Brand Fundamentals™ principals Greg Elizondo (l) and Peter Harris (r) conducting a workshop at the Hannah Grimes Center in Keene, NH.

Brand Basics

Developing a **brand brief** is an essential first step toward achieving your nonprofit organization's marketing goals. Here are the building blocks you need to get started.

"Brand Fundamentals explains the branding process in practical, effective steps to help nonprofits communicate their essence to their stakeholders. We were able to use some of the techniques we learned immediately for our annual campaign. We received so much for so little!"—*Julie Davenson, Executive Director, Youth Services, Inc.*

Brand Fundamentals™
ILLUMINATE YOUR MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

888-930-6511 ▪ info@brandfundamentals.net
www.brandfundamentals.net ▪ Keene, NH

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Every organization has a brand—if not by design, by default. In fact, a brand is the keystone of all other marketing communications.

Brands need stewards. To some extent, everyone is a brand steward capable of shaping attitudes and opinions. Professionals may have influence because brand building requires diverse talents and expertise. In the end, however, one person must bear primary responsibility, and that person is the Brand Steward (with capital letters).

Today, nonprofits are discovering ways branding can serve their specific needs and interests, and are contributing new ideas and best practices to the field.[1]

What is a brand?

Here are two definitions, neither complete unto itself, but together they present a fairly balanced picture:

"[A brand is] the name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of other sellers." *American Marketing Association*[2]

"Branding is the expression of the essential truth or value of an organization, product, or service. It is communication of characteristics, values, and attributes that clarify what this particular brand is and is not." *James Heaton, Tronvig Group*[3]

Throughout history, inspired language and imagery have captivated audiences and motivated them to act.

Why brand?

Building and maintaining a brand takes a lot of time and effort. Why bother?

Benefits to nonprofits and their stakeholders[4]

■ **Brand Integrity**—results in organizational cohesion and trust.
  • Structural alignment between brand identity and mission, strategy, and values.
  • Structural alignment between internal brand identity and external brand image.

■ **Brand Democracy**—creates brand ambassadors and reduces the need for control.
  • Participative process of internal and external stakeholder engagement to define and communicate the brand.

■ **Brand Affinity**—drives greater mission implementation and social impact.
  • Approach that leverages brand in support of partnerships and collaboration.
  • Use of the brand and brand assets to focus on shared social objectives.

Brand basics

Today's population is bombarded with personal and commercial messages all day, every day. Getting through is a challenge for any operation—but especially for nonprofits, which typically have complex messages, modest budgets, and limited human resources to work with.

Electronic media has, to some extent, leveled the playing field. It doesn't cost a fortune to have a website and a social media presence.

But effective communication doesn't begin with technology, it begins with narrative—always has, only today's stories are about brands. Brands position and differentiate themselves so people know what to expect and how to navigate through a dizzying field of options—whether it's what to buy, where to find services, or who to donate to.

In the absence of an effective branding program, all communications—internal and external, print and electronic—suffer. Brand entropy sets in. Mission gives way to mayhem. Continuity gives way to chaos.

Brand Architecture. As with many branding concepts, this comes from the for-profit sector. However, brand architecture is a particularly important consideration for nonprofits. Brand architecture refers to the way stakeholders—human and institutional—relate to each other and to the organization itself. Imagine a family tree, then create a diagram showing how your staff, your services, your beneficiaries, and your donors fit together.

1 See Laidler-Kylander, Nathalie and Stenzel, Julia Shepard (2014) *The Brand IDEA*, Jossey-Bass
2 www.ama.org/resources/Pages/Dictionary.aspx?dLetter=B&dLetter=B
3 www.tronviggroup.com/the-difference-between-marketing-and-branding/
4 Adapted from Laidler-Kylander, Nathalie and Stenzel, Julia Shepard (2014) *The Brand IDEA*, Jossey-Bass

Creative talent. Creative professionals are sometimes thought to be of a different breed. However, most are able to communicate well, take direction, adhere to deadlines, and work well with others. Of course, it pays to request multiple proposals and to interview candidates before entering into a contract with anyone.

Your brand brief will help convey your ideas and expectations. Try to avoid phrases like, "I'll know it when I see it." Instead, be clear about what you do know and ask for help with what you don't. Discuss how many solutions you will see for any particular item. Request concrete feedback to be sure you are being understood.

Differentiation. No organization exists in a vacuum. Far more than for-profit companies, nonprofits rely upon good will and positive relationships with diverse stakeholders. As such, it is necessary to balance alignment with differentiation. Branding can play a key part in accomplishing this objective.

Discipline. Albert Einstein said, "If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions." Ask the right questions and the answers will present themselves. In developing a brand, preconceived notions stand in the way. Pet names and cleaver ideas distract attention from better or more appropriate options.

"If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions."

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Elegance. In every field of endeavor—artist, scientific, athletic, *and branding*—elegance is achieved by starting simple, ending simple, and working really hard in between.

Identity/image alignment. In marketing terms, your *identity* is what you present to the world and your *image* is what the world believes to be true about you. Ideally, the two are 100% aligned. If there is a disparity, you have two choices: 1) change what you present to the world; or 2) change what the world believes.

Identity Program. An identity program is the face and voice of a brand. It is made up of vitals, verbals, and visuals. Vitals are addressed in a brand brief. Verbals and visuals are developed by a creative team.

The cornerstone of an identity program is a logo or signature. A tag line conveys information and character. Language and messaging guidelines (tailored for specific stakeholders) give the brand a compelling and consistent voice. Colors, typefaces, and other graphic elements play a part in creating a distinctive and memorable look for the brand.

The identity program should be documented in a standards and guidelines manual (which may be two pages or two hundred). Share it with consultants, writers, designers, web developers, social media specialists, and other staff or vendors to assure their work supports and strengthens the brand.

Intellectual property. Safeguard your name, logo, tag line, and other proprietary identity components by applying for copyright and/or trademark protection.

Worksheet

This information sheet is a companion to the *Brand Basics Worksheet* available at *nonprofitnext.nhnonprofits.org*.

If you'd like to learn more about branding for nonprofits, consider attending one of our workshops (or, assemble 20 or more people and sponsor one). If you'd like to know more about our proprietary Branding Programs, please contact us by phone or email. ■

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