



BRANDING | It's NOT the Logo, Stupid!

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By Tim Robertson

*Branding is a hot topic these days. It's not only related to products, but to the "brand" of celebrities, political campaigns, and even cities. What is a brand anyway? In this article Tim Robertson discusses what makes a great brand in the first place, and how the principles - and the value - of branding can be applied to any organization.*

## It's NOT the logo, or the tagline, or the advertising, or....

Let's clear up some misconceptions. Branding is not the logo, or the tagline, or the celebrity face. This would be branding at it's shallowest.

The reason that great brands thrive is because of something much more than a huge advertising budget and slick marketing campaigns.

People and communities are attracted by shared values. Great brands know what their values are and not only communicate them, but demonstrate these values at every level of their operations.

Within every great brand is an implied "promise". This promise is called the core brand message. It is the one thing that the organization can consistently deliver on, day in and day out. *It has to be authentic.* Imagine if FedEx didn't get your package there overnight, or Starbucks made a lousy cup of coffee!

It is this authenticity and reliability that builds trust with the brand's constituency. Trust compounds over time; a great brand will grow because of this compounding effect on its relationship with the communities it serves.

Great brands define and express their values; create a core brand message they consistently deliver on; and convey and demonstrate these values and messages effectively and congruently.

## So how can you benefit from this type of approach?

Branding works when it is adapted by the whole organization. This means that the brand is communicated through every point of contact internally and externally. There are many ways an organization can send out mixed messages.



When a complete branding program is introduced, all communications focus on the same consistent message; stakeholders and employees have branding guidelines for all of their communications and interactions with the community; and suppliers such as consultants, public relations, and promotions agencies have proper direction.

## What a great brand is made of - the components of consistency

**Core values** are the cornerstones of a great brand. Your organization already has certain values it adheres to - have they been articulated and clarified? Focusing on the 3-4 core values your organization has is helpful in determining what you communicate and how you interact in the world.

**The core brand message** is a statement that includes your “brand promise”. What is the one thing that you can deliver on regardless of the circumstances? What can you always be counted on for? Keep in mind this is not a guarantee, but rather a promise to deliver on a consistent basis.

**The brand personality** is a way to personalize and humanize an organizational brand. People interact with people, not conceptual legal entities. What is the brand personality of your non-profit? Is it young or middle aged? Scholarly or activist?



**The brand icons** are all of the visual and audio symbols that communicate who you are. The logo is only one aspect of this iconography - it also includes all print, online, broadcast media communications and promotions.

### **The brand opportunity**

Branding is something that takes place in the heart. It's a relationship that is built on trust and consistency. It's the promise in an on-going relationship between the organization and its constituency. It is built over time and compounds with time. It can be mythic and enduring, or it can be weak and superfluous. What is the inherent strength of your brand? What do you deliver on? And what values does your organization demonstrate and live through?

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