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Nonprofit Branding

Mark di Soma, of the branding agency known as Audacity Group, has a very curious description of the topic that every individual has at least heard: brand. "Brand is the 'f' word of marketing. People swear by it, no one quite understands its significance and everybody would like to think they do it more often than they do" (AllAboutBranding.com). In essence, branding is a topic that every company should be thinking about. No matter how hard a company wishes the business or nonprofit to be seen through their own exact eyes, it is only how the customers accurately feel about a company that matters. Truly, the perceptions in the mind of the consumers are what businesses work tirelessly to alter in the businesses' favor. A good brand not only puts the business in a good light and further increases its scope, but it actually becomes a part of the consumer. The consumer will develop such a brand loyalty that the brand is no longer a choice, but a way of life.

One particular sector that must maintain a strong brand to stay alive is a nonprofit organization. Nonprofits rely on donations from consumers to help the organizations strive to succeed their particular goals. In the workforce jungle, nonprofits could be seen as the grass grazers of the world, with corporations and huge agencies as the meat-eaters. Since nonprofit organizations naturally have very low budgets to succeed their goals, they must be effective and creative in creating a strong brand to put out to the consumers. Three companies that have

created such an effective brand are YMCA, The Salvation Army and United Way of America (nonprofit.about.com). These top companies are like the “Coca-Cola” of effective nonprofit brands. These brands have developed a strong, deep running relationship with its audience and have kept that relationship open so that communication is essential. By effectively branding, these three nonprofit organizations are recognized as some of the greatest nonprofits in the world. Using platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, nonprofits are working hard to create a strong visual identity that supports the company’s inner objections, visions and values.

One resourceful blog that dives into the realm of nonprofit branding and messaging is known as “bigduck”. The blog reveals a model in which they have entitled, “brandraising”, to help showcase what a nonprofit organization should do to create a strong, strategically sound brand. It identifies three levels of the branding pyramid including the organizational, identity and experiential level (bigducknyc.com). At the top of the pyramid lies the core of branding: the vision, mission, objectives, personality, positioning and its intended target audience. Identifying these areas is vital to sustain open communication between the organization and the public. A weak brand can absolutely destroy an organization or nonprofit, where the basic organizational tiers illuminated by the nonprofit do not match up with the consumers.

At the most basic level, a good brand conveys who the company is, what the company believes in and why the company exists. At the identity level, which is the level most consumers see as “branding”, the visual identity and messaging platform is created to fulfill the nonprofit’s purpose. Since nonprofits have such a small budget to put toward bettering their brand, they must use strategically creative messaging to communicate effectively to the consumers. Lastly,

at the bottom level of the branding pyramid as outlined in the blog is the experiential level. This level deals solely with the channels and tools through which the consumers connect with the organization. One prevalent tool being used with organizations all around the world to help communicate with their intended audience is social media. Social media has become one of the most dominant forces in creating a strong relationship between the nonprofit and its audiences. Through platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, an organization directly links to its audience in a way that deems to be more effective than other forms marketing, such as radio or television advertisements. Bigduck has created its own path where it not only addresses the topic of nonprofit branding, but helps its viewers achieve their branding ambitions. The blog breaks down into specific steps how to build up a company's brand by not only just throwing out information about what branding is, but pushing along a company to achieve a stronger, more durable brand that will be truly successful (bigducknyc.com).

Another influential blogger on the subject of nonprofit branding is a woman by the name of Nancy Schwartz. Schwartz uses real-life companies to help build the concept of branding as a fundamental area that every organization should deem critical. Looking at case studies of nonprofit organizations that have succeeded and failed can help the readers of different organizations to build knowledge on branding so that past trials at it will be more successful than not (gettingattention.org). According to Schwartz,

" The marketplace has changed. Our audiences will talk about us whether we like it or not. It's time that nonprofits join the conversation. Developing a brand is a proactive strategy. For example, a well-established brand can help your organization carve out a unique position for itself in the public mindset, preventing negative images of other organizations (e.g., United Way scandal) from spilling over to your nonprofit."

Throughout the branding process a business can learn the most operative methods to creating a lasting relationship between itself and its consumers. Schwartz knows how important branding is, and that there are so many people out there that are so unfamiliar with the term that they choose to not place as much importance in it. Another very resourceful thing that Schwartz does is keep up with the current job openings in the field of marketing and posts the different job openings and locations whenever they arise (gettingattention.org).

Nonprofit organizations are the main topic that will be covered on this blog, focusing on the specific topic of branding and how crucial it is for the survival of a nonprofit. Also, the blog will include highlighted nonprofits that deserve to be showcased for their successful branding. The audience that has come to this blog will be invited to showcase their picks on successful nonprofits around the world, because there are so many nonprofits that it would be difficult to highlight them all.

To set this blog apart from the rest in the competitive world of blogging, this blog will focus on the visual identity discussed previously, concerning the dominant players of social media. When stripped down to its bare, nonprofits each have a mission they want to accomplish and need donations, time given or opinions shared for that mission to occur. And let's face it, it is everyone's intention to help out a nonprofit in need. However, with the busy world of people getting in the way of that intention, it becomes very hard to present a logical appeal that pushes the consumer to help out. By using an emotional appeal in nonprofits, the organization can actually show the consumer the benefits of supporting that particular nonprofit. Words are a valuable tool to express the vision and needs that a nonprofit has,

although words can be cheap. In the world we live in today, seeing is believing. By using strong photography and videos, a nonprofit can actually show the audience the outcomes of supporting them and also show exactly what the problem is that they are trying to address.

Alan Fletcher, the author of the book “The Art of Looking Sideways”, gives a very simple example of what exactly branding looks like (AllAboutBranding.com). He says,

“A lady, sitting next to Raymond Loewy at dinner, struck up a conversation.
 'Why', she asked 'did you put two Xs in Exxon?'
 'Why ask?' he asked
 'Because', she said, 'I couldn't help noticing?'
 'Well', he responded, 'that's the answer.'”

Branding has now become the driving force in creating the open relationship between organizations and their audiences. Successful nonprofit branding attracts its consumers to support it then uses the different available tools to help differentiate it from the rest. Since the public is the primary area that nonprofits are focused on, it becomes visible of how vital the topic of branding is to the success of any organization.

Hopefully through the discussion of what branding is, especially in the concentrated area of nonprofits, the public can begin to see that without a strong brand a nonprofit cannot exist. A brand seeks out to become something that is molded into a person. The brand loyalty from the consumer becomes so strong that it is the brand that becomes them. This is where the organizations work to form such a strong relationship with its consumers that positive perceptions are given. However, not everything out in the world is positive, so branding also brings with it the communication between the organization and its audience which isn't so positive. This is when an organization knows that they are doing it right. Open communication

takes along with it the good and the bad. To only look at the positive feedback that an audience has is to ignore the primary problems that could exist. Listening and asking the organizations consumers what they think can go such a long way. However, this is an area that takes time and effort to put forth in order to be successful. It is the difference between being taken up and being brought into the light or being left out to dry.

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