

Brand Your Cause!

By Tom Peterson



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Each year thousands, if not millions, will come into contact with your group. They may catch 60 seconds on the local news, see a magazine article or a friend's Facebook like. They may glimpse it on a brochure or t-shirt. The cumulative effect of these touches forms the experience that person has of your organization. Whether they sought you out or stumbled upon you, they'll judge you. If the experience is bad or mediocre, an opportunity is lost. But if it's positive—moves the person toward confidence and loyalty—you may gain a lifetime friend.



Brand Your Cause

“Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple — that’s creativity.”
— Charles Mingus

“You don’t want to be merely the best of the best. You want to be the only ones who do what you do.”
— Jerry Garcia

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A story is going around about a rat and hamster relaxing by the backyard pool. The rat asks the hamster, “What gives? We’re about the same, yet the family here loves you. They think you’re cute. They’ve given you a nice home and bring you food every day. Meanwhile, I’m out here in the rain struggling to survive. People hate me, think I’m disgusting and try to kill me. What’s the difference?” The hamster responds: “It’s just branding.”

Businesses from Starbucks, Google and Walmart to a successful local café know the power of brand. So do celebrities—think Oprah, Trump, Bono, Tiger Woods. And branding can make a giant difference to your nonprofit or cause.

Some think brand is the logo. And it is. But it’s also the name, design, color, font. And it’s your website, printed materials, how you are portrayed in the media, how supporters talk about you to their friends. It’s how someone sees you in a hundred ways, their entire experience of your organization. It’s everything a customer or supporter feels about you and your products and services. It’s up to you to create and manage a brand that works in your favor. And it’s worth obsessing over!

Why Does Your Brand Matter?

The lifeblood of your cause is that important supporter. Ideally, they'd pay attention if you simply told them of a need or something wonderful you've done. Yet every day literally thousands of messages fight for the attention of that same person you want to reach. How do you get through the clutter? How do you emotionally connect with that potential partner? An established positive brand serves as a shortcut. Like the aroma of bread baking, your brand can signal to your supporter a good feeling and help them focus on your message.

Multiple Audiences. Your brand is important to more than that supporter. In its **rebranding journey**, MD Anderson

Cancer Center noted several audiences. "Brand drives about a third of choice decision for three stakeholder groups: For pa-

tients' decision to seek treatment at MD Anderson; For physicians' decision to refer to MD Anderson, and for potential employees decision to apply to MD Anderson. It is a crucial influencer of employees' decision to remain at MD Anderson."

Define Your Brand—What Makes You Unique?

Start with a clear brand identity or position. What your organization's essence, core, values? Of course, you've got to be doing something people want. Something relevant. If you're not, go home and rethink your life. But assuming you're doing

something valuable, what makes it unique? What's your niche? If you're not different, why should anyone care about you? It may take time, but to define your brand, you've got to be able to answer these questions.

The Grateful Dead is well known for its brand identity. In

Strategy + Business

Glenn Rifkin says the group "managed to hold on to its special perch in the fickle world of entertainment for more than 30 years, becoming a gold standard in an industry that has seen thousands of other rock 'brands' come and go." Some things the Grateful Dead got right: they knew their customers; they filled a need of that customer; they created (and stayed with) a community, building great trust with their followers; they focused on quality, making sure the experience was always great. Jerry Garcia said, "You do not merely want to be considered just the best of the best. You want to be considered the only ones who do what you do."

Again, what is that core thing that only your group does? Try to create a new category, something only you do, and focus on



that. Keep your brand simple, singular. Don't try to develop more than one brand.

Consistency. Then keep focused over time. You don't develop a serious relationship with someone you just met. It takes time to know each other, learn whether they're trustworthy, fun or authentic. The same is true for your organization. Brands take time—years—to develop. Once you've developed your brand identity, let it permeate every object, every event, every message. You may even get tired of it. But you're not the audience.

Your brand has to be authentic. You have to be truly what you say you are, practice what you preach. Be transparent. And you've got to be relevant to your supporters. You've got to be doing something they want done.

Find a way to stand out. When it comes to competing for attention, mediocrity is the ultimate defeat. Find a way to be remembered, preferably related to how you operate. Girl Scouts send a couple million kids out to sell cookies. The hammer-wielding volunteer brands habitat, while Greenpeace fights high-drama battles against environment wrecking Goliaths.

Tom Peters offers these Brand Contrasts:

<i>Good Product</i>	<i>vs.</i>	<i>Great “buzz”</i>
<i>Reliable</i>	<i>vs.</i>	<i>Unique</i>
<i>Excellent</i>	<i>vs.</i>	<i>Memorable</i>

<i>Serves a Function</i>	<i>vs.</i>	<i>Tells a Story</i>
<i>Satisfies a Need</i>	<i>vs.</i>	<i>Fulfills a Dream</i>
<i>Damn good Food</i>	<i>vs.</i>	<i>Place to be Seen</i>
<i>Drives Smooth</i>	<i>vs.</i>	<i>Makes a Statement</i>

What do your supporters really desire? How does your organization need to stand out?

Beyond your control

By the way, while you can do a lot to define your brand, you can't completely control it. The media and social media can also define your brand. Nothing can stop Facebook comments, blog posts and news articles (positive or negative) from driving the conversation. Look what happened to the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure brand in February 2012. A simple announcement that they would no longer support cancer screening/prevention programs at Planned Parenthood set off a firestorm of criticism that set the brand back years. (See the *Daily Kos* story, [How to destroy your brand in 48 hours.](#))



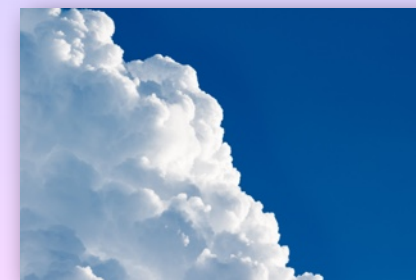
Nevertheless, for many the name Komen, still carries positive emotional power. When you hit a setback, simply get up, learn the lessons and get moving again. Brands are built over years.

The Power of Brand

Use branding principles, your logo and name consistently to make the most cost-effective impression in order to raise the most public awareness and funds possible with its limited funds. With the help of a coordinated effort, your group can become becoming a “household name” in your market.

Finally, you can’t make your brand be something you’re not. You’ll read in advice blogs and books that your brand should delight, clarify, be short, simple, reassure, connect. But first your group has to do these things in the real world. It has to provide excellent service over time..

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Case Study: Heifer Re-brand

The challenge

Heifers for Relief started out sending ships full of dairy cows and other farm animals to the countries devastated by World War II. Soon it was renamed *Heifer Project International*. For almost two decades, I led Heifer's marketing and communications. When I started in the nineties Heifer was almost 50 years old. At around \$6 million (including the \$3 million we later called marketing revenue) total income had been flat for ten years. With inflation it had shrunk by half.

In those days on my desk was a "brand" folder where I gathered materials printed by offices around the world. After some time, it contained more than 50 different versions of the Heifer logo! (Full disclosure, a couple were of my doing.) Most had a globe with longitude and latitude lines. They usually had five or six (but not always the same) animals. Peru's logo had llamas. Some logos added people or trees. The logotype was all over the place, with many fonts, colors, size variations, different words, some used all caps, and some just used HPI.

In short, the brand was out of control, confusing and ineffective.



It was time to reexamine Heifer Project International's brand, including the logo, and even the name.

Also on my desk was a directory of international humanitarian organizations. Along with the information about the 160 groups was a picture of their logo. One day in a few minutes of "research and analysis" (a.k.a. *counting*) I discovered that when you eliminated the logos with these four art elements—globes, hands, wheat and vague figures with outstretched arms—only about 10 were left! 150 organizations were using some version of four logos!



A good logo will be recognized even though it's in the background of a photo and blurred. It is simple and singular. It's unique to your group. Our (many) logos were anything but. And we had an opportunity to stand out from the crowd.

The process

We looked for help and found Seattle-based Girvin Design to lead us through a branding program. They had almost no non-profit experience (they'd just finished the Bellagio in Las Vegas) but something about them seemed right.

We wanted the process to be really "participatory." In eight different sessions, starting in 1999 we gathered input, got reactions to images, concepts, words, values from literally hundreds of volunteers, staff (including leaders from more than

40 countries), board members and others. Each time we met, the Girvin team helped us focus just a bit more.

From these sessions they developed a **Brand Positioning Statement** that emphasized self-reliance for families and sustainability. We also developed the elements of the **Brand Personality** such as *visionary* and *reliable*. Then we developed a short list of **Desired Brand Perceptions** that included *holistic solutions* and *rich legacy*.

The struggle for the logo

Now it was time to look at the logo. Creating a logo by committee is like writing by committee, except worse! It turns out that people are passionate about what symbols represent us. Everyone wanted their pet issue represented: besides a variety of animals (*goats are best!*), we had to include people because that's who we help, and a house that represents community, and a tree for the environment. And a sun that represented something that I can't even remember. After many months, we had a logo with about six elements. It sucked.

One day, in a short phone call I asked the Girvin team leader for a full design treatment that cut out everything but the one cow. They sent it, we showed it around, and that became our logo!



To rename or not to rename

And the name, did we want to change it altogether? The word *Heifer* had challenges. Few people know what one is (a young cow that hasn't yet had a calf). For many it's an insult—a large, heavy woman. We had named the magazine *World Ark*, in part, because we couldn't feature a photo of a woman—a project partner or supporter like Susan Sarandon or Oprah—on the cover and call it *Heifer*. (And... just in case we later wanted to re-name the organization World Ark).

We quickly agreed that *HPI* was cold and didn't inspire our desired brand personality. We recognized that we already had a lot of equity in the word *Heifer*. With millions of impressions out there for many it already meant our effort. So after several sessions, we decided to keep Heifer and to make the word mean us. “*International*” was kept to give the depth and breadth of the organization. It would be in smaller type to emphasize *Heifer*. “*Project*” had no value and even implied that our work was temporary. We dropped it.

“Heifer International.”

Informally, we encouraged people to simply use *Heifer*. Looking back it seems like a lot of work to just drop one superfluous word. But each step was a process we had to go through.

The roll out

Now we had a new logo and a new name. Girvin developed a brand guidebook—a tool kit with rules for colors, fonts, and

different uses—and we sent it to Heifer offices around the world.

Remember that had gone to great lengths, two years, to include the country programs in the process? When we put the new branding guidelines out there, we immediately heard that the U.S. program leadership didn't like it and wouldn't use it. "It's too whimsical!" In the country where we had to raise tens of millions of dollars each year, having two brands would be a disaster.

And from a few other countries came, "We don't like it! No one will know who we are." The African program had branded Heifer as "*HPI*." It was on all their printed materials, on the office and vehicle signs and thousands of t-shirts and caps worn by partner farmers. So several countries refused to use the new logo and branding guidelines.

After a few months of this, Heifer's president finally told them that they were free to keep their old looks, but any program that did would no longer receive funds from headquarters. Soon the new brand was universally adopted!

And a few naysayers said our donations would dry up, that people were emotionally bound to the old globe logo and the word *project*. But that first fall we mailed materials to millions of supporters using "Heifer International" along with the new logo, and did great.

During the process we also created name consistency for the country programs. That actually went well. There was a nice

ring to Heifer Uganda, Heifer China, Heifer Poland. In later battles, we brought the names of other assets into alignment. For example, the "International Learning and Livestock Center" in Arkansas (informally called "the ranch") became "Heifer Ranch." As passions come into play, change is hard for many.

Poised for growth

What should have taken less than a year took two years. With the patience of Job, Girvin stuck with us. They didn't charge any more for all their extra time and trips and were always positive.

Once we switched, it didn't take long for the old logos and name to disappear, even from our consciousness. We had moved on.

And the new logo worked fantastically. If you were to see the "leaping cow" blurred or quickly (for example, it appeared for two seconds in an episode of *The Office*) you would recognize it. It's unique. No other nonprofit has anything like it.

In 1990, Heifer's aided brand recognition among the U.S. public was less than one percent; by 2010 it was nine percent. Heifer went from unknown to one of the top recognized organizations working to end poverty. These increases are not just because of rebranding; we were mailing millions of gift catalogs every year. We had celebrity support, lots of PR, and thousands of congregations and schools were adopting our programs. But the new brand was part of the reason we were

one of the fastest growing nonprofits in the country. Between 1993 and 2010 annual marketing revenue grew from \$3 million to \$90 million.

Was the process messy? Absolutely! It could have been done differently. But we ended up with a strong brand that helped Heifer make cost-effective impressions to raise funds and public awareness. With a coordinated branding effort, once obscure Heifer was better poised to attract new supporters and deepen the connection with existing ones.

Nonprofit Brand as Place



Quit reading this and take a minute to think of an actual place that means a great deal to you—where you are energized or nourished. Is there a park, a room, a shop, a certain neighborhood or street, a section along a river?

*Hey, you're still reading!
Really, stop and think of that place.*

Now, how do you experience it? What makes it special?

When it comes to branding, it helps to think of an organization as a place we all experience. When you visit your group's place, will you feel like you're in a dark alley, not wanting to go further? Or on that pathetic street lined with fast-food restaurants, strip malls and power lines? Or hopefully, will you feel like you're in a garden or at a coffee shop full of people talking and connecting with each other?

“Brand” used to mean logo, typeface, color, packaging, jingles and ads. Today it's better thought of as the overall experience

anyone—a supporter, customer, passerby—has when they brush against your organization.

Experience of place

Each year thousands, if not millions, will come into contact with your group. They may catch 60 seconds on the local news, see a magazine article or a friend's Facebook like. They may glimpse it on a brochure or t-shirt, or talk with a staff person or volunteer. The cumulative effect of these visits forms the experience that person has of your organization. Whether they sought you out or stumbled upon you, they will judge you; if the experience is bad or mediocre, an opportunity is lost. But if it's positive—moves the person toward confidence and loyalty—you may gain a lifetime friend.



What makes a difference does place make? Here's an example condensed and paraphrased from Tony Hiss in *The Experience of Place*:

Drs. Abraham Maslow and Norbett Mintz conducted a study in the 1950s in which they asked volunteers to look at photos of people's faces. They had rigged three rooms. An ugly room looked like a janitor and storage closet with a hanging light bulb, torn shades, battleship

grey walls, boxes, trash cans, mops and dust. The beautiful room had large windows, indirect light, a Navajo rug, paintings, sculpture, beige walls, a bookcase, a soft armchair, and a mahogany desk. The average room gave the appearance of a clean, neat, office in no way outstanding.

Volunteers were told that they were studying photos of people to see whether the faces displayed “energy” and “well-being” The results: people found energy and well-being in the faces when they looked at them in the beautiful room and found fatigue and sickness in the same faces when viewed in the ugly room. Reaction to the average room more closely resembled those of the ugly room than of the beautiful room.

Other studies have found that people feel better when working in natural light. It affects your productivity, your interactions with others. Our spaces can keep us from living our best. Or they may give us energy, feed our soul. Some people do their best when spaces are organized; others prefer a bit more creative chaos. In it's wild array of variety, beauty in nature or our human-made spaces can inspire us and help our lives be more full.

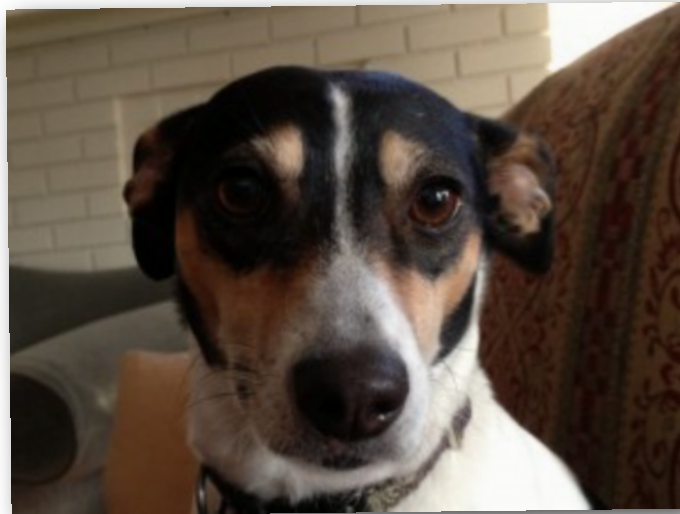
What's your nonprofit's brand? When someone comes to your place, what do they experience? Magic? Do they want to linger? Does it inspire confidence? You want them to be like those in the beautiful room. Doing so will help them feel up-

lifted, motivated and moving forward. And they'll want to come back.

Photos: Garden gate, Eptalon; coffee shop, Jonathan Billinger. Creative Commons.

How to Name Nonprofits and Programs

When we got her, we named this dog *Taz*. If you're moving forward, doing anything at all, sooner or later you'll have created something needs a name. And the choice can make a big difference. Each time you name nonprofits or programs you really want to get it right; it's exciting and seldom easy.



In *Old Possom's Book of Practical Cats* T.S. Eliot tells us:

The Naming of Cats is a difficult matter,

It isn't just one of your holiday games;

You may think at first I'm as mad as a hatter

When I tell you, a cat must have THREE DIFFERENT NAMES.

The first name, says Eliot, is the sensible everyday one the family uses: Peter, George. Electra. The second is more particular, dignified: Jellylorum, Bombalurina. The third only the cat knows, “and will never confess.” It’s the “deep and inscrutable singular name.”

At Heifer International, we had several names. The family (staff, volunteers, fans) called it *Heifer*. We encouraged that; it was short and easy. The second (official) name, *Heifer Project International, Inc.*, stemmed from its history; it's necessary for legal documents. The third—unknown to any single person—was our essence, our brand.

To name nonprofits, etc, think about three parts:

1. Common Name. This is the one to obsess over, get as right as you can. It's what you want everyone to call your organization or program. It's what appears in the news, on your materials. It has to work.

2. Official Name. If you're naming an organization, you'll need this for legal purposes. It's best if it's the same as the common name, but if that doesn't work, it should tie closely it. (There are some **state legal requirements**.) If you're just naming a program, you don't need this.

3. Brand. While most important, it's beyond the naming process and is, in Eliot's words, “the name that no human research can discover.” It results from what you do that causes people over time to have a feeling about your organization or program. You can and should try to describe it. But it's also indescribable. The essence.

Name your nonprofit or program well to give your cause a giant boost for branding, marketing—adding to your success for

years to come! The focus here is on the first, the family and common name. This is what you want to be known by.

Step one: Hunter/Gatherers

Don't name nonprofits or programs alone. Get a bunch of people involved. Make big lists of all kinds of names. Have fun. Tell friends, co-workers what you're up to and encourage anyone to make suggestions. Offer a free lunch for the person who suggests the winning name. Use libations, mind-altering substances if that's what it takes. But be free and loose. Gather all the names you can.

Step two: Murderers

Now you should have a giant quantity of possibilities.

“Whenever you feel an impulse to perpetrate a piece of exceptionally fine writing, obey it – whole-heartedly – and delete it before sending your manuscripts to press. Murder your darlings.” — Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch

Faulkner later called this heavy editing “*Kill your darlings.*” Whatever you call it, there's no time for all these options to die natural deaths. You'll have to murder or kill them all—except one. And that's the name.

Strunk and White's 14th rule in *The Elements of Style* is to avoid fancy words. “Do not be tempted by a twenty-dollar word when there is a ten-center handy, ready and able.” What's

more annoying than someone saying utilize and purchase when they mean use and buy. You may want to rethink an abstract or Latin-based candidate.

Pick a name people will won't forget. In *Made to Stick* Chip and Dan Heath describe what makes something memorable: Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, Emotional, Stories.

Websites can tell you instantly if the domain name is available. You should also check with the **U.S. trademark office** (click on trademark search) to make sure there is no conflict. At some point, you may need to hire a lawyer to help you register.

Once you've picked it, let it seep for a while. During this time, don't ask people whether they like it—God forbid, don't turn this into a vote or focus group! Instead, tell them about the organization or program using the name as though it were official. And watch for a reaction—from them and your own inner voice.

At the end of the process, you should feel good about your choice of a nonprofit name or program. (If not, go back to the drawing board!) Then you launch it! When you name nonprofits, dogs, kids, companies, it feels awkward for a few days. Then the name takes, and soon you can't imagine it any other way.

Now, who can imagine that excitable but sweet dog with any name other than Taz?