

NOTES ABOUT NONPROFIT BRANDING

What is a Brand?

A brand is the promise of a positive experience that consistently delivers a desired feeling to the target audience. The experience that's promised can be as varied as the product or service being offered. But the strongest brands are positive and consistent and resonate on an emotional level with donors, partners, volunteers and/or others.

Think of your head as a giant parking lot, with spaces for just about everything you can think of, from "chocolate cookie" to "safe automobile." Brands help products and services, whether for-profit or non-profit, get into those parking places and *stay there*.

A brand platform is a formal, internal document used by an organization to spell out its brand and serves as an internal rallying point for staff and board. Brand platforms are rarely meant for public communication. Instead, brands are presented to the public through logos, taglines, advertising and — most importantly — through **consistent experiences**.

Elements of a Brand Platform

Brand Position — this is the "parking place" that the organization wishes to capture. This could be a commonly defined parking place (healthy breakfast cereal), or a new space that the organization wishes to carve out in its audience's mental parking lot.

Brand Promise — this is, as it says, what an organization's brand is promising individuals who interact with the organization. In other words, as a consumer or donor, if I believe in your brand, what's in it for me?

Brand Attributes — these are the "personality traits" that make an organization's brand promise believable (e.g. fun, fast, sporty, innovative, cool, honest, etc.). In strong brands, the people within the organization can personify these attributes. In larger corporate brands, the attributes are portrayed through advertising.

Brand Messages — these are the verbal "sound bites" that are used to consistently describe the organization and reinforce the brand. The more they are used in speeches, printed material, on websites, etc., the more they become ingrained in the minds of target audiences.

Brand Imagery — often confused with the brand itself, brand imagery are the logo, tagline and other visual elements that are used to subtly convey brand attributes, position and promise. Although often a consumer or donor's first interaction with a brand, logos and taglines cannot deliver on an organization's brand promise. Only experience can do that.

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Why Build a Brand?

In a nutshell, brands help build strong, long-term interactions with the audiences an organization needs to survive — including donors, partners and volunteers. Here's a visual representation of how building a brand benefits an organization:

