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# Leaving Your Mark: Organized Branding for NFP Organizations

Branding has long been recognized in the for-profit business world as the most valued and impactful form of marketing any business or organization can perform. Branding is more than advertising a product or service; it's giving your company or organization an identity, a meaning in the minds of the public beyond just a name.

For example, when you think about people in your life, they are more than their name. They mean something to you. They have an identity for you encapsulated in what you call them. In its simplest, most base term – that's Branding.

And the same can be true for businesses and organizations as well:

**Walt Disney Company** – When most people hear the name Disney they think of castles and princesses, theme parks and fun. Most people give little thought, if any, to the business behind the brand, and many don't even know who Robert Iger, Disney's current CEO, is.

**The Coca Cola Company** – For many, the name Coca Cola brings with it thoughts of a cool refreshing drink on a warm summer day; or sitting in a movie theatre as the lights dim and you wait for the show to begin. Few people's first thought is how bad it is for you or where it's stock price is at.

**Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure** – The Komen Race for the Cure is an excellent example of what branding can do for a not-for-profit organization. For many, the name Komen is synonymous with the fight against breast cancer. Through their hard work and careful imaging Komen has formed a personal relationship with their supporters. The name Komen has more meaning than the organization that carries it.

That's branding!

Developing a brand used to be an expensive, time consuming proposition. There used to be little that smaller not-for-profit organizations could do to build a brand in the minds of their supporters and the public at large, but in the technological world of today, that is no longer the case!

Below are just five items any not-for-profit organization can do to help establish a brand name in the eyes of their supporters, the media and public at large.

- 1. Messaging** – Before starting any kind of coordinated marketing push it's important to craft a solid message. You need to know what you're going to say before you begin deciding how to say it. Most organizations have a mission statement, and this can be an excellent place to start, but most mission statements are too general. Your marketing message should be very specific and very tight. This will make it easier for you to ensure that all of your communications remain "on message". Once you've decided on your organization's message, stay with it! A brand isn't built over the course of weeks or even months. It takes years and decades of the same organization reinforcing the same message. Changing your messaging will cause confusion for the public. You can say it in different ways, but the message should remain the same. After all, Pepsi has been the choice of the new generation for more than twenty years, and Nike has been telling us to "Just do it" for almost as long.
- 2. Networking** – Don't underestimate the importance your connections to the community. It's a good idea to remain active with one or two associations or groups in your area that hold periodic meetings and events. Attend as many of these as possible so you become a visible part of the organization. It may also benefit you to serve on the board or on one of their various committees, this will allow you to form stronger ties and relationships with those in the organization.
- 3. Spread the Word** – Nothing will keep your organization's name and mission at the forefront of the public's minds quite like an electronic newsletter. If your organization doesn't have an electronic newsletter yet start one immediately. It's simple, effective, and costs only the time it takes to put it together. This can be a great way to stay in front of your supporters and allows them to share in your organizations success as you work together to accomplish your mission.
- 4. Social Media** – Over the last decade social media has become somewhat of a Technological buzz word. If it seems like everyone's doing it – that's because they are! The internet has changed every facet of marketing, and social media is a big part of that. In today's world, news stories, organizational updates, and important announcements of all kind are made through social media and travel at unimaginable speed. Before jumping in get your feet wet by familiarizing yourself with social media options. Blogs, Facebook, and Twitter can all be invaluable tools, but first you have to learn how to use them.

5. **Press-ing the Issue** – Most smaller not-for-profit organizations are afraid to approach the media. Often, they feel as if it isn't their place, but this couldn't be further from the truth. In reality most media outlets are as hungry for content as you are for media attention. Just remember to approach them the right way. This means identifying a story within your organization that's worthy of media attention and selecting the right publications and reporters to reach your target audience. Then put together a "press kit" that includes the story idea, information on experts they can use as sources, and why it's relevant and how it relates to something in today's news.

The dawn of the digital age has brought with it more opportunity for not-for-profits to leave their mark than ever existed before. With the right approach it's now possible for any not-for-profit to establish a meaning beyond just their name.

For more information on how the trusted advisors at Lane Gorman Trubitt, LLP can help you and your organization do not hesitate to contact David Ovesen, Partner-in-Charge of the LGT Not-For-Profit Niche at (214) 461-1443 or by email at [dovesen@lgt-cpa.com](mailto:dovesen@lgt-cpa.com).