

Branding Your Board

by Del Suggs

You may already be familiar with the topic of marketing. Sometimes we use other terms, such as advertising, publicity, or public relations. However, this time we're not dealing with marketing your board's events (concerts, comedians, films, etc.). We'll be looking at ways to publicize your programming board. And that all begins with Branding.

Heat Up The Branding Iron

Branding comes from the old West, as you might guess. You've seen cowboy movies where the branding iron is heated red-hot, and then applied to a steer. The scar, like a tattoo, identifies the steer as belonging to a particular ranch. That way, when the cattle were all together in a herd, it was obvious who owned each steer.

In contemporary marketing, branding uses that same concept as a metaphor. By creating a brand, you will allow the public (your customers) to identify your company. And likewise, when your campus events happen (like a herd), it will be obvious who "owns" each event.

Creating Your Brand

We tend to think of a brand as something as simple as a logo or symbol. It's actually much more complex than that. Branding is a kind of shorthand, or abbreviation. It's a summation of your "product" and all that your product embodies.

Let me give you a simple example. We all know McDonald's, the famous hamburger chain. You might think of their brand as the famous "Golden Arches." But that's really just their logo. Their brand is much more.

Ray Kroc, the developer of the modern McDonald's enterprise had a number of corporate goals: good food, fast service, and consistent flavor at every restaurant. So that's what he created. You know at every McDonald's the food will be

reasonably good, prepared reasonably fast, and that it will taste exactly the same at every McDonald's.

How about Nike? You probably think of the "Nike Swoosh", that reverse check mark they use as a logo. Or maybe you remember their famous tagline: "Just Do It."

Again, the Nike brand is far more than that. It includes the athletes who wear their shoes on the field and court. It includes the promise of enhanced athletic performance, comfort and foot protection, and durability.

See-- it's that consistency of the product that is the "brand." It's not just the logo. A brand is like a deal that a company strikes with it's customers. It says "this is who we are, and this is what we do." Brands are important because they convey a lot of information very quickly.

Why Is It Important?

You may be thinking "what does this have to do with my programming board?" Branding is essential to creating a High Powered Programming Board. Let me give you a few reasons.

First, it creates an image for your program board. It makes your board stand out from the other organizations on campus.

Second, it creates more campus awareness for your board. That means more students at your events.

Third, it helps you recruit and retain members. Does your board have too many volunteers? I didn't think so.

Fourth, it improves your "product"-- the events you produce on campus.

Finally, it strikes a deal with your students. Your brand will say: "this is a quality program" to everyone involved.

Creating A Brand

The first step is creating your brand. Pull together a committee to establish what your brand will be. Begin by creating your organizational mission statement. Why does your organization exist? What do you do? For whom do you do it?

Then look outside your organization. How do your students perceive your organization? How about the faculty, administration, and staff? Are you unknown? Do you have a negative image to overcome? Do you have a positive reputation you can build on?

The idea is to create a perceived, unique image for your board. Answering all these questions will help you to create a more vibrant and improved image for your organization.

By determining what you are supposed to do, how you are supposed to do it, and what you want your "customers" to think of you, all of this information will help you to create your brand. Sum it up as briefly as you can. This will be your brand.

Searing The Flanks

Once you've defined your purpose and image-- your brand-- then you can begin to market it. Again, learn from the professionals on Madison Avenue (that's where the big advertising agencies are located in New York, by the way).

Create a brand "message" complete with a name and logo. Maybe today you're just the Campus Program Board. With your new brand, tomorrow you could be "CPB-- We Rock Your World!" Perhaps you'd develop a logo with a globe and the letters CPB, while "Campus Program Board" is in a circle around the globe. Get the idea? Something new, unique, and exciting.

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Consistency In Your Brand

Once you've created your brand-- your perceived image and your logo-- then create a "style sheet" for use. All major corporations have a predetermined style for every aspect of their marketing.

Using our Campus Program Board example: is it abbreviated as "CPB" or is it "C.P.B."? Is it always upper case, or sometimes "cpb"? How about the font? Is it a serif, a sans serif, or something totally unique? How about the tagline "We Rock Your World!"? Is it always used with "CPB"? Is it all caps, or just the first word, or the first letter of each word?

I'm not just trying to be picky. In your Style sheet, you should standardize your name, abbreviation, spelling, font, case-- everything that deals with your brand. Look at other famous brands. You'll never see Coca-Cola spell "Coke" as all caps. You'll never see Coca-Cola written without the hyphen.

It's that consistency of style that helps to establish your brand, your image. First you create a standard style, then you use it consistently. It really works. Just ask KFC, or IBM, or McDonald's.

Use Your Brand

When you have created and standardized your brand, then it's time to use it. Put your brand on everything you do! It goes on your T-shirts. It goes on your office door. Have it tattooed on your advisor (just kidding...). It goes everywhere your organization goes.

Make sure all of your board members are knowledgeable supportive of your new brand. If you've changed names, stop using the old name. So what if it used to be called the "Campus Committee on Cocurricular Activities." Now you're "CPB-- We Rock Your World!" Use that, and

forget about the old name that nobody knew anyway.

Use your brand when you market your events. When you run an advertisement about Spring Fling in the newspaper, make sure your standardized brand is a part of the ad. Even when you put up posters and flyers on campus for an upcoming concert, include your brand on the publicity material.

It's that consistency of use that really establishes your brand. Earlier I said that brands are really a type of shorthand. When you use your brand consistently, and produce outstanding events consistently, then your brand will become synonymous with what you do.

Again, it's like Coca-Cola. They produced a high quality soft drink, standardized their brand style, and used it in all their marketing. Now people will order a "Coke" (meaning a cola drink) while they're standing in front a Pepsi sign. That's branding and marketing!

If you have any questions or comments, I'd love to hear from you. Just drop me an email, and I'll get back to you.

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