The majority of information for this thesis was obtained through personal interviews with the public relations or marketing communications officer from the United Way of America. The information was analyzed and presented in a case study. The case is broken up into sections: background, research, phases, implementation and achievements. The information was analyzed and compared to the literature review for correlation.

**Definition of terms**

The following is a list of terms and definitions applicable to this thesis. The definitions below are combined interpretations from various sources.

**Brand**- a name, term, symbol, design, or combination of these that identifies a seller's products and differentiates them from competitors' products.

**Branding**- intentional, marketing-oriented communications platform across all business units, media and audiences. It is a declaration of "who we are, what we believe and why you should put faith in us." It includes all forms of planned communications as well as building architecture and interior. It is the essence of the total experience from the organization.

**Identity**- a visual statement expressed in the names, symbols, logos, colors and rites of passage an organization uses to distinguish itself.

**Image**- the reflection of people's perceptions. The combined impact made on an observer by all of the organization's planned and unplanned visual and verbal communication as well as outside influences.

**Logo, trademark**- includes the company name and / or a graphic device (mark) that distinguishes the company, its activities, and its products and promotes immediate identification of these by the public.
Nonprofit Organization (NPO)- Any organization that does not engage in profit-making commercial activities, and has been granted tax-exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). NPOs can be social service, private, educational, health, advocacy, political, business, trade, scientific, philanthropic or youth leadership based organizations.

Perception- Interpretation of environment or stimulus.
Chapter Two

This chapter presents research highlights and other available literature related to the subject of branding for nonprofit organizations. Periodical information was readily available; however, books were scarce since the topic in the nonprofit sector is fairly new. Branding and marketing books on for-profit organizations were used when applicable. Several key words and topics researched include: "branding," "image," "marketing," "repositioning," and "nonprofit."

The author obtained articles from the Chronicle of Philanthropy, Corporate Philanthropy Report, Fundraising Management and Currents at the Foundation Center Library in New York City. Other articles from Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Business Journal, Marketing News, and Nation’s Business were obtained on-line through www.findarticles.com. An associate working in the nonprofit field provided recent articles from Nonprofit Times and Association Management. The author searched for books related to the subject through the on-line database at the Rowan University Campbell Library. Many books did not directly deal with the subject of nonprofit branding; however, many of the marketing books proved relevant to this thesis.
An article from Nonprofit Management and Leadership entitled “Managing Public Relations for Nonprofits” states:

The nonprofit management literature largely ignores the public relations function, and public relations scholars rarely study nonprofits. To illustrate: neither the subject of ‘communication’ nor ‘public relations’ appears in the index of NML’s last volume (volume 9, 1999). Similarly, the index of the last volume of Public Relations Review—one of only two scholarly journals dedicated to public relations—reveals no articles dealing exclusively with nonprofits (index, volume 24,1999).14

In her book A Communications Manual for Nonprofit Organizations, Lucille Maddalena says:

Donors may contribute to an organization they are unfamiliar with, but they give much more time and money to the ones they know and trust. Volunteers have little reason to join an organization if they do not think it will meet their needs for prestige, involvement, or experience. Community members rarely support a new program without first inquiring into its purpose and goals. The difficulty your organization may have in recruiting volunteers or gaining support may stem from one of the following reasons:

- Prospective volunteers don’t recognize your name and are unaware of your purpose.
- Community residents have heard your name but are not certain what you do.
- Negative publicity has resulted from misinterpretations of an agency-supported activity.
- Your board does not command the respect of the community.
- The public hears about your work only when you are ready to ask for a donation.

You can alter each of these situations, and many like them, by identifying and developing the image of your organization. Your image is the impression your organization gives the public; it is an embodiment of what an individual believes your organization is and does. You can build on the information the public already has to create an image that more accurately represents your purpose and the efforts of your volunteers.15

Before improving your image, you must decide what your image is. What image are you projecting? What image would you like to be projecting? According to Joe Marconi:

This isn’t rocket science. Before you can market an image, you must have an image. You must identify your target market and let them know who you are and what you do and why they should care. Your image is the reflection of people’s perceptions.... If the image of you that people take away is based on their perception of you and their perception is based on what they know of you, it’s important that you manage and control that flow of information about you to the greatest degree possible. But most important is that there be information; that you create a stream of information to raise awareness.16

“Greater clarity with an image means increased benefit by public recognition, especially with a donor base. Organizations going through this process have to balance achieving an overall objective with minimizing confusion.”17 A brand needs to be “credible, coherent, and attractive, supported and developed over time and not subject to rapid fluctuations in message, quality, positioning or overall ‘mood.’”18

According to Sauerhaft and Atkins:

It is critical to understand that communication does not begin with a press release and end with a thirty-second spot in primetime. What an [organization] does is far more important than what is says it does because there is an army of watchers waiting to see if (in their opinion) the game the [organization] plays measures up to the game it talks.19

A recent study found “few nonprofits have incorporated a comprehensive approach to marketing. A brief questionnaire was mailed to “marketing, public relations, or communications” officers in the Maryland Association of Nonprofit Organizations. The survey had a 30% response rate of the organization’s 950-member organizations. The respondents represented a full spectrum of nonprofit organizations serving needs in social services (48%), health (17%), education (16%), arts and culture (9%), public

affairs and policy (7%), and civil and human rights (3%). Sixty-one percent of the respondents worked for organizations with budgets of $1 million or more. The questionnaire was supplemented by in-depth interviews with six marketing officers for colleges and universities nationwide. “Respondents were asked to rate how essential fundraising, public relations, marketing, and volunteers were to the success of their organization. Marketing ranked highly, an average of 4.37 on a five-point scale, though not as high as public relations (4.62) or fundraising (4.53).” The respondents felt marketing was important; however, when asked to prioritize this function in respect to all other responsibilities, marketing lost.

The picture that emerges is of people in charge of many marketing tasks, but whose marketing responsibilities are secondary to other priorities. It’s a picture of organizations that have added marketing tasks, but envision marketing in narrow terms. It boils down to finding out what people want and seeing they get it. While hardly revolutionary, it is vastly different from a more common approach of business and nonprofits, which is to sell people what you have, regardless of (or in spite of) what they need, want or prefer.20

In today’s economy, people are bombarded daily by hundreds of advertising and branding messages. To grab their attention and make an impact, it’s important for people to connect with you and fall in love with your organization and its mission. Information about your organization, its mission and programs must be readily available in a dynamic and engaging way.21

“If you don’t brand yourself, focus your message, integrate your message delivery, and use every means at your disposal to get your message out there, you are

going to be lost in the message bombardment,”22 says Mr. Abbot of Volunteers of America. Cynthia Round, of New York’s Soho Repertory Theatre says, “Most nonprofit institutions are a brand already. The question is whether they are defining, articulating, and managing it to their advantage”…Still branding “‘goes well beyond just image and perceptions,’ says Ms. Round, ‘It’s not just a name or logo. It’s the personal experience of using that service or organization and the delivery of a consistent message.’”23

Branding is…“The ability to represent the synthesis of multiple qualities or claims in a single name.”24 Much like branding on the ranch, “a branding program should differentiate your cow from all other cattle on the range,” even if all the cattle look alike.25 Branding is “the unique property of a specific owner and has been developed over time so as to embrace a set of values and attributes (both tangible and intangible) which meaningfully and appropriately differentiate products [or services] which are otherwise very similar.”26

A branded product / service usually is associated with high quality. As a result, clients can usually rely on buying high quality and can gain assurance that what they buy will be the same every time. In addition, a branded product / service normally meets some status needs for clients. Branding is important to an NPO’s marketing strategy because it encourages repeat buying if the quality remains high. Branding develops a preferred market position for an NPO, particularly in highly competitive situations. Branding may also improve and maintain an image for the NPO. As a result of these benefits, a wise marketing strategy may be to incur the costs of branding to take advantage of both the client’s needs and the NPO’s revenue needs.27

Ted Leonhardt of the Leonhardt Group says, “A brand is the emotional shortcut between a company and its customer.”  

Consider the relationship some prominent brands have developed with their users. People buy Disney products or visit Walt Disney World because the brand conjures up the aura of magic. Taking a photograph with Kodak film has become synonymous with preserving a memorable moment for immortality.... Because these and other familiar brands are such a vital part of our everyday lives, we often don’t even consider choosing a competitive product or service. A brand transcends the physical attributes of a product or service, forming a constellation of powerful emotions. These intangible emotions can be expressed in the trust you place in the quality and reliability of a product or service, the confidence you have that it will deliver the results you expect, or the satisfaction or affection you have with owning or experiencing it. A brand is also about how consumers feel about themselves when they use a product or service. They may feel more masculine or feminine, smarter or more attractive, more unique or part of the crowd.  

“Brands are used as personality statements (some people call these personality ‘badges.’) Your choice of a badge is often determined by the statement you want to make to friends, neighbors, co-workers or relatives.”

In a presentation to United Way, Paul Pressler, president of Walt Disney Attractions, explained the Top Ten Traits of a Great Brand. According to Pressler:

A great brand:
1. Monopolizes share of mind- Successful brands dominate the very precious ‘square inches’ of consumers’ brains. Example: When you say ‘Overnight delivery,’ Federal Express comes to mind.
2. Is the perceived leader in its product category- People gain a wonderful feeling by going with a winner and this dynamic holds true in consumer decisions.

3. Has a human face- People don’t have relationships with corporate entities or company logos or slogans. They have relationships with people. Example: Orville Redenbacher for his popcorn

4. Needs a strong icon- Your icon should speak volumes about who you are and what you stand for. It should be universally identified with your brand, and something you would no sooner abandon than your name. Example: Mickey Mouse for Disney.

5. Revels in its history and traditions- A brand uses its history and traditions to establish an emotional bond and personal relationship with its consumers.

6. Offers meaningful emotional rewards- It finds a way to create an emotional connection with consumers.

7. Stays close to its customers- Strong brands keep close study of every aspect of the customer experience to ensure it is always a positive one.

8. Sweats the details- It is often the smallest, simplest details that make the greatest impression on people.

9. Has a clearly differentiated identity- A good test is if your customers can tell you in ten words or fewer what makes your organization different from similar organizations.

10. Seeks the company of other great brands- Alliances between two great brands can open up tremendous opportunities for cross-promotion.

Branding in the nonprofit world “denotes a holistic marketing approach in which a group’s mission and image come together in ways that build allegiance among donors, clients, and the public at large. The branding idea has become especially popular as organizations seek to get ahead of their rivals in the race for public attention and revenue.”

Not only can branding bring in dollars and volunteers, but it also can help charities gain a greater voice in public-policy deliberations… When you have a focused identity and integrated communications, you’re seen as a player at the table…. If you don’t brand yourself, focus your message, integrate your message delivery, and use every means at your disposal to get your message out there, you are going to be lost in this message bombardment. Most non-profit institutions are a brand already. The question is whether they are defining, articulating, and managing it to their advantage.


For-profits have been successfully branding themselves for years. It can work for nonprofits, too, if they are willing to give it a fair chance. According to Maddalena, there are several things nonprofits can learn from profits:

1. **GET DOWN TO REALITY** - Shed your cloak of virtue. Think of your organization as a product. Fit your organization and your competitors into a product category. Now ask yourself: How good is your *product*? How do its consumers perceive it? What is your competition doing? How well are they doing it? This is the beginning of the marketing process.

2. **LOOK AT YOUR PROBLEMS THROUGH THE EYES OF OTHERS** - Call it an insurance policy. Procter & Gamble wouldn’t distribute a product without market testing it first. Their bottom line is profit, so they research to protect their investment. So should you! Research will tell you how to present yourself and what information is penetrating your audience.

3. **NO ONE CAN BE ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE** (find a need and fill it) - Ivory soap appeals to one market segment consistently. If it tried to appeal to those who want a colored or creamy soap, they would run themselves in circles. If a product tries to appeal to everyone, it is likely to appeal to no one. Find your market, decide how to appeal to it and serve it.

4. **FIND YOUR POSITION IN LIFE** (and communicate it) - Ivory soap uses soft imagery with babies and fresh lovely women, and of course, the phrase 99 and 44/100% pure. While Camay soap is positioned as lush, creamy, sexy soap. Camay uses sexy models lounging in bathtubs for its ads. Each soap has defined
its market and reinforced its position through consistent and relevant communication.

5. YOU MUST COMPETE (if you don't, your competition will)- In the business world companies conduct research on their competition. "They analyze their competition's strengths and weaknesses and then develop responses which enable them to compete effectively." Money, donors and board members are in high demand, but short supply. If you don't recognize your competition and get in the game, your competition will play without you.

6. YOU HAVE MORE TO SELL THAN YOU THINK- Sell a subscription to a magazine that you now give away for free. Have experts on your staff provide consultancy for a fee.

The possibilities are endless.

According to Peter F. Drucker: "Nonprofit organizations tend not to give priority to performance and results. Yet performance and results are far more important—and far more difficult to measure and control—in the nonprofit institution than in a business." Since success for nonprofits is measured in results, not finances, nonprofit executives must ask themselves: How is performance for this institution to be defined? If it is a hospital, is it how fast patients are treated in the emergency room? Or is it the number of heart attack victims who pull through? "In a business, performance is what the customer

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is willing to pay for. The nonprofit does not get paid for performance. But it does not get paid for good intentions, either.\textsuperscript{36}

Once you have defined your organization's performance, you must capture its "point of difference." You must make sure what you say your organization does is really what the consumer sees it do. According to John Murphy, a significant point of difference must be: "Recognizable by consumers, desirable, familiar, credible on delivery, and communicated in every aspect of presentation."\textsuperscript{37}

"Recognizable by consumers"- It sounds obvious, but too many times organizations overlap and the only difference is the mission (something the consumer doesn't always see.) The difference between you and your competition must be evident to your audience.

"Desirable"- Is your organization providing services the consumers need or want? They want benefits like:

1. Quality- A brand they have grown to trust
2. Value- Their time or money is going to a valuable cause
3. Solutions to problems- Assurance that the organization is bringing results

"Familiar"- Consumers will be more perceptive to an organization if it strikes a chord of familiarity—something that links it to a past experience.

"Credible on delivery"- Consumers must believe you will provide what you say you will. If they don’t believe, they won’t buy. And if they buy and you don’t deliver, they won’t buy again.

“Communicated in every aspect of presentation”- Your mission and vision must be communicated consistently in every aspect of presentation—your brochures, publications, stationery, special events and fundraisers. Setterberg and Schulman say the mission should be “communicated in all written materials, enlivened by a consistent graphic image, and reflected in the behavior and attitude of everyone involved in the organization.”

Your image and branding should be consistent with the attitude of the people that represent your organization. The brand image you select needs to be portrayed by the person who answers the phone, greets guests, and speaks on behalf of the organization. All of these elements are considered, then reflected, in people’s decision to give to your organization, volunteer their time or participate in special events.

According to Duane Knapp, president of Brand-Strategy, a California consulting firm, branding is key to nonprofit member recruitment and retention. If an organization wants to enhance its value and be perceived as an essential organization, it must create a “genuine brand.” The following are steps in this process:

- “Correctly identify current brand perception”- Research is essential! You must first find out what people know about the organization and if they like what they know. If people know your organization was at the center of some bad publicity, your organization has a bad brand perception. According to Al and Laura Ries,

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“What you think your brand is doesn’t really matter. It’s only what your customers think that matters.”

- “Gain executive team consensus on current brand position”- Find out what the executives and board members think of the brand. Oftentimes what the executives think and what the people think are not the same. It is important to establish the need within the organization before initiating branding.

- “Conduct member research”- Are you delivering on your promises? Are you losing members annually? Why have your returning members stayed? Are your members speaking positively about your organization and recruiting new members?

- “Analyze current market strategy”- You must first know where you’ve been before you can get where you are going. What have you been doing right? What needs to be changed?

- “Evaluate the top five most frequent member transactions”- What is most important to the members? Are they getting what they want from their transactions?

- “Research competitive trends posed by for-profit companies”- For-profit companies spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on research and development. Utilize the information presented from these companies to detect market trends.

- “Analyze technological developments affecting the association community”

- “Create a written brand assessment and present it to the executive team for consensus”

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With the results of this process, consider your brand promise. "While the vision and mission are about what the association wants to do, the brand promise is about what the association is going to do for the members."\(^{42}\) John Sorrell, chairman of Interbrand Newell and Sorrell, says: "Whether you call it your purpose, mission, or vision and values, the process of sitting down and deciding what you believe in, then describing it in your own words is and extremely valuable exercise. It makes people focus on what they are trying to do."\(^{43}\) Richard DiPerna, vice-chairman of the Museum of Science in Boston, says: "Branding requires a ‘truthful statement’ of what an organization has to offer. You don’t just make up an image and then pray."\(^{44}\)

Patricia Houden, principal of a global branding firm in San Francisco, says “When changing the brand, nonprofits face challenges of gaining information about the internal and external audience…What are the priorities for these people? That must be answered before going forward."\(^{45}\) “Ask who are our constituencies and what are the results for each of them?…Each constituent sees the institution differently. Remember to keep the emphasis on the long-term goals of the institution. If you focus on short-term results, they will jump in different directions."\(^{46}\) “Avoid overemphasis on the things the institution can easily get money for, the popular issues, the easy things."\(^{47}\)

Before creating a brand promise, consider the association’s purpose by answering the following questions:

- What business is our brand in?
- What differentiates our products and services from those of our competitors?
- What is superior about the values we offer our members?

Make sure your promise will deliver:

- Distinctiveness- Unique characteristics and relationships
- Perception- By members as a unique brand
- Benefits- Functional and emotional benefits members desire

Use this information to train staff and volunteers to think like a member and deliver an exceptional experience. The key to delivering the brand promise is to ensure that absolutely everyone in the organization believes they are the brand whenever they relate to a member. The heart of every brand promise must be about making members feel special. Members want to belong to an association that has the information and expertise they need, provided with an instant-gratification mindset and exceptional service. The key is to ‘think like a brand’ and delight every member every time.48

“It is not enough for nonprofits to say ‘we serve a need.’ The really good ones create a want.”49

Chapter Three

A periodical search was performed at the Rowan University Library using the words “nonprofit,” “public relations,” “marketing,” “communication” and “advocacy.” Several resources were uncovered as a result of this search, including books, theses and articles.


An initial literature review revealed that research and implementation were key to the branding process. An article from the Chronicle of Philanthropy entitled “’Branding:’ A Hot Trend for Charities” introduced United Way as an innovative leader in the branding process for nonprofit organizations.
The United Way was chosen as the center of this thesis because its branding effort focused on these two aspects and was most comprehensive. The author conducted a telephone interview with Mike Wargo, director of Brand Strategy. From the United Way interview, information on the initial research conducted and general philosophy of the organization was uncovered. A personal interview was scheduled with Mike Wargo at United Way of America in Alexandria, Virginia. From the personal interview on February 12, 2001, internal materials, guidebooks and presentations were obtained. Additionally, results from the United Way’s eight Lead Cities were discussed and in-depth information was provided. A literature review was also performed from the materials obtained from the United Way.

The literature was then re-reviewed as it applied to United Way’s branding initiative. Three major correlations were revealed as a result. First, research is imperative for nonprofits to create an effective branding strategy. Second, preparation is the key to success. The organization must fully understand where it is and where it wants to go before initiating any change. Third, consistency is the heart of branding. All available literature stresses the importance of a consistent message, look and overall image.
United Way defines a brand as “the relationship between the product or service and the user. A product or service does not become a brand until it has earned a significant place in the lives of the users.”

Ted Leonhardt of the Leonhardt Group says, “A brand is the emotional shortcut between a company and its customer.”

Consider the relationship some prominent brands have developed with their users. People buy Disney products or visit Walt Disney World because the brand conjures up the aura of magic. Taking a photograph with Kodak film has become synonymous with preserving a memorable moment for immortality. Because these and other familiar brands are such a vital part of our everyday lives, we often don’t even consider choosing a competitive product or service. A brand transcends the physical attributes of a product or service, forming a constellation of powerful emotions. These intangible emotions can be expressed in the trust you place in the quality and reliability of a product or service, the confidence you have that it will deliver the results you expect, or the satisfaction or affection you have with owning or experiencing it. A brand is also about how consumers feel about themselves when they use a product or service. They may feel more masculine or feminine, smarter or more attractive, more unique or part of the crowd.

United Way stressed that branding forces a "disciplined focus on delivering a consistent experience to the customer across all aspects of an organization, from the

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receptionist, to the mailroom, to the CEO, to the volunteers. Branding is about building an organization’s capacity to deliver on its brand promises.”

**Background**

The road to United Way’s corporate branding strategy began with the realization that “Every year thousands of new nonprofits are being established. While Americans are making more charitable contributions, United Way’s share of the philanthropic market is getting smaller.”

Mike Wargo, director of brand implementation, explained United Way’s definition of brand: “It creates a set of promises and expectations, establishes a relationship with its audience and creates expectations about what a customer will experience at any interaction.

Branding makes sure customer expectations are fully met. It has real staying power because it really gets to the core of who we are and how we want to operate.”

**Research**

Young & Rubicam, a global marketing and communications firm in New York City, agreed to include United Way on their Brand Asset® Valuator survey pro bono. The research revealed four main elements vital to success for United Way: knowledge, esteem, relevance and differentiation. Knowledge is the culmination of brand building efforts—Are people familiar with your brand? It relates to all levels of the customer experience. Esteem is the consumer’s respect, regard and reputation—Do people like or

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55 Interview with Mike Wargo, February 12, 2001.
regard your brand? Relevance is how the brand relates to the consumer—how relevant is it to the consumer’s life? Y & R believes differentiation is what really drives the brand. It is the basis for consumer choice—can you differentiate yourself from your competition?

The Y & R research showed that United Way made major strides in recent years to reestablish “brand leadership.” Data from 1993 showed United Way was strong among consumers on knowledge, but weak on esteem, relevance and differentiation. According to Y & R, these are warning signs for an eroding brand.

Between 1997 and 1999, Y & R data indicate United Way made significant progress in terms of esteem and relevance. However, the survey found United Way was still weak on differentiation.

Additional research by United Way of America showed that donors wanted to be kept informed of where their money went and that their contribution was making the greatest possible difference.

United Way began its branding initiative as a means for survival. United Way needed to change with the times. Research showed market share was declining for the Health and Human Services sector. While charitable giving was up, United Way’s share of the philanthropic market was getting smaller. Changes in employment patterns eroded traditional work campaigns. Downsizing caused many loyal donors to join smaller companies or become entrepreneurs. Many workplace campaigns were diversifying to respond to employee demand—United Way was no longer the only game in town. United Way realized if it didn’t differentiate itself, it would become extinct. And like the dinosaurs, extinction would not be immediate, but certainly everlasting.
United Way responded with a “Prescription for Success.” United Way offered all 1,400 agencies the opportunity to participate in the pilot program for the branding initiative which would:

- Promote increased awareness of United Way’s core purpose and mission.
- Guide cohesive action internally and system-wide, delivering a consistent experience to donors.
- Drive accelerated growth among current and potential target donors.
- Ensure long-term vitality, preference and differentiation.  

In 1998, eight United Way cities volunteered to the national branding effort. The “Lead Cities” are: Sacramento, California; Denver, Colorado; Honolulu, Hawaii; Louisville, Kentucky; Monroe, Louisiana; New Orleans, Louisiana; Santa Fe, New Mexico and Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin.

**Phases**

United Way began its branding initiative in two phases. The first phase was the presentation phase: what the brand looks like. This involved ensuring the brand, or logo, was used consistently. For United Way it meant assessing all the different ways their logo was being used and deciding on one color scheme and one font type. Once this was decided, the exact Pantone color numbers were prescribed in the logo usage portion of United Way’s Brand Book. The Brand Book was designed to assist professional staff and volunteers at each UW location create a consistent look and message. This phase can take up to a year to assess and even longer to flesh out.

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“A consistent look is very important. And it is a starting point, but there is more to it.”

The second phase is performance: what the brand acts like. It involves asking yourself—what is our message? How are we communicating? How often are we communicating and what are we saying?

It’s harder because if you are involved in community results, you have to show you are producing results. You have to be able to perform what you say you will. And that’s where branding starts to get tricky: how are you actually performing on the brand. For example, if you walk into a McDonalds and your French fries are always cold, you’d say ‘this brand isn’t performing to my expectations.’ Every interaction with a customer has to be a good experience.

Before entering the performance phase, it is important to conduct what United Way calls a “key competencies assessment.” It involves assessing an organizations strengths and weaknesses in four major areas:

1. Data management- Database design, data collection, application of data and maintenance of database.
2. Relationship management- donor research on communication frequency and preferred communication methods. Database segmentation of committed donors and communication to that population.
3. Resource development- Planned and major giving and endowments.
4. Community building and outcome measurement- Development of community agenda, identification of desired outcomes aligned with community agenda and communication to donors about outcomes.

If the organization was weak in any of these areas, the branding process could not begin.

United Way began the performance phase by asking “How are we going to deliver a positive experience to our donors and what does that mean?” They began by targeting an audience. For United Way it was the $500 donor—reinforcing the importance of conducting a key competencies assessment. Organizations without in-

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57 Interview with Mike Wargo, February 12, 2001.
58 Interview with Mike Wargo, February 12, 2001.
depth information on their $500 donors were not eligible to be a Lead City. They
performed focus groups and conducted surveys with their $500 donors to assess their
expectations of United Way. Wargo explained, “It’s like United Airlines asking their
frequent fliers what is most important to them. They fly with the company the most, so
they are more apt to know the company and what they want from it.

It’s about finding out what your target customer really wants from your brand and
delivering on it every time.” United Way used the information obtained from their $500
donors and began making a Brand Value Proposition (BVP). A BVP breaks down the
donors needs and makes a promise for each need. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DONOR NEEDS</th>
<th>UNITED WAY PROMISES</th>
<th>DONOR BELIEF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I want to know what is being accomplished with my contributions”</td>
<td>“Let me know what is being accomplished with my contributions”</td>
<td>“My United Way is accountable in stewarding my contributions and showing me their results”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The BVP then becomes the basis for the organization’s strategic and operational
planning. “It is an overlay of how we do business, our need to deliver on promises and
gives us greater focus on where we need to put attention.”

United Way’s BVP was created with input from volunteers and Chief
Professional Officers from across the system, as well as members of the National
Marketing Committee, the Brand Integration Team and United Way of America’s Board
of Directors. Each aspect of the BVP is used to differentiate, shape and focus the service
United Way provides to its donors. The key criteria of a Brand Value Proposition are as
follows:

- Relevance and importance to target donors
- Differentiation of the organization / brand

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60 Interview with Mike Wargo, February 12, 2001.
61 Interview with Mike Wargo, February 12, 2001.
 Allocation of resources to implement a realignment around the BVP
 Measurable results establishing indicators for success, collecting baseline information and tracking results
 Enduring and sustainable characteristics for future growth

According to United Way’s Brand Workbook, once you have the targeted a customer, identified their needs and created a BVP, there are three non-negotiable commitments an organization must make to implement a brand strategy. They are as follows:

1. **Alignment-** Is the organization doing the things the customer wants? The organization must be willing to make a substantial investment in real programs that deliver on the BVP. This phase identifies gaps and strengths in the organization.

2. **Choices-** There must be a willingness to identify the activities or programs that most fully meet the BVP and those that require revision or elimination. It is important to recognize you can’t do everything and activities that don’t deliver promises must be eliminated.

3. **Metrics-** This involves understanding your desired outcomes and how you will measure them. The organization must measure their results across the whole customer experience. Short and long-term goals must be set.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Gaps &amp; Choices Example</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situation:</strong> The number of calls to the Information and Referral network exceeds the system’s capacity to effectively handle the requests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gap:</strong> United Way’s Information and Referral system does not meet demand or service. (Opportunity for enhanced donor touch point)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Choice:</strong> Expand I&amp;R capacity to include 24/7 service through collaboration with a partner agency and/or cooperation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wargo explained an example of the above strategy. “If United Airlines was planning on repainting their planes and then asked its frequent fliers what they wanted and they responded safety, comfort and candor, United must make choices to realign its activities to fit in with the customer’s expectations.”

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United Way of New Orleans used to sponsor a six-county relay race for company-sponsored teams. The race was replaced with a “Day of Caring.” In which corporate-employee teams work with UW on painting, repairs and other improvements to New Orleans neighborhoods. Gary Ostroske, president of the New Orleans area United Way, said “We’re not in the running-shoe business or the race business. The race didn’t demonstrate to the public what we do.”

United Way realized differentiation was not driven by its fundraising, but by its ability to be a community leader and its potential to achieve community impact. The eight Lead Cities provided insight for United Way to define and develop key service dimensions. They realized it was important to engage the donor at every dimension of the UW experience, not just at the point of fund raising. The key dimensions are as follows:

- Community Leadership- Be a leader in identifying the critical health and human services issues.
- Collaborative Partnerships- Develop partnerships with affiliated agencies, government agencies and other collaborations to support the community agenda.
- Community Impact & Outcome Measurement- Develop outcome-focused plan for achieving measurable change. Demonstrate accountability for investing in programs that make a difference.
- Relationship Management- Develop year-round relationships with individual donors. Establish means to collect donor names and addresses. Focus communication to donors on results and appreciation.
- Resource Development- Increase the efficiency and ease of contribution process. Give donors choices within the context of the community agenda.

Everything described above relates to the performance of the United Way brand. It is how United Way says it wants to deliver a consistent experience to their donor, from

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the donor perspective. The next step is Brand Positioning, which is considered the central tenet of the organization and serves as the basis for all communication and actions. While the brand positioning is the road map for achieving desirable goals, it is not meant for public dissemination. United Way created the positioning statement: “United Way: A Caring Force. Focusing on Solutions. Maximizing Your Impact.” The statement gave each agency a specific focus by which to measure all communication and activities before execution.

**Implementation**

According to United Way there are five phases of implementing a brand strategy—Commitment, Assessment, Plan Development, Implementation, and Ongoing Management.

The first phase, **COMMITMENT**, involves obtaining buy-in from all members of the organization starting with the most powerful individuals and trickling down. “The implementation of the brand strategy affects the entire organization, United Way staff,
board members and other key volunteers. It must consider the interests of and involve each of these stakeholders.  

Lead Cities found commitment the most critical phase. If the major players are not committed, or their expectations differ from the goal, the process will not move forward successfully. United Way suggests taking the following steps:

- **Demonstrate President’s Commitment**: Successful implementation starts with the president’s commitment to change, brand positioning, the BVP and the implementation of the brand strategy.

- **Gain Senior Management Commitment**: It is important for senior management to participate in the development of the vision, since they will be responsible for the actual implementation of the brand strategy. The senior management will adopt the BVP as a framework to move forward, agree to the definition of the committed donor, and commit to measurement and evaluation. Senior staff must completely understand the BVP and what it means to deliver on promises in every facet of the business function of the United Way.

- **Gain Board Buy-in**: As policy makers they have a central role in endorsing and actively supporting the strategic direction of United Way. It is important to listen to the board’s concerns and address them at this time. It may be impossible to gain 100 percent board support, but it is necessary to have support among key decision-makers. Lead Cities have found that full board support will come over time.

- **Educate Staff**: It is important that the staff understand the total picture and how the branding focus relates to their work. ‘Everyone in the organization touches the donor. Our receptionist is the Director of First Impressions.’

- **Communicate Vision**: Frequently, implementing a vision is hindered by undercommunication and / or sending inconsistent or mixed messages.  

The second phase, **ASSESSMENT**, involves five components: committed donor / target market, dimensions of the United Way product, competition, key competencies, and functional task analysis.

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Committed Donor / Target Market Assessment involves identifying your committed donor and understanding more about them. At this stage it is important to have a well-kept database, not only to initially identify the target donor, but to continually track the donors. "Lead Cities learned that annual surveying and tracking of donors, particularly the committed donors, is the single most important step they took in the branding process."

The Service Dimensions Assessment involves analyzing the product across its service dimensions—community leadership, collaborative partnerships, community impact & outcome measurement, relationship management and resource development. United Way created a Service Dimensions Assessment form for each UW agency to use. The heart of the assessment involves asking: "How does this activity / program strengthen or differentiate our UW?" and "Which BVP does this address?"

The Competitive Assessment begins with assessing your key competitors in relation to the dimensions of your product. "Just as McDonald’s wants to know what Burger King is doing and Borders wants to know what Barnes & Noble is doing, you want to ascertain the work of your key competitors and their strengths and weaknesses."

Key questions to ask are:

- Who are the main competitors?
- What are their strengths?
- What is their strategy? Who do they target?

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• How do they compare to your services / capabilities?

A Key Competencies Assessment involves developing and assessing a level of competency in each of the following practices: data management, relationship management, resource development, community building and outcome management, and high performing organizations. Lead Cities developed a checklist of these practices to guide the assessment process. The following are examples of items on each key competency checklist.

• Data Management- Identify database objectives across functional areas.
  Installation of “right” database product. Offers donors online access to results and program information.

• Relationship Management Practices- Donor research on communication frequency and preferred communication channels. Specific staff responsibility for relationship management with donors. Involvement of other stakeholders.

• Resource Development- Dedicated staff, system to identify prospective donors, recognition programs, giving programs and workplace campaign.

• Community Building and Outcome Measurement- Perform community needs assessment. Develop outcome-focused plan for achieving measurable change. Actively measure program outcomes and focus on results.

• High Performing Organization- Identify factors driving customer satisfaction.

The fourth step in the assessment phase is the Task Audit. Lead Cities found it important to analyze their major tasks across organizational functions in order to:

1. Determine whether or not specific tasks deliver on the BVP.
2. Identify any new tasks that need to be implemented in order to deliver on the BVP.
3. Identify any existing tasks that need to be revised in order to better deliver on the BVP.

The focus of the task audit is to assure that every UW activity, from speaking to a receptionist to attending a leadership event, is in support of at least one brand promise.  

United Way Lead Cities performed task audits by department and followed a four step process:

- **Step One:** List all major current tasks / programs. List tasks / programs you would like to do that deliver on the brand promises. Evaluate if the task is infrastructure, enhances or detracts, or needs to be revised to deliver on the BVP.
- **Step Two:** Indicate whether the task / program is a donor touch point or has opportunity for a donor touch point.
- **Step Three:** Identify which promises of the BVP are addressed by the task / program.
- **Step Four:** Evaluate the status of the task. Is it new? Does it need revision, or will it be eliminated? Consider the value of the task / program to the donor. How will the donor experience it?

Lead Cities found it useful to divide their tasks / programs into three categories: learning, action and feedback:

- **Learning** touch points occur when perspective donors are given opportunities to gain knowledge and build awareness of United Way. Examples are: personal contacts, media messages, printed materials, electronic communications and special events.
- **Action** touch points occur when prospective donors receive a direct invitation to support United Way by: making a financial or in-kind contribution or volunteering their time.
- **Feedback** touch points should open two-way communication channels and occur whether or not the donor decides to participate. If the prospective donor decides to participate, examples of feedback touch points include: thank you letters, reports on results achieved, research survey results and ongoing support (tax receipts.)

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Phase three of implementation is **PLAN DEVELOPMENT**. After assessing the committed donor, service dimensions, competitors and key functional tasks, the next step is developing a plan. This phase is broken into three parts: defining the service description, forecasting and measuring performance. Having a plan will help prioritize, focus resources and deliver commitments in a specified timeframe.

The first step is the Service Description. This step correlates to the task audit of the previous phase. It involves listing the key learning, action and feedback touch points you want to deliver. This phase should identify the following:

- Purpose and content of the touch point.
- The method each touch point will be delivered to the donor.
- When the touch point will be delivered.
- Who is responsible for the touch point?
- What the internal interdependencies are for delivery of the touch point.
- What new operational resources are required for delivery?

Metro United Way of Louisville, Kentucky, completed a comprehensive touch point audit. They found they were:

- Over-communicating and fragmenting their message and image to some of their largest individual donors.
- Communicating only once a year to the majority of individual donors and prospects; a pledge card may be their only contact.
- Not aligning the multitude of touch points with the message strategy.

As a result of its touch point audit, Metro United Way:

- Combined four publications into one great newsletter.
- Developed the ideal set of touch points for each donor segment.
- Implemented systematic consultation with each division of the organization to bring them all into alignment with the message strategy.  

The final step is forecasting the expected results and measuring the performance.

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“Identify the categories of performance you will measure. For each category identify the anticipated results. Finally, define the assumptions on which the forecast is based.”

There are three types of measures:

- Donor beliefs- These should be measured against the BVP. Are you achieving the desired belief as defined by the BVP? How will you measure it?
- Organizational performance.
- Competitive analysis- Both should be measured on how well it delivers on your desired outcome.

Phase four is IMPLEMENTATION. Lead Cities found implementation required extreme discipline and focus. They identified the following key elements to an implementation strategy:

- Create board development plan to support the implementation of the brand strategy.
- Begin executing the Service Description as time and resources allow.
- Use the prioritized list of activities as a resource in budget development and management.
- Develop a campaign plan that focuses on the committed donor.
- Develop a plan to baseline and track success metrics, such as market research and campaign performance measures on committed donors.
- Revise organizational resources as needed to implement the brand strategy.
- Implement graphic standards per the Brand Guide Book.

Phase five is Ongoing Management. This phase, as its title implies, should be going on throughout the implementation. It involves constantly measuring the effectiveness of the strategy against the performance measures and timelines developed in the Service Description.

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Achievements

The achievements, as United Way calls them, are the results of the eight Lead Cities. Sacramento, California enjoyed a $1.3 million increase in donations from committed donors, a 33 percent increase in giving to the Community Fund and a more consistent message to donors.

Denver, Colorado saw a nine percent increase in the 2000 campaign—the largest in 16 years. The Mile High United Way also saw an increase in committed donors’ overall opinion, from 54 percent “very favorable” in 1998 to 65 percent in 2000.

Honolulu, Hawaii achieved its goal for the first time since 1995 with $100,000. Honolulu also enjoys improved communication among newly segmented donors.

The number of leadership givers improved 23 percent resulting in a $1.2 million increase in Louisville, Kentucky. Louisville also successfully completed the presentation phase and touts a consistent message and look in all aspects of its agency.

As a result of the branding pilot, Monroe, Louisiana, forged a new partnership with the “Children’s Coalition.” Monroe also enhanced committed donor touch points by ten percent overall and 14 percent in leadership giving. As a result of the extensive donor research from the branding initiative, Monroe created a new level of leadership giving at $1,500 and Tocqueville giving at $15,000.

New Orleans gained 1,820 new committed donors and created a year-round advertising effort—“United Way... Getting it Done.”

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Santa Fe, New Mexico’s branding initiative generated a committed donor increase of 22 percent. Santa Fe also successfully completed the presentation phase by ensuring all printed materials are consistent in message and look.

Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin enjoyed a 26 percent increase in committed donors and a 13 percent increase in leadership giving as a result of their experience with the pilot program. Chippewa Falls also realigned communication with its donors and communicates year-round.

United Way continues to monitor and learn from each Lead City. Kathleen Markey, who headed the branding effort, said the aim of the project was to “raise the awareness of United Way’s value in communities and in the hearts and minds of individuals who have the potential to volunteer their time or contribute money.” The pilot programs, she added, “are helping us understand how you manage a United Way in the context of this strategy.”

United Way still has a lot to do, but research with the Lead Cities has shown that United Way’s differentiation is steadily increasing. All of the Lead Cities have enjoyed more consistent messages, an increase in donors and a two-way relationship with their communities.

As Joe Marconi recommended in his book, *Image Marketing: Using Public Perceptions to Attain Business Objectives*, the United Way targeted a market and communicated with them. United Way realized it was not only important to have the right communication, but to inform the right audience. United Way used information to create a stream of awareness among donors and volunteers.

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The United Way’s branding program draws from Paul Pressler’s presentation, “Top Ten Traits of a Great Brand.” The branding initiative attempted to share each of Pressler’s traits: United Way has a “strong icon,” “offers meaningful emotional rewards,” “remains close to its customers,” “sweats the details” and “seeks the company of other great brands.”

United Way truly treated the branding effort like a business objective. The organization was considered a product and they measured results through performance. According to John Murphy, a significant point of difference must be: “Recognizable by consumers, desirable, familiar, credible on delivery and communicated in every aspect of presentation.” United Way was on its way to achieving a successful point of difference. Each Lead City is successfully communicating a consistent message to a donor or volunteer who finds United Way relevant to their lives.

Duane Knapp, president of Brand-Strategy in California, recommended eight things to create a genuine brand:

“Correctly identify current brand perception”- United Way did this with the help of Young & Rubicam and its own research. United Way realized the importance of what its customers thought of the organization.

“Communicated in every aspect of presentation”- This was achieved in the first phase of the United Way process, entitled “the presentation phase.” While it took some time to flesh out, the Lead Cities are successfully presenting a consistent look and message.

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“Gain executive team consensus on current brand position”- This process is mentioned in the implementation phase. United Way realized the importance of a consensus, or at least keeping everyone informed. Oftentimes a consensus may not be possible, but United Way was never lacking in communication on all levels.

“Conduct member research”- Lead Cities needed to have sufficient information on their members to even participate in the pilot program. The branding initiative allowed the Lead Cities to better segment their donors and volunteers and target communication more efficiently.

“Analyze current market strategy”- Research from Young & Rubicam and United Way’s research allowed them to accurately assess where they had been to then project where they wanted to go.

“Evaluate the top five most frequent member transactions”- United Way was sure to go to their target customers to find out what they wanted from their United Way experience. Most importantly, this information contributed to United Way’s construction of the Brand Value Proposition. United Way made sure that their donor’s priorities were theirs as well.

“Research competitive trends posed by for-profit companies”- United Way’s Brand Workbook often referred to the actions of Starbuck’s, United Airlines and McDonalds. These references were not only quite adequate and applicable, but also equated United Way as a player at the table with these powerful brands.

“Analyze technological developments affecting the association community”- United Way recognized that employees in workplace campaigns were being offered numerous giving options and that Internet fundraising was on the rise. United Way
responded with its “Prescription for Success,” which was incorporated into the branding initiative.

“Create a written brand assessment” - For United Way, their brand assessment turned into their Brand Value Proposition. The BVP gave United Way a non-negotiable set of promises they were going to deliver as a result of the branding initiative. Everything the organization did always centered on the BVP.
Chapter Five

Summary

United Way was used as a case study for this thesis because the organization’s branding program reflects what current literature recommends is a successful branding program.

After national research, United Way discovered its brand was not standing out among other organizations with similar services. United Way began researching for the branding initiative as a means to differentiate its brand.

United Way researched its audience and targeted the $500 donor for the branding initiative. United Way used eight pilot cities, called Lead Cities, to initiate the branding in order to monitor and measure the successes of the process, as it would apply to the organization nationally.

The author conducted telephone and personal interviews with Mike Wargo, director of Brand Strategy at United Way of America in Alexandria, Virginia. The author obtained presentations, workbooks and training materials used by United Way to educate and train agencies on the branding program.

Results of the pilot program varied at each Lead City. Overall, each city enjoyed a more specific communication with a targeted audience and a more consistent presentation
of the United Way brand. As a result, each city saw a significant increase in financial
giving from donors and time from volunteers. The branding program gave each city a
prescription to follow for more successful communication and a system of checks and
balances for measuring the effect of the communication. Lead Cities realized
communication should not only occur once a year, but rather year-round and they do it
successfully because of branding.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

United Way could have taken the easy road. They could have continued to do the
same thing they always did with the same results. Instead, they took the high road. They
knew they had to compete for their market share. They were not afraid to tenaciously
pursue what was rightfully theirs—a positive image.

United Way defined branding as “the relationship between the product or service
and the user.” Their branding initiative exuded that definition. United Way practiced
what they preached by getting to the heart of their donors and building relationships from
the ground up. United Way made promises and delivered on them. The United Way
brand communicates character and generates loyalty. United Way stopped making their
organization a fund-raiser and made it a personal experience.

Skeptics of branding for nonprofit organizations say potential donors won’t want
to donate to an organization that looks too polished or savvy. After researching both
literature and the United Way, the author believes that targeting an audience and
communicating a consistent message in an attractive presentation can never be too savvy.
Branding is about creating emotional shortcuts and delivering consistent experiences
every time. It is more about relationships than it is about a four-color brochure, but sometimes the brochure is the gateway to the relationship.

After an extensive literature review and the United Way case study, the author recommends that nonprofits do their research before initiating a branding project. It is a costly and time-consuming endeavor and it will not bring immediate results. Branding is not a quick fix and it is not a gimmick. It requires hard work from every person affiliated with the organization and will not be successful if everyone does not cooperate. Finally, the author feels it is important for nonprofits to remember: you cannot be all things to all people!. Branding is a targeted approach with a specific message for an even more specific audience.

The author chose to study branding for nonprofit organizations in an attempt to help nonprofit organizations raise awareness about their cause. Many nonprofits do not have the time or money to conduct the research described herein. It is the author's hope that nonprofit organizations may benefit from the information in this thesis.

When this thesis was written, branding was a fairly new concept to the nonprofit sector. While branding was successful for the nonprofit organization in this thesis, it may not be the answer for all nonprofit organizations. For future researchers considering studying this subject, the author recommends studying a successful branding initiative and comparing it to a nonprofit organization whose branding initiative was unsuccessful. It would be interesting to determine at what point the branding program became unsuccessful so mistakes could be avoided in the future. Defining a “critical point” in the branding process may be very helpful to nonprofit organizations. The author feels a timeline or checklist for an organization to use as a benchmark in the process would be
extremely helpful. Using a checklist may help organizations identify if their branding program has gone awry and may save money by abandoning the program before more money is invested.

Future researchers looking where to begin should read Thomas Billitteri’s article, “Branding: A Hot Trend for Charities,” in the May 20, 1999 issue of The Chronicle of Philanthropy. The article highlights five organizations that initiated branding programs. The public relations officers of those organizations may be willing to participate in a study. Depending on how much time has passed, perhaps enough information will be back from their studies to really uncover if their branding program was a success.