

Branding for NFPs

Martin Long



Martin Long, NFP Analysts, explains the importance of a strong brand engaging members to increase their level of involvement and to develop loyalty.

What creates a strong brand?

If we asked a random group of consumers their unprompted recall of not-for-profit organisations most would nominate the usual big charities such as the 'Salvos', Red Cross and the Heart Foundation. Others might recall a professional or industry association connected with their work and others a charity that relates to a personal interest. Does your brand have personality?

While some think this should all be left to the commercial organisations, others understand the importance of branding for not-for-profits. If you Google "breast cancer charities Australia" you get more than 867,000 results! The first page includes two pink ribbon links plus the National Breast Cancer Foundation, the McGrath Foundation and four state organisations.

A confusion of organisations but, in the public's mind, I would assume that 'pink ribbon' and all things pink are now firmly established as representative icons of the 'breast cancer' brand. This success has led to sporting teams and corporate staff wearing pink and pink food packaging to demonstrate support and raise funds. For the record, it appears that Cancer Council owns Pink Ribbon Day and they involve many other organisations for the cause. This is big business, with Cancer Council donating in excess of \$49 million in 2010.

Pink Ribbon Day is a good example of a brand with a distinct personality. It's caring, warm and feminine (the colour pink helps...) and yet determined to achieve. In fact, someone just like your mother, your wife or your sister! We connect comfortably with the brand and have empathy with its aims even as we face our own fears about the subject it promotes.

Brands evolve but they need fertile ground and nourishment to grow

A strong brand will develop from a clear mission statement that really states what the organisation stands for. A positioning statement will follow, clearly differentiating the brand from its competition and focusing on the competitive advantages. From this we consider the brand challenge – what is the consumer perception in comparison to our positioning statement? That's the real positioning – how we appear in the consumer's mind – and the strategic journey is taken from the actual perception to our desired perception. Sometimes this is a difficult task and requires change to the products and services offered by the organisation to its members and to the promotion of those services.

Some say the brand is just the name, the logo and the colours and these just need to be 'refreshed' every now and again. True, this process is often required but it doesn't work unless the qualities that underlie the physical representation of the brand are sound and valued by the member or consumer.

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How we can influence where a brand is seen and heard

We can control our image and style through advertising and print. We can manage the image at events and through publicity efforts we initiate. But how can we influence the way in which our brand is referred to, described and displayed through the exponential increase in digital media including social media platforms?

The first rule here is probably to keep things simple. Simple image, simple straplines, simple concepts that members and consumers can grasp and refer to themselves. And, as the great photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson said, "It is by great economy of means that one arrives at simplicity of expression."

One final thought: As a marketer, I've always been a bit uncomfortable with the description of our sector as 'Not-for-Profit' or 'Non profit' or even 'The Third Sector'. The first two seem to ignore the reality that most of us need to make an operating profit to provide services to our members or clients and the third, well, it's just a number. It doesn't do what a brand should do, namely, create a connection on an emotional and rational level through personality and understood values to encourage ongoing support and loyalty.

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