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## BRANDING in the Non-Profit World

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**W**hat is a brand? In essence, it is a concept, a specific word or phrase you occupy in a person's mind. It is also a promise of what will be delivered. For example, people expect quality if they buy a Honda automobile which includes durability and low maintenance costs.

How important is the brand in marketing and to success in the marketplace? Very. Think about it. People don't say they need a photocopy, they say they need a Xerox™. They don't ask for plastic tape, they ask for Scotch tape™; they don't want a plastic wrap, they want Saran Wrap™. At its strongest a brand "owns" the concept of the generic product in many consumers' minds.

To a non-profit organization, the brand is perhaps the single most important asset they have. Successful non-profit branding can greatly impact the non-profit's mission, profile and fundraising. If built and promoted well, it is like having an introduction in the person's mind, or having a door opened. A strong brand creates trust and builds recognition. Properly managed, this can be converted into affinity, loyalty, and a long-term relationship.

For example, when there is a disaster some place you will receive appeals from several relief organizations. If you have only \$25 to give and the choices are World Vision, Friends in the West, and Disaster Relief International, chances are you would choose World Vision due to the strong brand equity they hold in your mind.

The World Vision brand is strong and well managed. When Christians turn on the news and hear about a natural disaster, many offer assistance and support to World Vision without even being contacted directly. World Vision "owns" the concept of disaster relief in many Christian minds, largely due to effective branding.

While a strong brand and its resulting effects cannot be created overnight, it can happen, if a clear plan exists and the non-profit is committed to the process of brand building. Kristine Webster, president of The Canterbury Group, offers several tips as a good starting point.

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# WRITING FOR THE WEB: 10 Basics

What is the most common thing visitors do on your web site? The majority go to our sites seeking information. Simply, most come to do one thing: read.

However, writing for the Web is not the same as writing for print because people read differently on the Web. In fact, many times the value placed on a Web site's words isn't commensurate with the value we place on its cool design.

At least, that's the view of content guru Gerry McGovern, author of two books about the Web: **Content Critical** and **The Web Content Style Guide**. Specifically, he says "the ability to create and publish quality content is a critical skill in the information economy."

Speaking at a San Francisco conference last March on web site usability, Gerry laid out his golden rules of writing powerful content that will pull readers or customers into your site.

**1. Know your reader.** Don't think of your "audience" as a faceless customer base. Gear your content to a particular person you think best represents the face of the people who use your site. Maybe he's a 72-year-old retiree who is fond of cruise line vacations. Whatever. Write to HIM.

**2. Develop a style and tone.** Develop a voice that speaks to that individual. Be sure that your site writers and copywriters adhere consistently to that style and tone. Develop tools to help: invest the time and energy to pull together a style guide and word and phrase glossary. Otherwise, your style and tone comes across as flat.

**3. Understand legal and copyright issues.** If you outsource any writing on your site to freelancers, have a clear understanding of copyright and fair use laws. For example, will writers producing articles for your site maintain ownership of the piece, or would you prefer to buy their words for your own exclusive use? There are many shades of gray in between those two extremes. (See [www.publaw.com](http://www.publaw.com) for more information.)

**4. Size does matter.** In web writing, shorter is actually better. The "word count" feature on your tool bar should become one of your most intimate friends. Readers online are impatient; it's difficult to read documents on a screen that run longer than 500-700 words. This rule doesn't apply only to text. Think short headers (4 to 8 words), short article summaries (30-50 words), short sentences (15-20 words), and short paragraphs (40-70 words). Really. It. Works.

**5. Be direct and compelling.** Remember Faulkner's words: "Kill your darlings." Those pieces of text on your site that are so well-crafted they bring tears to your eyes should be your first target: Strike them out. Really. Stick a stake straight through their beautiful hearts. As coarse and

unlovely as you view them, practical bullet points and straight-to-the-matter text are what you want.

**6. Titles are critical.** Headings on the web are even more critical than they are in print. They should be short, of course, but also descriptive. Think keywords and search engines. Tempting as it may be, avoid clever headlines: Save your creativity and double-entendres for the subheads.

**7. Summaries should—guess what!—summarize.** Many of your so-called readers are actually scanners. Scanners impatiently look for the good stuff they need, so be sure that any summary truly offers the essence of a longer piece...and entices the reader to read on. An accurate summary is also critical for top search engine results and for other web sites that might want to link to yours.

**8. Write for searchers.** Throw plenty of relevant keywords into your headlines and summaries. Google will love you for it.

**9. Create web documents.** Okay, so there are those times when a longer piece of text really is necessary. You just have too much to say to cram into 700 words. In that case, you have two options: Publish it as an Adobe PDF file, or write a punchy summary in HTML that links to another web page. Break up that lengthy document in any way you can: Pull out quotes in a larger font size, use sub-headings within the text, break out interesting sidebars, or use hypertext links to break up blocks of text.

**10. Edit, edit, edit!** Get that first draft out. And then get out your chainsaw and slice it neatly in half. After that, produce your choicest set of editorial surgical tools and precisely cut and remove excessive words and verbose prose. Be your own editor, before your readers take a look at it. It's less painful to criticize yourself than to hear it from others. ◇

## BRANDING continued

- **Appoint a Brand Manager.** This person should be the brand traffic cop, making sure everyone is moving in the correct direction and that there is a consistent brand message/image being used. The brand manager should review all materials, web pages, ads, etc., to make sure the right message is consistently conveyed.
- **Define the Brand.** Look at your mission statement, programs, and values. The brand image must work with them, and truly represent them. Ask questions regarding who you are, what you do, how you do it, and most importantly, whom do you help? Most non-profits rely on the kindness of donors, for whom consistency is key; if the brand, mission, and goals aren't in sync, donors will notice, and you will lose the relationship the non-profit has cultivated over time.
- **Check Out the Competition.** With more than 700,000 charities in the U.S. alone, most likely there are other charities in your "space." How do you compare? What do you do better or worse than they? This form of benchmarking provides insight into an organization's core competencies and allows formulation of a brand strategy that sets you apart from similar groups.
- **Educate the Organization About the Brand.** Once senior personnel have defined the brand, make sure all employees and volunteers understand the brand, why it is important, and how they are part of the brand building and maintenance process. Integral to success is the support of all, from board members to junior staffers.
- **Employ Integrated Marketing.** Your marketing and communication plans must support and reinforce the brand. Make sure the strategic plan of the non-profit incorporates and supports the brand image at every turn. Everything from logo and colors to typeface, language and placement must carry from piece to piece. Remember, brand equity and loyalty is built over time and requires clarity and consistency.
- **Put the Brand In the Driver's Seat.** The brand should be a carefully planned part of each communication, whether it is an appeal, a newsletter, a website, collateral materials or a special event. The brand is part of the non-profit's personality.

Remember, a strong brand adds value and creates affinity and loyalty, which are important to a non-profit's future stability and effectiveness. So be consistent with your brand and use it to differentiate yourself from the crowd. Brand building requires commitment and patience, but the benefit is well worth the effort. ◇

## "GO TO" WEB SITES

Spyware is a generic term typically describing software whose purpose is to collect demographic and usage information from your computer, usually for advertising purposes. The term is also used to describe software that 'sneaks' onto the system or performs other activities hidden to the user. Spyware apps are usually bundled as a hidden component in mis-labeled "freeware" and shareware applications downloaded from the Internet—a spyware module may be active on your computer at this moment without your knowledge! These modules are almost always installed on the system secretly, suggesting that spyware companies know how users feel about such software and figure that the best/only way to ensure its widespread use is to prevent the end-user from discovering it.

Advertising-supported software, if done properly, is a unique and viable business model in which software developers can make money without requiring the end-user to pay for the software. However, the key words are if done properly, which is often not the case. While it may come as no surprise that adware uses your Net connection to download ads, you would have good reason to be concerned about the large amounts of data flowing in the *other direction*. Several adware applications have been known to secretly snoop around areas of your computer where they don't belong, including your browser history.

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David Howard, a columnist for Smart Business Magazine, calls this type of software “leechware” and advises paying attention if you see these names while downloading/installing software.

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Cydoor Technologies</b> | Delivers banner, pop-up, or keyword advertising regardless of whether you're running the application it came with.  |
| <b>eZula</b>               | In TopText program, advertisers purchase contextual links to popular keywords like “travel” and “sports equipment.” Golden-highlighted links then appear atop regular text on a Web page. |
| <b>Gator.com</b>           | Offers various advertising services and a wallet service, but recently suspended its Companion Pop-up Banner, at least temporarily.   |
| <b>Onflow</b>              | Provides online advertising, including tracking technology that reports the number of times ads get viewed.   |
| <b>WebHancer</b>           | Secretly installs on hard drive and, in the words of its own Web site, “transparently monitors Internet performance.”   |
| <b>WhenU.com</b>           | Offers targeted ads, mostly in the form of pop-up coupons.  |

Fortunately there are some solutions. Some Web sites to visit include:

- [grc.com/optout.htm](http://grc.com/optout.htm)
- [www.scumware.com](http://www.scumware.com)
- [www.spychecker.com](http://www.spychecker.com)
- [www.sunbelt-software.com](http://www.sunbelt-software.com)
- [www.lavasoftusa.com](http://www.lavasoftusa.com)
- [www.simplythebest.net/info/spyware.html](http://www.simplythebest.net/info/spyware.html)
- [www.spyware.co.uk](http://www.spyware.co.uk)
- [www.zonelabs.com](http://www.zonelabs.com)

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