

Puget Sound BUSINESS JOURNAL

OCTOBER 31 - NOVEMBER 6, 2008

Brand for nonprofits: It's about trust

No one in the nonprofit world will dispute that building trust and credibility is a top priority for their organization. And although their primary objective is to raise awareness and contributions, many consider brand development a luxury they can't afford.

In the end, that can be a costly mistake.

Spending resources on brand — or giving a voice to your core values — deepens your understanding of what your supporters and potential supporters really care about. Brand also communicates your organization's core values in a clear, consistent way. The intersection of these two things strengthens relationships and can ultimately increase donations.

"There are close to 2 million nonprofit organizations in the U.S. alone, and 'doing good' has become a shop-and-compare commodity," says Katya Andersen, author of the book "Robin Hood Marketing: Stealing Corporate Savvy to Sell Just Causes." "People are making purchasing decisions based on how much they trust an organization or product. This is true across the board for service organizations, nonprofits seeking donations as well as consumer products."

Nonprofits can take a page from successful corporations by implementing a brand program that walks the talk of their cause. The end result: the trust that is the foundation for meaningful long-lasting relationships with stakeholders.

Is your brand passion-driven?

Whether you know it or not, your organization already has a brand. It's your website, the services you provide and how they are delivered, your name, and so much more. Everything that employees, volunteers, board members, community stakeholders and

IDEAL IDENTITY



Mary
Weisnewski

donors — your tribe of like-minded supporters — associate with your organization is your brand. The question is: Does your brand convey and inspire the passion your tribe members have for your cause?

The mistake so many businesses make is thinking that brand stops with what people see. It's really more about what they feel.

"If brand development is just about cosmetics — colors and logos and creating collateral — it has a somewhat short shelf life," says Diana Reid, vice president, global communication for Unitus, an international nonprofit microfinance organization based in Seattle. "When brand is tied to mission and strategy — where you want to go and who you want to serve, and how to go about making things happen — then it becomes an organic part of your organization. It's as natural as breathing, because it's interwoven with the passion for your mission."

Conveying that passion effectively is a huge differentiator among the growing number of nonprofits clamoring for attention. You'll inspire trust, confidence and loyalty.

The surest way to create a trustworthy brand is to make certain it's authentic. You can't fake it. Does it truly reflect your organization's organic strengths and core values?

"Any quality brand has to be built from the inside out."

BRIEN LAUTMAN
PEACEHEALTH

"Any quality brand has to be built from the inside out," says Brien Lautman, system director for communications at PeaceHealth, a nonprofit regional health system serving communities in Alaska, Washington and Oregon. "At PeaceHealth, our mission and values directly influence how we deliver the care and services we provide to our patients and communities. This focus is a thread that runs directly through our

hiring practices, our management and caregiver training, and the care we deliver at the bedside. Delivering exceptional medicine and compassionate care is both a brand promise and experience that is understood and delivered every day in every PeaceHealth hospital and medical practice."

Part of the nature of developing trust is that it takes time. It's the consistency of words and actions that creates strong ties with your supporters.

"Brand development requires intelligent ongoing investment of time, money and focus," says Ed Belleba, President and CEO of Friends of Youth, headquartered in Redmond. "As you attempt to build brand equity over time, testing everything an organization

"There are close to 2 million nonprofit organizations in the U.S. alone, and 'doing good' has become a shop-and-compare commodity."

KATYA ANDERSEN
AUTHOR

does to communicate — special events, outreach to clients, websites, newsletters, annual reports and all other ways an agency touches its various audiences — ensures consistency of the messages. Consistent delivery of the right messages creates impact."

Trust plays an important role with all of these supporters, and brand may be even more important for nonprofits than for corporations.

"People make decisions about buying products for lots of reasons, but the decision to invest in a charity is made 100 percent on faith and how much trust there is in the organization," Andersen says. "The confidence one has in the brand has a lot to do with the choices people make about donating their time and money."

"Many not-for-profits make significant investments in fundraising," Belleba adds. "Brand is an integral part of fundraising. It enables attracting donors, building strong sector relationships, and connecting with potential clients."

MARY WEISNEWSKI is principal and founder of Kite Inc., a Bellevue-based brand strategy and design firm. Reach her at 206.306.6515 or at mary.w@kite-brandstudio.com.

INSTILLING CONFIDENCE

Is your brand trustworthy? Ask yourself these questions to evaluate if your brand is trustworthy:

- Does your brand authentically reflect your core values?
- Is your brand consciously managed and leveraged to drive decisions, communications and the relationships you seek?
- Does your brand instill passion in your supporters, making them loyal fans who spread the word about your causefans who spread the word about your cause and market you for free?