

Brand Alignment – The key to achieving your organization’s mission

Whether you’re chief marketing officer of a business or ministry, getting your brand’s key components in sync and moving in the same direction lowers stress, raises profitability, and improves the organization’s reach.

We often start a new year with the best of intentions. We make resolutions – promises to ourselves – about what we’ll do differently; but under the stress of daily life we fall back on our old behavior.

As leaders, we do the same thing with our organizations. We set goals, we make plans, but when challenged it can be easy for us to go off on a tangent or fall prey to the marketing “flavor of the month.” At the end of the year, we look back and wonder how we lost sight of those big goals we had.

That’s less likely to happen when you have a strong brand with all its components in sync and committed to the same objectives.

These five questions will help you begin the alignment process and take stock of the progress you’re making on your alignment efforts to obtain more paying customers for your business or a bigger membership base for your ministry,

1. Where are we going? When you get in your car you know exactly where you’re going and you usually know the precise route you’ll take to arrive at your destination. Running and growing an organization requires the same clarity. If you don’t have a clear vision for your organization, or haven’t revisited the one you wrote years ago, it’s time to sit down with your key leaders and formulate a clear, compelling vision. It will act as magnetic north on a compass, keeping you focused and on target.

2. Where do we stand now? At some point in your life you’ve probably been so lost that you had no idea where you were. When you’re that confused you simply can’t make good decisions until you get a handle on exactly where you are now. Only then can you begin to think through the actions that will get you back on track to your ultimate destination. Evaluate your current reality by identifying the needs of your internal and external communities, determining if you’re doing a good job meeting those needs, looking at how you’re perceived by those two communities, and conducting a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) of the organization.

3. What image should we convey? The answer to that question lies in the heart of the organization’s leadership. The strongest brands are built on foundations of authenticity. You

can't thrive by pretending to be something you're not and you won't grow by forcing yourself to be something you don't want to be. Organizations grow with less stress and better return on investment when they attract people who want to be involved with them. The better you understand who you are as an organization, the better job you'll do using language and design elements to convey that. You'll draw people who have been looking for an organization like yours whether they realize it or not.

4. How will we communicate our message? Communication is the most important part of building a strong brand and it's also the most exhausting. Whether you call it a weekly bulletin or newsletter, regular communication is the first step to brand engagement for your community. It takes between 7 to 12 contacts before your message registers in the mind of your community. The key is to repeat your message through a variety of communication methods without necessarily literally repeating your message. Keep in mind that everyone is busy and overwhelmed with information so using a variety of communication techniques helps people absorb in ways they're most open to.

5. How will we create a community? You can't just send out announcements and expect to create a community. That's a mailing list. People want to be a part of something. They want to feel as though they're cared about. The challenge is sharing information in a way that draws the audience into a relationship with your organization and engages them to become active members of your community.

Building a brand is a journey that requires vision, dedication, and teamwork. The leadership team that regularly reviews these five questions will stay focused on where the organization is at that moment and how they can strengthen the engagement of all components that make up the brand.

Your next step: Schedule time as a leadership team to discuss the answers to each of these five questions. This can be challenging with everyone's different schedules, but if your leadership team is committed to growing the internal community and as well as the brand, they'll make the time necessary to do it.