

Brand Force: A Nonprofit's Guide For Building A

by Donald Argento

A sample of the opening pages

Brand Force: A Nonprofit's Guide For Building A Magnetic Organization

INTRODUCTION

What is a Brand and why is it necessary for a nonprofit?

Let's start with what a brand is not. A brand is not a logo. It's not a typeface. It's not a snappy slogan. It's not a well-crafted mission statement. A brand is not a color scheme. While a brand should probably encompass all these things, a brand is so much more.

So, what is a brand? Unlike a math equation that has a right or wrong answer, a brand is an intangible creative asset. Brands are more like the wind - elusive, yet powerful - a force of nature. You can't hold a brand in your hand, but an effective brand can ignite interest, inflame passion, and stir to action. Like the wind, some brands are light and mild, while others are intense and bold. Both types have the ability to propel organizations toward their goals.

Just like your competition, all nonprofits are searching for that magical magnet that attracts the community to their cause in hopes of attaining continual financial support and a lasting emotional bond. Competition for donor dollars and members makes the search all that more difficult.

To create a strong appeal, it's imperative to harness your Brand Force. By creating a compelling and valuable brand, you'll attract, keep, and get more out of each and every one of your members and donors. But a brand can't be a here today, gone tomorrow endeavor. A carefully crafted brand represents not only your organization's identity, but also your passion and ongoing commitment to those you serve.

I got excited about brand marketing at age ten when I blanketed the entire neighborhood with flyers for my start-up lawn service. I quickly realized how much it influenced people's decisions. I couldn't believe that a simple piece of paper would get someone to pick up the phone and call my house to hire me to cut their grass. I thought, "This is crazy." I had no idea what I was doing at the time. And I had no idea it was called marketing, advertising, or branding. Yet, I inadvertently created a brand. My brand was a young, eager, and responsible kid earning money for college. It was my face, my mower, and a promise to do a great job in

exchange for their support. People in my rural farming community responded positively to that sentiment. That small town was filled with salt of the earth, hard-working folks who appreciated my ambition and work ethic. Without knowing it, I had created a Brand Force, a magnetic appeal of my own and my success had nothing to do with what my marketing materials looked like - it was simply about my mission, my story.

The lawn service business I had created was just a means to an end. I had no plans to be in that line of work. After all, I had just discovered that I was able to spark interest in a service with some words on paper. That's magic to a ten year old kid, and still is! So, years later, building demand and generating interest in products and services became a career for me. I became a marketer.

I've worked for large corporations, higher education, and nonprofits. I even started my own small business after earning a marketing degree. I also worked for a consulting firm that helped nonprofit organizations reach their philanthropic goals for capital and comprehensive campaigns. Little did I know, that experience would spark the fire that is now this book.

I recognized that so many nonprofits lacked the marketing resources to develop a clear message, or communicate it effectively, which is imperative especially during any type of fundraising campaign. Many were so focused on their mission they didn't even give their brand any consideration.

This undervaluing the importance of a strong Brand Force keeps so many organizations from reaching their full potential. Many have an intense passion and motivation to champion their cause, but harnessing that spirit to have a dynamic effect on their community is lacking. I had seen the marketing gap between the corporate world and the nonprofit world. It was evident to me that there was a way to bridge that gap and make it a level-playing field. And it's all about the brand.

Many winning ideas for nonprofits come straight out of the corporate playbook. Successful corporations that have thrived and prospered for the long-term have realized that building a great brand takes clear vision, persistence, endurance, passion, and resolve to stay the course despite a changing landscape.

Nonprofits are founded and sustained by passion and an enthusiasm for a cause. But fervor alone will not sustain an organization. It takes a strong commitment to developing a well-defined plan that effectively serves your community to endure and prosper. Your brand has to create a bonding experience with your community. Depending on your organization, your community may consist of several stakeholders including: associates, members, patrons, patients, visitors, donors, clients, volunteers, partners, board members, and so on.

The good news is that building a strong Brand Force is one of the most fulfilling things a nonprofit organization can do. Your brand can reach beyond every department. It's internal. It's external. It's the blood coursing through the veins, the essence and spirit of the organization.

Your brand wind will sweep through the halls of your building. It's the elevator pitch. It's the excitement in the tone of voice when an associate tells someone where they work and why they do it. It's the total sum of your community's experiences. It's the trust that is earned from fulfilling your community and donor's expectations. It's the truth of who you are. It's also one of the most inexpensive ways to improve your organization's market position.

My goal is to help you develop your own magnetic Brand Force.

Let's get to it...

Brand Force: A Nonprofit's Guide For Building A Magnetic Organization

FOUNDATION

Whether you're a large, multi-location organization or a one-person shop with purely a mission and dream, we all face the same challenges and opportunities. So, why do certain organizations flourish while others fade away? It's simple. A great brand has the power to attract an abundance of resources. In order to do great things for others, we must first strive to do well for our own organizations. Before you're able to make a strong connection with your community you have to know who you are, or at a minimum, who you want to be.

Let's say you want to start a membership organization that focuses on tree preservation. That's a great cause. Now, are you looking globally, nationally, regionally, or locally? Are you trying to save all trees or a certain type of tree? Will you work with other preservation clubs like the Sierra Club; do you share the same reasons for existence? How big do you see your organization getting? Some folks like to remain small; others have a vision to save the world. Where do you fit in? How long do you envision it taking to make the impact you want? How many people will your organization require to accomplish your goal? Is it just you; will it always be just you?

On the following pages you will find the Brand Force questionnaire that will help facilitate the process of developing a magnetic organization. This is where you have to roll up your sleeves and sharpen your pencil. It may take you thirty minutes to fill out, or several hours. Just remember, the more effort you put into this, the better your results. Along with background information you'll be uncovering, it's a place to share your biggest and boldest thoughts and dreams for your organization. Don't be afraid to write too much here (or on separate paper if needed), you can always prune later. These answers will assist you in developing your magnet's Foundation, Essentials, and Communication. What you will unveil about your organization, and what you strive for, will ultimately unlock the power of your Brand Force.

The more you know about your organization the better equipped you'll be to create a brand that stands out from the rest, and most importantly - enable you to fulfill your mission.

Mining these answers will help you develop your brand from the inside out. Don't worry, you may not have all those answers now, but the more you define your organization, the stronger the

magnet you can create. Once you have a comprehensible vision of what your organization will look like from several angles you can start stitching together the fabric of your brand. Sometimes all it takes is seeing things on paper to create that "Ah-Ha" moment.

(Note: The sample organization, Champion Guide Dogs, shown as a model example in the following Brand Force Questionnaire exists solely for the purposes of this book. It will be used in every section to demonstrate effective branding methods.)

Brand Force: A Nonprofit's Guide For Building A Magnetic Organization

QUESTIONNAIRE

Brand Force Example

ORGANIZATION

What is your organization's name?

Champion Guide Dogs

What is your Tagline?

Great Dogs. Greater Independence.

What is your main cause?

Providing the visually impaired with the best quality guide dogs in the industry.

Where are you located? Are you tied to your locality?

Pensacola, Florida. We train our dogs here, but they can be delivered anywhere in the world.

How old is your organization? What is your history (briefly)?

We were established in 1987. The mother of our founder, Sam Thompson, became visually impaired from contracting glaucoma. Sam spent a long time trying to find the best guide dog for her. After an exhaustive search, he realized there was a significant need for high quality guide dogs.

Who comprises your organization?

We have six full-time associates: an executive director, a marketing manager, an operations manager, and three trainers. Our board consists of five members and we have over 50 dedicated volunteers.

Our Foundation

ORGANIZATION

What is your organization's name?

What is your Tagline?

What is your main cause?

Where are you located? Are you tied to your locality?

How old is your organization? What is your history (briefly)?

Who comprises your organization?

MEMBERS

How many members do you currently have?

We have a program called "Champs of Champions" with approximately 2,300 members.

What do you know about them?

Most of them have pets of their own, mostly dog owners. Over 75% support other nonprofits.

How many patrons / visitors / clients do you currently have?

Since we were founded, we have supplied over 6,000 visually impaired clients with our high quality guide dogs. Some of them are repeat clients, as the animals do have a predetermined service period.

Are you gaining or losing significant numbers of patrons / visitors / clients? Why?

We are slowly gaining clients. Our problem isn't that we lack clients, there's certainly more need for our dogs, it's that we lack the funds to be able to hire more associates to be able to train and provide more guide dogs. Great trainers are scarce, in high demand, and very expensive.

Who are your donors?

Of our 2,300 about 500 of those donate 75% of the funds, the rest support us through membership dues of \$40 per year.

MEMBERS

How many members do you currently have?

What do you know about them?

How many patrons / visitors / clients do you currently have?

Are you gaining or losing significant numbers of patrons / visitors / clients? Why?

Who are your donors?

COMMUNITY

What does your current community look like (demographics)?

Our clients range in age from eighteen to eighty. The members of our "Champs of Champions" average thirty-five to sixty-five years old. The average annual household income is \$50,000. They are active, about 70% are married, 65% have some college education, 85% have computers with Internet access and shop on-line.

Where does most of your community come from (location)?

85% of our community lives within 50 miles of our location. The remaining 13% consists of clients and members located in other counties and states (2% from other countries).

What common characteristics do they share (interests)?

Many of our members like to spend time outdoors; walking, swimming, and enjoying the great weather. We found they have an affinity for helping others enjoy it too.

Who is your prospective target community (demographics, location, interests)?

We would like to get the younger generation involved, at least informed, so that we can cultivate them as future members. Maybe work with Boys Scouts and Girl Scouts. Initially, we would like to increase our reach into adjacent states. Then, build a national membership. Our focus will remain with the outdoor enthusiasts.

COMMUNITY

What does your current community look like (demographics)?

Where does most of your community come from (location)?

What common characteristics do they share (interests)?

Who is your prospective target community (demographics, location, interests)?

INDUSTRY

Who are the other major organizations serving the same community?

Our closest competitor is Tallahassee Lassies, in Tallahassee, Florida.

How are you different from, and same as your competitors?

We provide the best-trained and highest quality guide dogs; we also have the quickest placement in the industry. We all provide the visually impaired with access to a more independent life. Most of us belong to the Guide Dogs of America, and some to the international Federation of Guide Dog Schools.

Is there any confusion between you and your competitors (from your community's view)?

Not really, but there is a misconception that all guide dogs are the same. We strive to make sure our community knows how we stand out from the others. We do a lot to explain our extensive

breed requirements and comprehensive training program that exceeds industry standards and prerequisites.

Is your industry growing or slowing?

Unfortunately it's growing. Part of it's due to an aging population, some due to war-related injuries, or lack of health care. However, we exist to improve people's lives. As there's an increase in people who become visually impaired, we will do our best to ensure they can lead active, productive, and enriched lives.

INDUSTRY

Who are the other major organizations serving the same community?

How are you different from, and same as your competitors?

Is there any confusion between you and your competitors (from your community's view)?

Is your industry growing or slowing?

Brand Force: A Nonprofit's Guide For Building A Magnetic Organization

PERSONALITY

Every great brand strives to stimulate a strategically premeditated response. This is something many consumer brands do very well, and traditionally nonprofits do not. When we think of the automobiles manufactured by Lexus we think elegance; Volvo evokes safety. Both are very different feelings, but very successful as brands because they push their community's key brand personality button. That is, the very thing their brand stands for is imprinted into the hearts and minds of their community. And it's done with a one-word Personality Attribute description.

When you think of Harvard what comes to mind? Prestigious. Exclusive. Expensive. What about The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame + Museum? Edgy. Fun. Exciting. There are tons of adjectives to describe a personality. Focus on which personality traits are unique to your organization, or more specifically, the ones you would like to exude.

This is not a case of the chicken and the egg. With branding, it is up to your organization to create, develop, and deliver a Brand Force Personality that you want your community to sense every time they think of you or interact with your organization. Lexus didn't stumble upon elegance; they started out with the goal of achieving it. There has to be one identifier that quickly comes to mind. You should not give your community the opportunity to create their own response to your brand. You need control over it.

End of sample

Read the rest - the complete eBook is available at bibliobookstore.com