

Effective Branding in a Social Media World

As the nonprofit landscape gets increasingly complex, money is tighter than ever *and* your org is discussed on infinite communications channels, it's *more important than ever to brand* your organization, programs and campaigns. When you do so – conveying credibility and value in a way that's easy to remember and repeat – you'll build long-lasting relationships with donors, volunteers, members, the media, clients, and more. But it's *more challenging than ever* in our 2.0 world.

Join us to talk through this dilemma, hear some solutions put in play by a few of your peers, and bring your own questions and challenges to our branding clinic. The Dr. is in!

Takeaways:

1. Build your understanding of what a brand is, what branding takes and how it helps your build strong relationships.
2. Sharpen your brand outline to ensure you stand out, generating action and building loyalty -- including how to draw on your base's perspective -- and express it consistently, whether in conversation, on your site, in a direct mail fundraising package or LinkedIn group.
3. Learn how to train your staff, volunteers and base to carry your brand forward in their own social networking, activism or just plain socializing via charity badge, Facebook cause page, dinner party conversation or....
4. Get expert advice on how to brand your org in our clinic.

Starring

- Danielle Brigida, Assistant Operations Coordinator , National Wildlife Federation
- Felicia Carr, Director of Online Communications, National Parks Conservation Association
- Wendy Harman, Social Media Manager, American Red Cross
- Nancy Schwartz, Blogger/Principal, GettingAttention.org/Nancy Schwartz & Company

Expert Summaries

➔ **Nancy Schwartz, GettingAttention.org/Nancy Schwartz & Company**

Here are seven keys to effective branding in a social media world:

1. What a nonprofit brand *IS NOT*

- *Not* what your organization stands for in the mind of your network
- *Not* your organization's self-image, mission or logo

2. What's a nonprofit brand?

- The intersection of...
 - What's unique about the way your organization does its work, and its impact
AND
 - The interests and needs of your network
- Must be real, or else it will undermine everything your org is trying to do, bs meter is very sensitive

3. Branding is...

- the art of creating a consistent, recognizable and clear unified voice or personality that conveys your org's focus, credibility and unique contributions

4. Why branding matters, and now more than ever before

- More nonprofits looking...
 - + To secure a piece of fewer contributions,
volunteers, board members, clients, customers
 - = Heated Competition
- If you don't participate, that space/airwaves will be filled with the wrong information

5. How branding works

- A strong brand makes a real difference in developing and maintaining strong relationships with your network
- So strengthen or design your brand to ensure you stand out, generating action and building loyalty
- Be consistent about it, to build recognition (so it can be remembered and repeated) and avoid confusion

6. The challenge of branding in an open source world

- When your network spreads their word to their network, the potential is huge
- Encourage them to do so, for exponential reach
- But throw away the illusion of control!

7. Putting your base to work

- Don't assume they'll spread the word. Make it clear what needs to be done and ask for it (once you've established relationships, you can't do this with new "friends." You have to get to know each other first.
- When someone picks up the flag and runs with it, showcase their efforts. Much more effective than your org making the ask directly.
- Make it easy for your network to spread the word correctly, avoiding confusion, misunderstandings, blow ups, etc. Provide graphics, widgets, whatever is going to make their viral marketing more effective.
- Thank your base profusely, frequently and personally for spreading the word!

➔ Danielle Brigida, National Wildlife Federation

1. **What are NWF's greatest challenges when it comes to creating and maintaining its online presence?**

NWF attempts to reach a number of different audiences through a number of differently branded programs that sometimes function separately from each other. I'll talk about the struggle of managing the reputation and social presence of some of the programs and discuss how that relates to NWF's overall online brand.

2. **How do you brand different programs vs. your organization?**

Finding ways to display the relation between NWF and its programs can be a bit of a struggle. I'll talk about how I've been encouraging program staff to join social media sites and do their own outreach, which I'll then promote through NWF profiles. It's an easy way to let people know the brand is multi-faceted. I'll talk about our use of Twitter, fan pages and other media in promoting programs that include:

- National Wildlife Federation
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/National-Wildlife-Federation/5644748986>
- NWF Campus Ecology
<http://www.nwf.org/campusecology>
<http://www.twitter.com/campusecology>
- Green Hour
<http://www.greenhour.org>
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Green-Hour/21005786883>
- Great American Backyard Campout
<http://www.nwf.org/campout>
- Wildlife Watch
<http://www.nwf.org/wildlifewatch>
<http://www.twitter.com/wildlifewatch>
- Climate Classroom
<http://www.climateclassroom.com>
<http://www.twitter.com/climateclass>

3. **How has the National Wildlife Federation empowered staff to represent the brand? What are the benefits of this?**

In an open source world, the people that represent the brand are just as important as the brand itself, so it's good to trust your employees and let them speak to the quality of your work or product. I plan to elaborate on NWF's staff enthusiasm in working with various web audiences and strengthening the brand through personal connection.

- NWF's Staff on Twitter:
http://blogs.nwf.org/arctic_promise/2009/01/nwfs-staff-on-twitter.html

4. **How does branding influence NWF's social media sites? Does this differ from the rest of the organization's branding?**

I'll talk about how we learned to give up some control—and how we have benefited greatly from trusting our instincts to have an honest presence online—while also determining that it's useful to have both specific and broad branding guidelines depending on the situation and the overall goal.

➔ Felicia Carr, National Parks Conservation Association

National Parks Conservation Association Online Branding Case Study

NPCA's Mission: To protect and enhance America's National Parks for present and future generations.

<http://www.npca.org/>

1. NPCA's Branding Issues

NPCA has weak name recognition and suffers from a case of "brand confusion." NPCA is often confused with the National Park Service, the National Park Foundation, and other environmental groups, such as National Resources Defense Council.

Examples:

- <http://www.npca.org/>
- <http://www.nps.gov/>
- <http://www.nationalparks.org/>
- <http://www.nrdc.org/>

2. NPCA's Branding Goals

- To establish NPCA as the leading voice of the American people in the fight to safeguard the largest and most diverse park system, in the world.
- To establish NPCA as the go-to organization on national parks issues.
- To empower our supporters to protect our national treasures.

3. NPCA's Branding Initiative

To help our audiences understand who we are and why we focus on national parks, NPCA has begun a branding initiative including:

- Setting Goals for our Brand
- Determining our Strengths and Weaknesses
- Assessing the Competition
- Developing a Brand Platform
- Creating a Brand Map that includes online arenas
- Researching & Defining Target Audiences (including online!)
- Creating Brand Guidelines
- Creating & Implementing Rollout Strategy

We are extending these efforts to the web and social networks both to raise our visibility and also to bring new audiences to our cause.

4. Controlling Your Brand Online is Difficult

Even with a careful plan and brand map, controlling your brand in the online world is difficult.

For example, NPCA has a Facebook supporter who fundraises for NPCA via a Facebook cause while using the logo of the National Park Services. NPCA staff members have tried to persuade her to change it--to no avail! NPCA still has staff members who post unbranded materials on sites such as YouTube. However, many supporters are happy when we offer guidance and gladly adopt new standards.

- **Well-Branded NPCA Facebook Cause**
<http://apps.facebook.com/causes/46960>

- **NPCA's Facebook Petition Page**
<http://apps.facebook.com/causes/petitions/?m=df33af27#sign>
- **Poorly-Branded Facebook Cause**
This example shows an NPCA Facebook supporter who fundraises for NPCA via a Facebook cause while using National Park Service logo!
<http://apps.facebook.com/causes/362>

5. Branding in Restrictive Spaces

Applying your brand guidelines in spaces you don't control, such as MySpace with its restrictive templates, is a challenge and the results can be disappointing. Even so, we find this is more effective:

<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendID=146826120>

6. Empowering Staff and External Audiences to Become Brand Ambassadors in Online Arenas

NPCA's web and communications teams are working to empower staff and supporters to "brand" these online efforts on their own. For example our Facebook outreach is being run by an internal "volunteer" in Membership.

Internally we empower staff by:

- Conducting trainings at staff retreats and new employee orientations;
- Distributing a brand book with online guidelines;
- Teaching staff one on one;
- Sharing brand success stories;
- Publishing a brand newsletter; and,
- Empowering staff to reach out to our supporters and encourage them become NPCA brand ambassadors.

➔ Wendy Harman, American Red Cross

1. How have you translated your brand to the social media space?

Well, started exploring on 2 fronts:

- Reactive: Listening, brand reputation. Correcting misinformation. Lead to broad proactive engagement.
- Proactive: Not in marketing sense, but proactive in mission. Used tools to offer preparedness tips, disaster information, etc. Offering value of mission within tools.

When let others talk about you, it doesn't always turn out the way you want (The Office last week and ensuing mountain of comments in social media spaces) but we're learning that it's often more effective anyway. Office is a big TV example, but it happens 200-400 times a day that someone takes to her blog or twitter, etc and discusses her blood donation in a crass way and then encourages others to donate. Even though we wouldn't have put it the same way, she's influencing her friends and her overall intent is good.

When you lose control of your message in this way, it's easy to remedy if you're listening. When you listen to the conversation, you'll see problems right away, can leave comments that correct misinformation while supporting the person writing about you. The author and subsequent visitors will see that you're there, listening, offering information, and can be reached if they additional ideas or questions. Bam, you've just added one more person to your "army" of supporters.

2. How do you empower staff/volunteers:

- Guidelines: drafted guidelines for discussing work online
- Developing guidelines that will help chapters establish official presences with proper guidelines (show chapter blogs, twitter accounts, and facebook presences)
- Give lots of internal training – have social media 101 classes we offer
- Make sure anyone who wants it can receive the daily social media update so they're up on the conversation

<http://blog.redcross.org/chapter-blogs/>

<http://blog.redcross.org/twitter/>

3. How do you empower public:

Social Media is all about democratization. It's a big culture shift internally, but we're handing over the reigns to our supporters to carry the message.

- Empower the public with ready-made and easy to use tools (wiki)
- Empower the public with a point of contact for help.
- Encourage your power supporters by building relationships with them.

4. How is branding in social media different from traditional brand management?

It's not too different when you're looking at the big picture. Goals are similar (increase donations of time, blood, and money) but way of going about it is different. Have to be human. Have to let your supporters take the wheels and be passionate for you. Have to let your employees and volunteers talk about their work.

The same as how social media in general is different from traditional media. Controlled vs uncontrolled, collecting information from the masses versus shouting it out from one microphone.

Have to accept that individual employees and volunteers are the face of your branding and communications – can't hide behind a veil of fake people and corporate identity.

5. Red Cross Month

It's been a long struggle with firewalls, etc to get the word out to our own people that we're online. In March, we held webex trainings and told the field one way to celebrate March is Red Cross Month is by joining us on our official platforms and by telling their own stakeholders to do the same.

<http://www.redcross.org/www-files/Documents/BrandStandards.pdf>

6. What is our biggest challenge?

The naming of things.

With over 700 chapters, 36 blood regions, and thousands of eager people, it's often tough to tell an official online space from an unofficial one. This makes us a little harder to find.