

# Branding *Be your school's brand manager*



*A brand is more than just your logo or motto. It is also about the perception your school creates in the minds of your students, parents and neighborhood when they see your name and logo. A brand should:*

- *Be your identity—the values, culture and personality that distinguishes your school from any other.*
- *Reinforce and remind students and the community of immediate and future goals.*
- *Build connections and perceptions that create a sense of ownership for your school community.*
- **BE CONSISTENT.**

## Your school is a brand – That makes you a brand manager

In recent years, your role has expanded, whether you know it or not – whether you like it or not. You now also must be the top brand steward for your school.

## Clarifying the meaning of “brand”

The word “brand” is not well understood by the masses.

A brand is NOT:

- Your brand is not a logo – a logo is simply a visual expression of the brand
- Your brand is not the name or the slogan
- Your brand is not owned by you

A Brand IS:

- Your brand is the sum total of all associations with your school
- Your brand is what people say about your school ... when you are not in the room
- Your brand is your responsibility to manage, protect, and advance

Your brand is how people feel about your school based on their cumulative experiences with you – online, offline, in person, in writing, what they hear, what they read, what they believe. Whatever you choose for your brand platform, those themes must carry across every aspect of the school’s practices, events, and communications. Clarity and consistency across channels is crucial.

## Words are not enough

Your actions need to back them up.

Remember, this is not just about what you say. Lead with action and support it with your communications. Everything must be aligned to support your brand – from physical spaces to the brand identity to internal events and rituals to marketing efforts to your teachers, staff, and others. (see checklist)

## Seek inspiration from your favorite brands

Just because you're a school doesn't mean you are relegated to looking at other school branding models. There is a world of brands out there that captures hearts, minds, and dollars, and you should think about whether some of them offer lessons in branding for your school.

## The Exercise

- 1) Write down three adjectives/emotions that immediately come to mind when you think of your school.
- 2) Ask two-three co-workers to do the same.
- 3) Ask two-three non-employees (parents, students, school neighbors) to do the same.

## The Results

Where there any similarities in the responses? Any surprises?

What attributes or descriptors do you hope people will think of first when they hear your school name? Are any of these similar to your experiment?

If you had multiple answers, here are some possible steps to cultivate a unique and impactful school brand:

### **STEP 1: DEFINE YOUR BRAND VALUES**

The first step in creating your brand is to define your uniqueness (much like we did in the exercise). During this stage, it's important to seek feedback from staff related to such questions as "What's important to you?" "Who are we now or where are we now?" "Who do we want to be?" "What are our strategic goals?"

After you gather feedback, it's then important to gain agreement across the organization. Try organizing a brainstorming session where you list your values and prioritize them based on what you believe in and want your organization to stand for. Think of your values in terms of words that could represent them and your organization. Ensure input is integrated from across the team and then align upon six to eight words or phrases that define your brand.

This step was much like our little exercise. For most of you, this is probably how you came up with your mission statement if you have one. If you don't have one you can try this technique to help you come up with one.

## **STEP 2: BE CONSISTENT! STAY CONSISTENT!**

Step 2 is about being consistent and repetitive in displaying your brand's values in everything you do. Your core brand values should drive everything everyone does in your school. Consistency sets expectations and reliance on what you offer thereby reinforcing your brand.

Inconsistency in the use of logos, image and video quality, "about" descriptions, and even slogans is a significant branding challenge for many schools. Ensuring your students/parents find consistent representations of your brand during their online search is important for building a sense of familiarity, dependability, and trust. Avoid constantly changing your logo/look/motto.

## **STEP 3: CREATE AND INTEGRATE YOUR DISTINCT VOICE**

Every interaction – written and verbal – with students, employees, board members and community members should have a set tone of voice. Your voice should be consistent across every interaction to make an impact on the experience people have with your brand.

## **STEP 4: BUILD YOUR BRAND THROUGH GOOD CITIZENSHIP AND ADVOCACY**

When you establish your brand and parents understand that they and their kids are part of it, they then want to share. Part of building your brand is also involving and engaging the community, seeking brand champions amongst that audience and building connections.

## **5. LOOK CRITICALLY AT THE BRAND IDENTITY OF OTHER SCHOOLS**

Other schools can also be a great place to look for school branding examples. After all, you offer similar programs and are competing for similar target audiences. It can be highly instructive to examine how similar schools are presenting themselves in the market, and which elements they're emphasizing to make emotional connections with their target audiences.

Taking the time to look at other schools' messaging can offer you fresh insights into your own evolving brand identity – helping you distill the most memorable, unique, and emotionally stirring impression of all.

*Compiled from the following:*

*"Raise Your Hand Texas" newsletter; What Every Public School Leader Should Know About Marketing and Branding Their School.*

*5 Steps to More Unique & Impactful School Branding; Date posted: June 23, 2017.*

*Forecast5 Analytics, Five Steps to Creating Your School's Brand; Posted on Dec 19, 2017.*

## **Recommended Reading**

**BrandEd: Tell Your Story, Build Relationships and Empower Learning**, by Trish Rubin and Eric Sheninger.

Rubin - former educator now marketing consultant - believes it's up to school leaders to now become the "storyteller-in-chief" by defining their school's brand. Rubin and Sheninger's book provides a step-by-step framework to the nuances of spreading good school news and winning support.

# School Branding Audit Checklist

*Some elements to consider*

Every experience, every touchpoint, communicates something about your school. The following is a list of possible areas for discussion and exploration about how you can optimize what you are doing to establish and advance your school's brand. Consider this just a starting point. You will no doubt come up with many more.

## PHYSICAL SPACES

- Signage
- Lobby
- Front office, staff offices
- Hallways
- Classrooms
- Cafeteria, gym, teacher's lounge
- \*Bathrooms, floors, ceilings

## BRAND IDENTITY

- Name (full vs. shortened)
- Logo
- Mission/vision/values
- Positioning
- Value proposition (features + benefits)
- Key messages/elevator speech
- Slogans
- School colors
- Voice/persona
- Mascot

## INTERNAL EVENTS/RITUALS

- Drop-off/pickup
- Assemblies
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Open houses/tours
- Carnivals
- Movie nights
- Fairs
- Field days
- Spelling bees
- Graduation ceremony

## MARKETING CHANNELS

- Website
- Social media presences
- Business cards
- Brochures
- E-mail newsletters
- Newsletters & letters

## PEOPLE

- Administration/staff
- Teachers
- Volunteers
- PTA/PTO

## EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

- Parents
- Media
- Realtors
- Online review sites (GreatSchools, Yelp, etc.)
- Neighborhood/community events
- Neighborhood groups
- Elected/appointed officials
- Peer principals (if families move)
- School board
- District office staff
- Business/community leaders & groups
- Other influencers online/offline

\* These are included to reinforce that you should be open to every possibility about how to communicate something about your school. It is not to say that you must find a way to integrate your brand into bathrooms, floors, and ceilings.