

Non-Profit Edition: How to Capture Attention with Brand

Brand still has the power to create a compelling presence even for a non-profit

- Brand inspires people to care.
 - To set this up in a context familiar to all non-profits...fundraising. The person who cares the most about your cause is you. You may find people who have somehow been touched by your cause, but this is more the exception than the rule. There are many non-profits with the same or very similar cause from which donors can choose.
 - “But we do it so much better!” , which then becomes a conversation about brand. This leads back to the three brand questions: 1) Who am I? 2) How am I different? and 3) Why do you want me? The articulation of these is where the skill is at. These can make or break whether people feel inspired or not and ultimately choose you or not.
 - What’s important in the articulation? 1) To tell a story - why are you even here? What motivated you to start this? What is your purpose? 2) To connect to the emotional pay-off for the fundraiser. This is generally rooted in impact and how it is benefiting THEM. 3) Make it focused. We tend to throw everything and the kitchen sink into our narratives and all we end up doing is diluting them.
 - These 3 questions come to life verbally in what we call the Brand Story, Brand Character and Tone-of-Voice and visually in the Brand Toolkit (logo, fonts, colors, textures, photography, icons). These create a brand foundation by which you then generate all other communications.
 - When we initially make this point, people sometimes give us the skeptical side-eye. But as we dive into all of the ways this comes to life, their heads literally turn as they engage. We know this can seem daunting, but when you take the time to get this right it really does become your true differentiator and reason to care.
- Brand cultivates culture.
 - It can be difficult to attract top talent because generally non-profits pay lower than for-profit businesses. And what’s more, many non-profits rely on volunteers for staffing. So, how do you make up for the pay deficit? With culture. Culture becomes an equalizer for some who want to be part of something bigger than themselves and feel like their efforts are making a difference.
 - It sn’t easy working at non-profits. With lean and mean teams, talent is expected to wear many hats and the work can be mentally, physically and emotionally draining. Which is why cultivating a culture that attracts and keeps talent and volunteers is so critical.
 - How do you cultivate culture? Through Brand of course! Culture is the manifestation of brand, not the other way around. Your Brand Story, Brand Character, and TOV as well as the Mission, Vision and Values play a big role in helping define the parameters, but the key is in the activation. This means defining the behaviors and actions which will shape the culture.
- Brand establishes a clear hierarchy by which to establish partnerships.
 - A non-profit rarely operates autonomously. Bringing on partners to extend their service offerings and build advocacy is essential. However, it can pose a problem if the partner’s brand is stronger than the non-profit’s.
 - When this happens, the attention on the non-profit can be dwarfed by the brand who has a clearer, more defined presence. This makes it harder for the non-profit to get the attention they need to continue attracting resources and other partners.
 - Without clear brand guidelines and rules for engagement, it makes it hard to mandate certain visual and verbal guidelines. For example, prominence of logos and rules around lock-ups, inclusion and prominence in collateral, decision-making authority on co-sponsored programs and events. The brand becomes the filter by which all these choices are made and enforced.
 - Non-profits are often “small but mighty” and they don’t always get the presence they deserve. This can make it hard for donors to choose them and employees to stay motivated. Having a brand allows for a seat at the table in a very real way with the “big guys”. It says, we deserve to be here and we are not going to give in or go away!
- Brand creates consistency in communication that lifts the business.
 - We often say brand is built from the inside out. So, you won’t have clear and compelling external communications if internally people aren’t talking consistently about the brand. Because you are lean and mean, you need the power of the brand to lift you. The brand gets its fuel from consistent communication.
 - This doesn’t mean people are robotic in their story-telling, but it does mean everyone has a message track. This message track is anchored in the brand. It ensures first that people have internalized and can own the brand and then articulate it in a way that feels and sounds like them but with key messages that are consistent within the brand architecture.
 - This informs the external outreach which can look like marketing materials, tools, channels, pitches, talks, etc. With the brand serving as the brief, the creation and execution of these tools becomes more efficient. The consistency in the execution also serves as that fuel I mentioned making your efforts more productive. For orgs that are lean and mean, this is super critical.
 - When you create this consistency can you start owning your space. You are able to carve a moat despite the fact that other nonprofits may have the same or similar causes. This also creates a level of authenticity that inspires and differentiates.

