

Branding and Integrated Communications

by Jacqueline Bassey, MBA, CAPM

On June 15, 2023, the School of Business at Molloy University continued its workshop series regarding Professional Development and Community Capacity Building, sponsored by a Mother Cabrini Health Foundation grant. This grant creates opportunities for nonprofit organizations on Long Island to receive training, mentoring, and technical assistance for staff at all levels. This workshop was titled “Branding and Integrated Communication” and featured speakers Rebecca Brawley, MBA, Founder of Platinum Consulting Services; Donna Iucolano, Ph.D., Marketing Professor at Molloy University School of Business; and Peggy Maher, Chief Development Officer, Catholic Health and VP for Development, St. Francis Hospital Foundation.



Donna Iucolano



Rebecca Brawley



Peggy Maher

A synopsis of the Branding and Integrated Communication workshop follows.

The key to brand awareness is to tell a story. Although a nonprofit may have an incredible story, navigating how to tell it is challenging. Marketing is one of the most powerful tools fundraisers can use to tell their story to the world. Although the concept of marketing has been around since as early as 1500 BCE when societies in Mesopotamia would stamp products with their signature mark to ensure quality control¹, it has grown exponentially within the past decades due to the new strategies, competitive markets, and a “tech-savvy” generation entering the workforce. To succeed in marketing, nonprofits must build a brand and adapt to integrated communications.

The Four Ps of Marketing

While the generality of marketing can be quite broad, it can be summarized by a concept called *The Four Ps*: Product, Place, Price, and Promotion. One Long Island nonprofit organization that has adopted a strong model is Catholic Health. **Product** is the solution your nonprofit provides for its cause. For Catholic Health, this would be providing exceptional healthcare service close to home. **Place** refers to the physical and digital spaces to tell stories. In the nonprofit industry, physical spaces might include institutions providing service, mailings, fundraising events, or small (or one-on-one) cultivation events to engage prospects and donors. Digital spaces could include websites, social media, or email campaigns. **Price** refers to a nonprofit’s donations and sponsorships. Many nonprofits aim to improve fundraising; sometimes, donations and sponsorships will cover marketing expenses to tell the organization’s story. **Promotion** helps put all the Ps in place—ensuring a consistent message, an amplified sense of pride and achievement, and an obligation to your donors that builds a sense of trust with their money.

Branding

Branding is the process of creating a *distinct identity* for your organization, with your target audience in mind. This audience may include beneficiaries and important, front-facing people, such as volunteers, donors, and the public, who may directly or indirectly benefit from your nonprofit. The goal is to help people recognize the nonprofit and its mission, influence how people might perceive messages, and gain support for its good work. For Marketing Professor Donna Iucolano, an expert in corporate marketing, the brand is more than just a logo. It also consists of your visual design, acronyms you may refer to your organization by, and the tone of voice in which the message is communicated. In today’s world, branding is quite psychological. It is important to pre-define what your brand will consist of through “branding standards.” For a successful brand, the branding standards should be a guideline followed each time a message is conveyed to your audience. Depending on the organization, this could be different logo formats, specific colors, special wording or slogans, or legal disclaimers. If a branding strategy is implemented correctly, the results could greatly benefit the organization (e.g., via increased trust and loyalty from supporters, strong fundraising results, and new opportunities).

Integrated Marketing and Communications

Once a strong brand is established, nonprofits will be able to put the brand to work through **Integrated Marketing and Communications (IMC)**, which will consistently implement the brand’s messaging across all platforms to reach the target audience. In short, IMC gives nonprofits a way to reinforce branding and marketing. IMC can be divided into two categories – traditional marketing and digital marketing. **Traditional Marketing** includes primarily tangible marketing strategies, such as flyers, brochures, direct

mail, radio/TV advertising, and the organization's name and logo. **Digital Marketing** consists of digital channels, such as the organization's website, email marketing, online advertising, and search (paid and organic). It is important that brands utilize *both* traditional and digital marketing, and tailor the channels based on your specific brand and audience. One example can be seen in Catholic Health's fundraising appeals. A quarterly appeal may consist of *both* a series of emails and a physical direct mailing. Covering an array of channels ensures that the brand and its communications are seen by more people, resulting in higher return rates. It is important to utilize channels that fit the organization's target and budget, and it is also important to track analytics from the marketing channel to figure out what works and what does not work specifically for your organization.

Maintaining Message Consistency

One of the most important parts of branding is ensuring that the message is consistent across all traditional and digital outlets. This will ensure there is brand equity and trust. Peggy Maher, CDO of Catholic Health, spoke about the challenges of rebranding several hospitals with unique identities into one, consistent brand – Catholic Health. "Each hospital ...has a very unique identity within the communities they operate. St. Charles Hospital in Port Jefferson has a very different identity from Mercy Hospital in Rockville Centre, which is different again from Good Samaritan University Hospital in West Islip," Maher stated. The challenge for the organization was retaining the benefits from each entity. In this instance, the organization must find a way to streamline the brand but tailor the message to the individual entity or service line. One way this could be done for nonprofits is through testimonials or stories from those directly benefiting from the nonprofit.

IDEA

Building your nonprofit's brand is all about strategy. A nonprofit must be proactive and deliberate and treat the strategy as if it was a for-profit brand. One way to do this is through the **IDEA Framework for Strategic Nonprofit Branding**ⁱⁱ, which includes a brand's integrity, democracy, ethics, and affinity. **Brand Integrity (I)** is when a nonprofit's internal identity also matches the external image and perception, and both are aligned with the mission. The goal of brand integrity is for the public to understand *why* the organization's brand matters. **Brand Democracy (D)** refers to how the organization communicates its core identity to others. It builds trust through employees, members, and volunteers and is an important consideration, especially when implementing social media campaigns (having a centralized group of people running the pages to promote consistency). **Brand Ethics (E)** is not just about being known as *ethical*; rather, it refers to how the brand's visual identity reflects the nonprofit's core values and conveys its values to the public. **Brand Affinity (A)** examines whether the brand will work well with other brands to promote collective interest. If a nonprofit has a strong brand affinity, it will be able to attract partners and collaborators to form a mutually beneficial partnership. An example would be a nonprofit partnering with local businesses to sponsor a walk-a-thon. The nonprofit would benefit from the proceeds and name recognition, and the local businesses would benefit from the sponsorship, advertising, and added corporate social responsibility. Rebecca Brawley, entrepreneur and Founder of Platinum Consulting Services, poses the question of how a nonprofit can put IDEA to work. She poses the Smokey the Bear Wildfire Prevention Campaign from the 1950s. "[It] was about a singular event of a wildfire in New Mexico and transformed into a national movement." This is a great example of how a company used the IDEA framework to identify what needs to be accomplished, figure out who needs to

be involved, and use the influence they gained to have companies become more sustainable. “Using brand leverage to *inspire* change is what we mean by framework.”

Mistakes to Avoid

While building an effective brand will help your nonprofit “level up,” it is important to avoid these common mistakes:

1. **Not being proactive or strategic.** Branding and IMC should not be an afterthought. It is important to consider planning. Designate specific people within an organization who will be responsible for planning.
2. **Using acronyms or shorthand for the organization’s name.** Call the nonprofit what it is and take pride in its name. It can lead to confusion and missed branding opportunities when the acronym, for example, is listed on the logo instead of the name.
3. **Sloppy execution on social media.** Social media is a growing channel. However, there could be less regulation within nonprofits, which can hurt more than it helps. Monitor everything and use each platform purposefully, meaning use it for what it does best (e.g., audience, content, capabilities, etc.).
4. **Losing control of branding and communication efforts.** Being “democratic does not mean giving up control or standards. Guidelines, templates, and procedures can ensure that those you trust will express their understanding of the organization well and correctly.
5. **Letting perfection become paralyzing.** It is okay to start small, test, learn, correct, and revise before rolling out a campaign, and you should! Send an email to a small test group first, send direct mailings in segmented groups, or run a social media ad within a small radius, to start.

Jacqueline Bassey is a graduate of Molloy’s School of Business, earning her B.S. in Marketing and her MBA in Management. She has professional and various experience in several industries, including Real Estate, Corporate, Retail, Hospitality, and more recently, Nonprofits. Jacqueline is currently the Leadership Giving Officer for Catholic Health’s St. Francis Hospital.

ⁱ (ocreative, 2022)

ⁱⁱ (Kylander, 2012)

Kylander, N. &. (2012). The Role of Brand in the Nonprofit Sector. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 10(2), 37-41.

ocreative. (2022, January 4). *The History of Marketing in Under 5 Minutes*. Retrieved from ocreative: <https://ocreative.com/the-history-of-marketing-in-under-5-minutes/#:~:text=The%20history%20of%20marketing%20starts,goods%20that%20required%20quality%20control.>