

Brands: They Need to Work Just as Hard as You Do!

Here's how to create a powerful brand on a shoestring.

BY JOYCE BOSCH

The director of a nonprofit organization in the Washington, D.C., area carries a card in her wallet that says, "I work for a nonprofit. In case of accident, just let me lie here. I need the rest." That plea pretty well sums up the endless hours, missed meals, and perpetual exhaustion that comes from meeting so many demands with so few resources.

Truly, building a successful nonprofit operation is a difficult task. That's why your nonprofit organization needs a brand to strengthen its image, build trust, and attract contributors. This brand needs to work just as hard as you do!

Tell People Who You Are

The most important advantage your organization has is its brand: a name, symbol, logo, personality, or promise that immediately tells your community and the world who you are.

Here's an example in two words: Red Cross. The Red Cross brand is so well established that its logo and name immediately conjure up images of how the organization helps people. Such a strong national brand can help local members through "co-branding."

A powerful brand that portrays your mission can increase funding, public awareness, consumer confidence, and donor support. It can also

help unite your organization's employees and supporters around your mission and goals.

Grow with the Times

An organization's brand may need to evolve as its audiences, goals, and the world around it change. That was the situation faced by the American Association of Retired People (AARP). For decades, it enjoyed a tremendous market share. Then research showed that it wasn't attracting the Baby-Boom generation and that most of its members weren't actually retired.

In response, the association decided to drop the name American Association of Retired People and use only the acronym AARP. This plan was feasible because of AARP's outstanding brand recognition. The strength of AARP as a brand provided the springboard to move into new areas. Chances are, our next generation won't know what AARP stood for. Who remembers what IBM originally meant?

In addition to its flagship publication *Modern Maturity*, AARP created a new publication called *My Generation*. This lifestyle magazine was designed to attract the active baby-boomers—the 50 to 60 year olds who are into hiking, biking, skiing, and the less sedentary life. Thanks to the power of branding, AARP has turned itself into a younger, more vibrant organization.

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Build Your Brand on a Budget

How do you build a trusted brand image for your nonprofit without deep pockets? Here are six steps for branding on a budget:

1 Become the Logo Police. The most important thing you can do is to make sure your name, logo, colors, and slogan are consistent and placed on every document. It sounds simple, but it's surprising how many organizations don't adhere to this seemingly simple step.

2 Do the "Thumb Test." Spread your materials on a table. With your thumb, cover up your logo on each piece. Now look. Does it appear like everything is from the same organization? It should! Don't forget to include your Web-site materials in this process. Even on the Internet, your look should be consistent and easily recognizable.

3 Create a “Branding Board.” Attach all your materials on a bulletin board. Every time you begin creating a new flyer, fundraising package, or newsletter, compare the layout to the bulletin board. You’ll be able to spot inconsistencies instantly.

4 Do Your Homework. Research is the key to establishing a brand. Use the Internet to gain access to boundless sources of information about branding. Also, ask marketing professors at your local college if they’ll use your organization as a class project or if marketing students can serve as interns. Some students can even handle design and production work for PSAs, brochures, and Web sites.

5 Make Full Use of Every Staff Member and Volunteer. Know the skill sets and past experience of your volunteers, whether they are students or senior citizens. Volunteers can do much more than answer telephones and stuff envelopes.

6 Use Public Relations. Effective PR is instrumental to establishing a brand, particularly with a small budget. It builds credibility and gives reporters solid information about you that they can report to the public.

A Bonus Tip. Remember all the little things you can do that won’t cost you anything but will make a big difference. Make sure your receptionist sounds happy, receptive, and help-

ful. Put your slogan on your after-hours voice-mail greeting and on your e-mail signature. Even fax cover notes can be branding tools. You can add “quick facts” about your organization, or inspirational quotes, and change them weekly or monthly.

Success in branding isn’t about doing one thing 100% better. It’s about doing a hundred things 1% better. ■

Resources

Lauer, Larry, “Achieving an Admired Organization,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 11, No. 5.

Muehrcke, Jill, ed., *Public Relations & Communications, Leadership Series*.

Ott, Christine, “Nonprofit Communications on a Shoestring,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 8, No. 2.

Rosenstock, Francine, “The Accidental Publicist: Three Factors that Can Improve Your Image,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 9, No. 5.

Warwick, Mal, “Outside-in Marketing: A New Way to Look at Marketing,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 16, No. 3.

These resources are available from the Society’s Resource Center, 800-424-7367, www.snpo.org.

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Nonprofit World • Volume 20, Number 1 January/February 2002
Published by the Society for Nonprofit Organizations
6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, WI 53719 • 800-424-7367
www.snpo.org