



# Center for World-Changing Organizations

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Strengthening organizations that make the world better

## #6 In Our Guides & Workbooks Series

# Branding Guide

## How to Stand Out from the Herd of Organizations in Your Field



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By Jonathan Reed, PhD

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**JONATHAN REED, PH.D.**, the Center's founder, has an unusual background for a management consultant. He received his doctorate in the biological sciences at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, where he subsequently served as Lecturer and Honorary Fellow. His research took him far afield: 500 miles north of the Arctic Circle, four field seasons in Kauai, Hawaii, and to Panama as a Smithsonian Tropical Research Fellow.

He then founded The University Group in 1988, a private consulting firm representing 65 leading faculty at UW—Madison. It transferred the latest advances in management and technology from universities to corporations such as General Electric and Johnson Controls.

When clients began asking for his advice, he found he preferred consulting to trying to manage professors. So he started consulting for corporations, nonprofits, and government agencies on his own. One of his projects received a National Quality Award.

He has co-authored *A Systems Handbook: An Introduction to the Systems Age for GE Medical Systems*, consulted for federal Science Centers for seven consecutive years, and helped lead the Conservation Science Division of The Nature Conservancy.

He served as a consultant to the U.S. Agency for International Development in Afghanistan and the former Soviet Union Republic of Georgia, and the Inter-American Development Bank in Trinidad and Tobago. He also has taught mindfulness meditation at maximum-security prisons.

To see the results his clients achieved and read their testimonials, see the Experience section of our website.



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# Center for World-Changing Organizations

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Strengthening organizations that make the world better

## #6 Branding Guide

### How to Stand Out from the Herd of Organizations in Your Field

Cowboys brand cattle to separate their herd from others on the open range. An organization brands itself to stand out from its pack of competitors. A strong brand accentuates what its intended audience finds most compelling about it. This guide describes how a world-changing organization<sup>1</sup> can develop a more powerful presence and use it to its advantage.

It presents the first branding model for values-driven companies, nonprofit organizations, and public institutions. It describes branding within the broader context of strategic marketing. If you're not familiar with this subject, we encourage you to read our *Strategic Marketing Guide*.

Branding has recently emerged as the most powerful marketing strategy. Naomi Klein, a harsh critic of corporate branding, attributes the recent rise of corporate wealth and influence to its power in her book, *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs*.<sup>2</sup>

We divided this guide into three sections: a summary of branding, a description of our branding model, and an appendix with marketing terms and descriptions of several branding topics.



This is the sixth in our *Guides and Workbooks Series* to help you build a more successful and prosperous organization. Subjects include ***strategic planning, strategic marketing, and organizational development***. We list them on the back cover. See this endnote for permission to use them.<sup>3</sup>

They are based on our research and work with many organizations of different sizes and in various fields, including General Electric Medical Systems, Rexnord Aerospace, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Geological Survey, and U.S. Agency for International Development—as well as many smaller organizations.

## What you need to know about branding

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### What a brand should do

Ries and Ries<sup>4</sup> describe branding as *staking a claim to the idea or attribute of your organization that you want to “own” in your target audiences’ minds*. To do this, your brand should:

- Capture the essence of who your organization is and what it does.
- Distinguish it from other organizations competing for your audiences’ attention and “business.”
- Symbolize what your target audiences consider most compelling about your organization.
- Position your organization in your audiences’ minds as being the only or best one to fulfill their needs and solve their problems.
- Generate positive emotions in your target audiences.

### Two ways to define a brand

Branding is an elusive subject. As the nine definitions of “brand” in the appendix attest, marketing experts don’t agree on what a brand is. What we think is missing from them is *perspective*. Almost every writer on the subject defines “brand” as an organization or its audiences perceive it. Though they define it from one perspective, they write about it from both. We find this confusing.

We define a brand from both perspectives. An organization’s **real brand** is the one its audiences carry around in their heads. It is shaped by many things: audiences’ interactions with the organization and what it offers, its reputation, recent events, public opinion, urban legends—and the image it projects of itself. We refer to an organization’s real brand simply as its **brand**, which we define as:

**Real brand.** *Target audiences’ collective impression* of the organization and what it offers. It is an organization’s actual brand, which its target audiences carry around in their heads.

The **desired brand** is the one that an organization’s leaders and marketers carry around in their heads. It is the compelling image that it projects of itself to its audiences. An effective brand *distinguishes* the organization from its competitors and *highlights* what its intended audience find most compelling about it. We define it as:

**Desired brand.** The *image the organization projects of itself and what it offers* to its target audiences. Its purpose is to make the organization and what it offers stand out from the herd—to appear different from and more appealing than its competitors and what they offer. It is its *ideal brand*, which its leaders and marketers carry around in their heads.

## Brand your organization

Concentrate on developing a compelling<sup>5</sup> brand for **your organization**; not your products, services, or whatever else you offer. Large consumer-products companies like SC Johnson & Sons are among the few enterprises with the resources and knowledge to successfully brand their product lines such as Windex, Ziploc, and Saran Wrap. Most companies and world-changing organizations brand themselves and then link what they offer to their brand.



## Stand out from the herd

Keller<sup>6</sup>, as well as Sargeant and Ford<sup>7</sup>, have found that many social-enterprise organizations have similar brands. They emphasize what they have in common such as compassion, inclusion, and caring: not what distinguishes them from one another. From a branding perspective, this makes as much sense as nearby ranchers using almost identical brands to mark their cattle. Brand your organization like a cowboy—to stand out from the herd.



## Design your brand for your target audiences

You create your brand for your target audiences, not the general public. **Target audiences** are one of the organizing principles of strategic marketing. They are the critical external groups that determine an organization's success. They are the *customers* of world-changing companies; *constituents* and *oversight committees* or *administrators* of public institutions; and *clients*, *funders*, and *supporters* of nonprofit organizations.

Windex, Ziploc, and Saran Wrap are among the few brands designed for the general public, but even they have a gender bias. The marketers behind Ferrari, Prius, and Dodge Caravan are not targeting the general public, nor the same audiences. Almost all companies design their brands and what they offer for specific audiences—and so should you.

## Base It on what audiences find most compelling and distinctive about you

Your brand must appeal to your audiences and distinguish it from your competitors. Design it around what your target audiences find most appealing and unique about your organization. To do so, you'll need to know their perceptions of your organization and its competitors.



Use your audiences' current perceptions to strengthen your brand instead of trying to change them. People's perceptions and attitudes are nearly impossible to change. Consider your success at changing your relatives' political views and vice versa at Thanksgiving. The key is not to change your audiences' perceptions, but use them to your advantage. Avis used Hertz's #1 standing in car rentals to its advantage in its successful "We try harder!" marketing campaign.



## Less is more

A lean, tight brand has the best chance of hitting its target and capturing one's attention. Distilling it down to its core—and tossing out most people's ideas about what it should be—is usually the most gut-wrenching and critical part of branding.



It requires sacrifice among those whose ideas for a great brand end up on the cutting-room floor. The leanest runners win marathons; the bulked-up ones stay in the gym. Keep it lean. Marty Neumeier, who wrote two short and excellent books on branding, can't seem to stress the importance of *focus* in branding enough. He refers to it as *a hard mistress who demands fidelity*.<sup>8</sup>

Prevent your brand from turning into a laundry list of everything you represent and do. Over-packing it is death knell of branding by committee. You might add one or two other appealing and distinctive attributes about your organization to it as long as it reinforces its primary focus. But don't "overstuff" it. A bloated brand with a diluted message won't grab anyone's attention.

Building a taut, compelling brand requires *sacrifice*. So sacrifice all the other attributes you dearly want your audiences to associate with your organization, and concentrate on the one that captures the essence of whom your organization is—and that nobody else owns in your audiences' minds.<sup>9</sup>

Organizations with clear and potent brands are Harvard—academic excellence, Boys and Girls Clubs—they are safe and enriching after-school refuges, and NASA—is about space exploration. Other examples include Volvo—it stands for auto safety, National Academy of Sciences—scientific excellence and integrity, and Patagonia—adventure clothing and protecting wild lands.

## Successful brands capture audiences' attention and run deep



Most of us are bombarded with several thousand marketing messages every day. To maintain our sanity, our minds put up mental filters to screen out all except the most appealing and intriguing ones. The best brands are cunningly designed to slip through these filters and penetrate the consciousness of their intended audience.

By *running deep*, we mean that they resonate with their audiences at multiple levels and may contain various associations—emotional, cognitive, cultural, tribal, core values, and lifestyle. To appreciate this, consider the following brands: Habitat for Humanity, BP Oil Company, Greenpeace, and Nike's association with Tiger Woods. Each one triggers different emotions, associations, images, memories, and tribal affiliations (e.g., golfer, non-golfer, anti-golfer, or sexual-abuse prevention advocate). The best brands work at many levels, especially the ones about who we are and what we value.

## Your brand's ultimate goal

The ultimate goal of branding your organization is to create the impression in your audiences' minds that it is the only or best one to satisfy their needs associated with your mission. Ries and Ries referred to this as the *concept of singularity*.<sup>10</sup>

## Stake a claim to the idea you want to "own" in your audiences' minds

In their classic marketing book published in 1981, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*, Ries and Trout claim that organizations compete for their audiences' minds. They view branding as a communication strategy to reach and engage marketing-saturated audiences. They recommend developing a brand that establishes new connections and associations with audiences' existing knowledge and experience.

They describe a brand's impact as the amount of *real estate that an organization owns in its audiences' minds*. An example is the Alzheimer's Association recent decision to stake out "brain health" as the real estate it intends to own in its audiences' minds. Its brand, offerings, and marketing communications all position the Alzheimer's Association as the go-to organization to maintain a healthy yet aging brain.



Similarly, Volvo used its long-standing commitment to auto safety to build its brand on this reassuring idea in car-buyers' minds and become one of the world's leading automakers. In the 1960s, Volkswagen decided to "own" the idea of owning a small, oddly shaped car in the minds of young, sophisticated US car buyers when it introduced the VW Beetle in US markets. It later stumbled but recovered in the 1990s when it rebranded itself with its "Drivers Wanted" marketing campaign. It had taken several years before car buyers started thinking of VW as a German automaker specializing in higher-performance and exhilarating-to-drive cars.

## Staking a claim versus distinguishing yourself from competitors

Most books and articles on branding state that the primary function of a brand is to distinguish an organization or product from its competitors. Once it identifies an opportunity or "hole" in its target market, the organization competitively positions its brand to appeal to its new "targets" by stressing what makes it different and better than its competitors. Some of the biggest and longest-running positioning battles have been between Coke and Pepsi, Apple and Microsoft, Mercedes and BMW, and McDonald's and Burger King.

We question whether this is the primary function of values-driven brands and if these examples apply to world-changing organizations. Not only does everyone know what these eight companies do, each pair competes in distinct markets: cola drinks, computer software, foreign autos, and fast-food chains.

Most values-driven organizations have poor name recognition and rarely compete for “market share” within well-defined and fixed-size markets. Even if someone recognizes the name of one of them, the chances are that they have only a vague idea of what it does.

We believe most small- and medium-size world-changing organizations face two branding challenges. First, is to define who they are and what they do for their target audiences. The second is to distinguish themselves from their competitors. Building a brand around your key attribute accomplishes both. Obviously, these challenges don’t apply to high-profile organizations like The Red Cross, NASA, Harvard University, and Patagonia.

### Why corporate success depends on branding

Corporations have embraced branding for two more reasons. First, powerful brands create highly appealing impressions of them and their offerings that *capture and hold audiences’ attention*. No marketing tool has proved as useful in reaching and influencing marketing-saturated audiences—everyone.



We guess most of us tune out at least 99% of the marketing messages sent our way. The few that grab our attention are either tailored to our specific needs, values, and perceptions; or are disarmingly clever or funny. Almost nothing else gets our attention.

The audiences that world-changing organizations try to engage are as wary and weary of marketing messages as everyone else. Hordes of organizations with critical missions bombard large foundations and wealthy individuals constantly with urgent funding requests. You probably *have about 60 seconds to make its pitch and capture their attention*. Brands are tailor-made for this short-duration, grab-‘em-or-lose-‘em occasions: lengthy descriptions of critical missions and dire funding situations are nonstarters.

A brand that captures and momentarily holds someone’s attention creates a brief opening for the organization to deepen that person’s interest in it by explaining who it is, what it does, and, most importantly, *what it can do for them*.



The second reason corporations spend so much time and money building powerful brands is to *prevent their goods and services from becoming commodities* like hog bellies or soybean futures. There’s nothing special about hog bellies or bushels of beans—they’ve just standard units within their market. Once that happens to a company’s products or services, it must become a low-cost provider to survive. Strong brands prevent this from happening. Few conscience-driven organizations face this problem.

Brands are also valuable. A respected brand can be a company’s most valuable asset. In 2016, Forbes Magazine valued the top three brands as Apple—\$154B, Google—\$82B, and Microsoft—\$75B. (Yes, the “B” represents a *billion* dollars.) Kotler believes modern corporate marketing is now mainly about branding.<sup>11</sup>



## Key elements of a brand

A brand is not a blunt instrument designed to bludgeon the masses. It is an arrow aimed at the center of a brand's target. The figure below shows the three elements of a brand. The pink, outer ring in the center represents the overlap of your target audiences.

The purple, middle one is what it symbolizes to these audiences. It is often an icon that connects your audiences' values and needs to what you represent and provide. The red bulls-eye is what intended audiences find most appealing and distinctive about your organization.

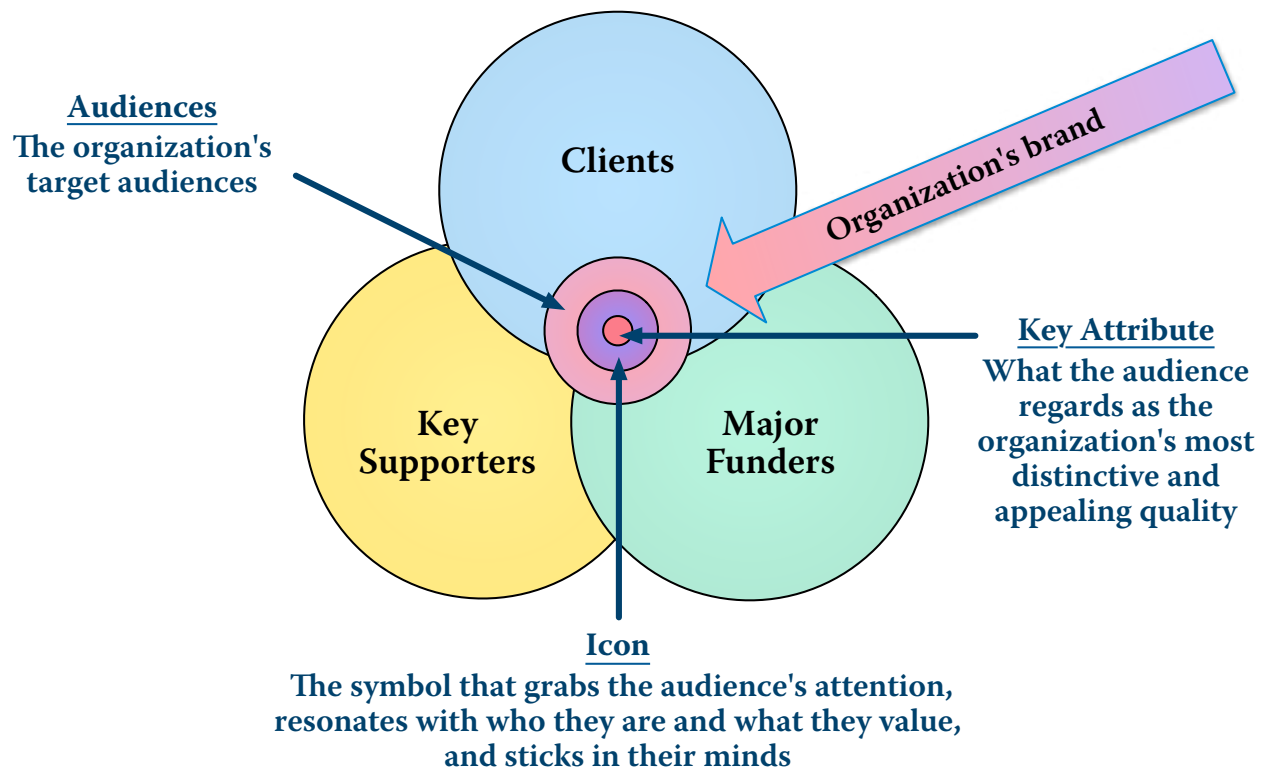


Fig. 1. Key elements of a brand

### Audiences

Design your brand for your target audiences, not the general public. The figure on the previous page shows the three types of target audiences of many world-changing nonprofits: clients, major funders, and key supporters. The bull's-eye in the center of the figure represents the overlap of these three types of target audiences. If one or several of your audiences is crucial to your success, such as a critical group of clients or funders, design your brand primarily for them.



## Icons

The aim of branding isn't to just parrot back what audiences find most appealing and distinctive about you. It's to grab their attention and stick in their minds. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to incorporate an icon into your brand. It should symbolize what your organization stands for and does. The more it resonates with what your audiences value and need, the stronger it will be.

Consider the seemingly illogical connection between Paul Newman and a brand of salad dressing. Newman's Own is a compelling brand for several reasons. First, the company that Newman and his friend A. E. Hotchner started donates its profits to charities. It's an example of a new breed of conscience-driven organizations called *social enterprises*. Second, he is a household name in America. And third, he represents distinctive and compelling American qualities.

His rugged good looks, innate street smarts, and free spirit resonate with Newman's Own target audiences. Plus it reflects their values. A mental image of Paul Newman riding into town on a handsome horse with a six-shooter strapped to his leg surely stands out from the herd of Nature's Garden of Herbal Whatever salad dressings lining your grocer's shelf.

World Wildlife's panda bear, and Steve Job's blue jeans and black turtleneck work in similar ways. The panda has broad appeal. It resonates with animal lovers with a soft spot in their hearts for cuddly looking animals as well as conservationists who want to protect their montane bamboo forests in Asia. Similarly, Apple's CEO Steve Jobs' blue jeans and black turtle project an anti-establishment undercurrent that resonates with the inner Picasso and Einstein of creative types and academics.

Paul Newman, panda bears, and blue jeans aren't Newman's Own salad dressing, the World Wildlife Fund, or Apple—but they are potent symbols of them. A compelling brand doesn't require an icon, but a memorable one is the dominant element of many powerful brands. If a symbol represents your brand, find out what your audiences think of it. If not, consider identifying several candidates for your icon and test your audiences' reactions to them.

## A brand's key attribute

A key attribute is the quality or feature of an organization that its target audiences find most compelling and distinctive. It could be what your organization represents, its most distinguishing characteristic, its track record of significant accomplishments, or even its endearing but quirky personality. A key attribute should distinguish your brand from your competitors. The following figure captures what we think is the key attribute of The Nature Conservancy's brand.

## Branding model for world-changing organizations: Outline and figure of our branding model

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### 1. Decide what you want your brand to do

### 2. Conduct a branding survey

- Interview enough audience members to design a branding survey.
- Conduct a branding survey of your target audiences.

### 3. Decide if you're happy with your brand and, if not, how to improve it

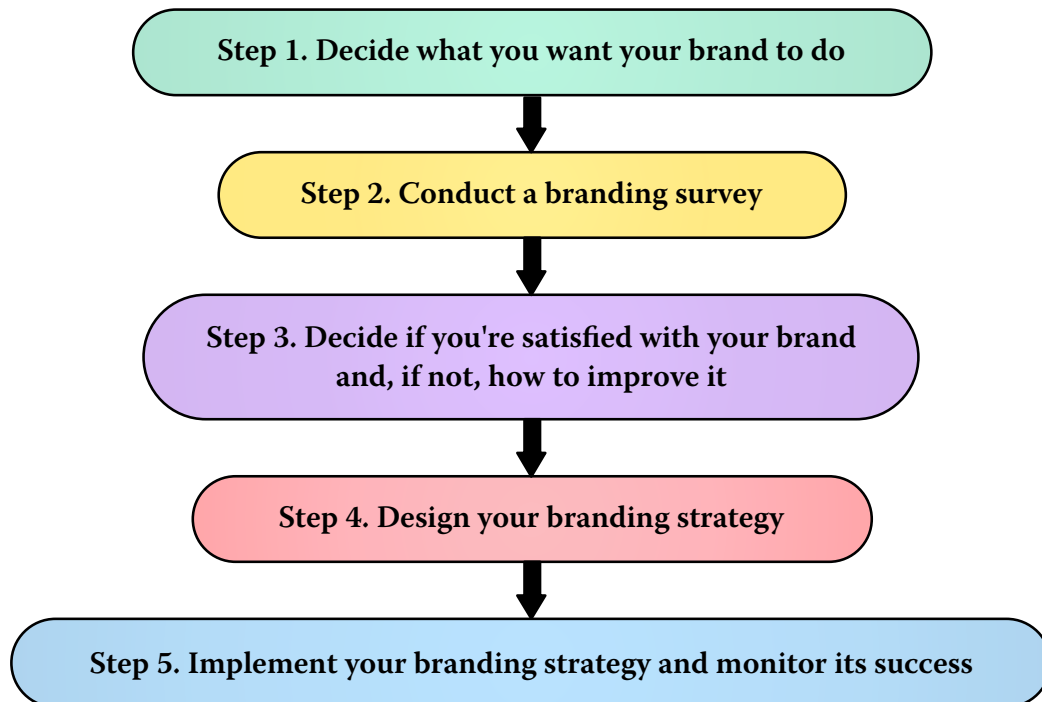
- Decide if you're satisfied with your brand and, if not, identify your branding options
- Ask key people in your organization and audiences to evaluate your branding options

### 4. Design your branding strategy

- Decide if you should change, modify, strengthen, or keep your current brand.
- Design your branding strategy.
- Review your brand's elements.
- Design a communication plan to introduce it to your organization and audiences.

### 5. Implement your branding strategy and monitor its success

- Appoint a brand champion and branding team to lead your branding strategy.
- Monitor your brand's use and impact.



**Fig. 2. Our branding model**

## Guidelines for using our branding model

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The following guidelines draw on information presented earlier in the guide, so familiarize yourself with it before continuing. Because the brands and marketing situations of world-changing organizations vary widely, adapt these guidelines to your organization and its brand.

### Step 1. Decide what you want your brand to do

Read this guide on branding, our *Strategic Marketing Guide*, and other information on branding to familiarize yourself with the roles and benefits of a compelling brand. The asterisked citations in the bibliography are branding references we recommend.

### Step 2. Conduct a branding survey

Your target audiences' perceptions and gut feelings about your organization are your brand. The same goes for your competitors' brands. Their satisfaction with what you and your competitors offer usually has the greatest influence on them. The best way to know how they feel and what they think is to survey them. We recommend hiring your consultant or another firm to conduct this survey to:

- Define your and your competitors' **brands**.
- Determine what your brand represents to your audiences and its **position** in their hearts and minds compared to your competitors' brands.
- Assess their **satisfaction** with what you and your competitors offer.
- Identify their **needs** that you're in a unique or best position to fulfill—and determine their expectations of you and your competitors.
- Determine the **key factors** that most influence their impressions of you and satisfaction with what you offer them—and those of your competitors.
- Determine what they find **most compelling** about you and your competitors.



### 2A. Interview enough audience members to design a branding survey

Your brand should stake a claim to the idea you want to “own” in your audiences' minds. This idea should embody what your target audiences find most compelling about you. To determine what your brand is from your audiences' perspective, we recommend hiring our or another outside firm. Whoever you hire should first interview some members of your target audiences, design a branding survey based on the findings of the interviews, and then administer it to a representative sample of your audience members.

Design the interviews to identify whom audience members see as your competitors, what they consider your and your competitors' brands to be, and what they regard as the most compelling things about you and your competitors.

## 2B. Conduct a branding survey of your target audiences

Survey enough audience members to feel confident that you understand your brand and those of your competitors, their satisfaction with what you and they offer, the key factors that influence their impressions, and what they find most compelling about your organization.

We've found the findings of this type of survey to be the most valuable information that organizations possess. If you don't hire an outside firm to design and administer the survey, you could do it yourself. Though your survey probably wouldn't be as objective and useful as one conducted by a professional firm, it still would provide valuable information about your and your competitors' brands. At a minimum, informally interview some members of your target audiences.



### Step 3. Decide if you're satisfied with your brand and, if not, how to improve it

#### 3A. Decide if you're satisfied with your brand, and if not, identify your branding options

Decide if you're satisfied with your current brand, its position in your audiences' minds, and its appeal and distinctiveness. If you're not pleased with it, decide whether to keep or change its key attribute and icon. Identify your options and assess the merits of rebranding your organization, and modifying or strengthening your current brand. Select the best three-to-four branding options, summarize what they are, and "mock up" what they might look like and state.

#### 3B. Ask key members of your organization and audiences to evaluate your branding options

Share your survey's results and top branding options with influential staff or everyone in your organization. You may be surprised by people's range of reactions to them. Think long and hard about the responses you get. Remember, the people inside your organization are not the brand's target audience. If necessary, modify your branding options and then see how members of your target audiences react to them.



## Step 4. Design your branding strategy

### 4A. Decide if you should change, modify, strengthen, or keep your current brand

Considering your audiences' and staff's responses to your branding options, and your gut feelings about your current brand, determine whether you should keep, improve, or change your brand. If you decide to change or modify it, define your future brand.

### 4B. Design your branding strategy

Base your branding strategy on these factors:

- What you want your brand to do for your organization that your current one doesn't.
- Describe what's different between the image your audiences have of your organization compared to the one you want them to have. Also, decide if you're designing your brand for all your audiences or just one or two of them.
- Define what the brand's key attribute, icon, and other attributes will be.
- Develop a plan to introduce the brand to your target audiences.

### 4C. Review your brand's elements

#### Your name

The most recognizable thing about an organization is its name. Some marketing authorities claim an organization's name *is* its brand. Though we define "brand" differently, an organization's name plays a vital role in the image it projects to the outside world. The right name portrays the essence or spirit of the organization. Unless there is a compelling reason to change it, don't.

However, do consider changing the names of products, services, and programs that your audiences find confusing or can't remember. People who design products, services, and programs tend to give them technically correct but complicated names: marketers give them names that are appealing and easy to remember. The names of your organization's products, services, and programs should be short, descriptive, and *capture the spirit* of what they are.

#### Tagline

The tagline is the short phrase that accompanies your organization's name. It should be descriptive yet appealing. Taglines often describe what the organization does. For example, "***To boldly go where no man has gone before***" was both Starship Enterprise's five-year mission and Star Trek's tagline. Some taglines identify whom an organization serves and how it does so. Others convey its personality. A tagline is often visually combined with one's name and logo to form a unified visual identity. Taglines are second only to an organization's name in importance in defining its brand.

## Core message

Your core message is your short answer to the question “What does your organization do?” It’s often called an “elevator speech” that’s about 30 seconds long—the time it takes an elevator to move between several floors. The goal of your core message is not to present a summary of your organization. The goal is to get people *interested* in your organization—to whet their appetite, so they want to know more.

Don’t design your core message for the general public; create it for your target audiences, particularly those you serve through your mission. Once you’ve developed your core message, consider developing different versions of it for different audiences. All your marketing materials should reflect your core or underlying message. To design a message that *sticks* in your audiences’ minds, see “*Marketing Messages that Stick—Heath Brothers’ SUCCESs Principles*” in the appendix (p. 20).



## Personality

Vivid and memorable brands have personalities. You might remember the Apple commercials contrasting a hip Mac user (actor Justin Long) conversing with an unflattering caricature of a frazzled, frumpy PC user (comedian John Hodgman). Though the overt take-home message is about the superiority of Macs over PCs, the *deeper message* is about who you think you are and the image you want to project.

One way to breathe life into your current brand is by giving it more personality. Some commercial brands acquire their character through a well-known “personality” like Michael Jordan. Some world-changing organizations build their brand around their founder. The Sierra Club never seems to miss an opportunity to remind its members and the public that its first president was John Muir.

## Website

The importance of your organization’s website is probably second only to its name and tagline in defining its brand. It is now the primary portal outsiders use to peer into your organization and understand what it stands for and does. A professionally designed, highly attractive website with clear descriptions and intuitive navigation is now *a requirement* for any values-driven organization that wants to be taken seriously.

## Logo

Your logo is your principle “*mark*”—a visual embodiment of who it is and what it stands for. Logos should be appealing, memorable, and simple. If you’re going to change your brand, consider keeping your name but changing your logo and tagline.

## Visual identity

The visual dimensions of your brand are its website, logo, color palette, typefaces, graphical layouts, images, paper, and cardstock. Consistently portraying the same visual identity on your website, stationery, business cards, reports, and email strengthens your brand through constancy and familiarity.



## Digital assets

Besides your website, your digital assets are your ready-to-use templates, boilerplate text layouts, images, and photo libraries. The more attractive and accessible they are; the more likely your staff will use them. A well-designed visual identity and easy-to-use digital assets are essential to maintaining brand consistency.

### **4D. Design a communication plan to introduce the brand to your organization and target audiences**

How you do this depends on how much you are changing your brand and the size of your organization. It might include a mix of meetings to introduce the brand to your staff followed by a training session on its use.

## **Step 5. Implement your branding strategy and monitor its success**

### **5A. Appoint a brand champion and branding team to lead your branding strategy**

Designate a brand champion and branding team to design and implement your branding strategy.

### **5B. Monitor your brand's use and impact**

The branding team should ensure that your organization's brand is used consistently across the organization and monitor audiences' impressions of it.

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- \* — **Recommended**
- \*\* — **Highly recommend**



## APPENDIX

### How others define a brand



Neumeier.<sup>12</sup>

What follows are definitions of a brand from various marketing authorities. As you read them, you might suspect that we chose the most diverse or weird ones we could find; we did not. As far as we know, no consensus has emerged among branding experts and management theorist as to what a brand is.

*Gut feeling* about an organization and what it offers—Marty

*Expectation of experiencing a certain feeling*—Tom Asacker.<sup>13</sup>

*Shorthand* for an organization and what it offers—Andreasen and Kotler.<sup>14</sup>

A product that seems *different and unique*—Ries and Ries<sup>15</sup>

*Identity, underlying values, and promises* of an organization and what it offers—Holland.<sup>16</sup>

*Identity, personality, and abstract idea* behind an organization and its offerings—Wikipedia<sup>17</sup>

*Unique image* that identifies an organization and its offerings that represent certain attributes—*Business Dictionary*<sup>18</sup>

*Type of product* manufactured by a particular company under a particular name: *a new brand of detergent*—*New Oxford American Dictionary*<sup>19</sup>

*Proprietary image or identity* of an organization and its offerings—*Brand Solutions*<sup>20</sup>

### Incorporating Competitive Positioning Analysis into Your External Survey

This analysis measures the appeal of your brand and offerings to your target audiences—and compares them to those of your competitors. It also identifies the attributes of your organization and what it offers that most influences an audience's impression of your organization and its competitors. Ideally, it also determines how your organization and its offerings stack up against those of your competitors on these key attributes.

You can map the results of this analysis for each target audience, each market, or as one composite map of all your markets and audiences. Most competitive positioning maps are pairwise comparisons of the key variables that shape a market's or audience's impressions of your organization relative to its competitors. It's possible to draw three-dimensional maps of three variables, but they are harder to construct and interpret.

Another way to map competitive position is to average the scores for all the variables associated with the *benefits* organizations offer and plot them against the average score of all the *cost* variables associated with each organization. This type of analysis produces a *cost-benefit competitive positioning map*.

The competitive positioning analysis is a three-step process:

1. First, interview some audience members to find out who they see as your chief competitors. Then determine the essential characteristics or variables they use to form their impressions of your organization and your competitors—as well as your and your competitors’ offerings.
2. Survey or interview a larger sample of audience members to find out how they rate you and your chief competitors on each essential characteristic or variable. A critical survey or interview method used in competitive positioning analyses is the *semantic differential method*. The following semantic differential diagram and the aforementioned competitive positioning map illustrate this approach and how its results can be displayed. A key element of it is to ask people to score organizations from the polar or opposite extremes of each variable. For example, customer service might be scored from “extremely helpful” to “hostile.”
3. The last of the three steps is to plot your results on competitive positioning maps. The figure below illustrates how respondents rate three hypothetical organizations based on a polar-opposite scale for each variable.

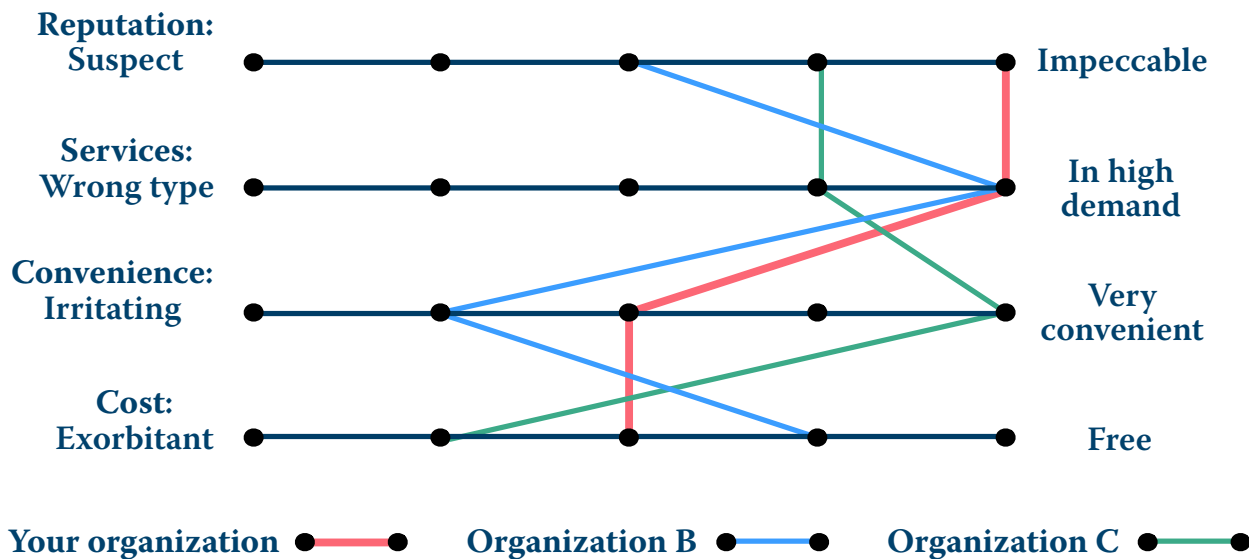


Fig. 3 Semantic differential diagram

## Competitive positioning maps

The best way to present the results of a competitive positioning analysis is with a competitive positioning map. To create a competitive positioning map, identify the key variables that most shape audiences' impressions of your organization and its competitors, and then obtain accurate data on them through a well-designed external survey. The following positioning map plots the audience's perceptions of the relative benefits and costs of what an organization offers compared to its competitors. The x- and y-axes represent composite variables: combinations of all benefits and all the costs associated with what the organization and its competitors offer.

Another and perhaps better way to choose the x and y variables is to determine the two variables that account for the most variability (biggest spread) between an organization's and its competitors' scores. Well-designed external surveys and interviews should reveal the key variables that distinguish your organization from your competitors in your audiences' minds. The blue vector or arrow represents the organization's positioning strategy to improve its standing or competitive position within this audience.



Fig. 4 Competitive positioning map

## Marketing messages that stick—Heath brothers’ SUCCEs principles

Chip Heath, a Stanford business professor who researches why some business communications succeed, and others fail, and his brother Dan have written a short and insightful book entitled, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*. Their research reveals that sticky ideas share six traits:<sup>21</sup>

**Simplicity.** Short, memorable messages that strike a deep chord stick in one’s mind.

**Unexpectedness.** Surprising or counterintuitive statements that grab people’s attention.

**Concreteness.** Concrete language and images like “put an American on the moon in this decade” stick.

**Credibility.** Asking the audience if experiencing what you described establishes more credibility than quoting outside experts.

**Emotions.** Personal stories, not abstractions, are what most people remember.

**Stories.** Stories stick with us because they help us define who we are, explain our place in the world, and prepare us for future events.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> **World-changing organizations** are committed to making the world a better place—whether in a local community, a region, or the world. Many are **nonprofits** and **governmental institutions**. But others are **companies** striving as much to make a difference as turn a profit. When we refer to *organizations* in this document, we mean *world-changing ones* unless we specify otherwise.

They range from small organizations working in local communities to global organizations like the U.S. Agency for International Development (which I consulted for) and The Nature Conservancy (which I worked for) that work in 100 and 30 countries respectively.

*What do these seemingly diverse organizations have in common?* Most of them are trying to solve complex problems (e.g., social, societal, environmental, and scientific—to name a few); understand and serve a variety of audiences with different agendas (e.g., clients, funders, and supporters); seek support from diverse interest groups; and manage an idealistic, independent, and often iconoclastic workforce.

These are just some of the things they have in common. And it is up to an organization to determine if it is sufficiently committed to making a difference in the world to refer to itself as “world-changing.” If so, they may wish to avail themselves of what we offer.

To avoid repetition, we sometimes refer to them as **values-driven**, **mission-driven**, and **purpose-driven**. Use the term “values-driven” most often because, as we explain in our *Guiding Statements Guide* and elsewhere, we believe their core values drive everything they stand for and do.

And we often refer to the people who work in and support them as **conscience-driven** because their inner sense of what’s right and wrong compels them to work for and support these organizations.

<sup>2</sup> Klein, *No Logo*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> We grant you permission to use our guides or any part of them for non-commercial purposes free of charge, including distributing printed versions of them, if you acknowledge they were written by Jonathan Reed, PhD of The Center for World-Changing Organizations. We licensed the stock images from iStock and Fotolia. We used OmniGraffle to design the figures.

<sup>4</sup> Ries and Ries, *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding*, 22 and 26.

<sup>5</sup> We use the term **compelling** to mean *evoking interest, attention, or admiration in a powerfully irresistible way* from *New Oxford American Dictionary* on a Mac.

<sup>6</sup> Keller, *Strategic Brand Management*.



- <sup>7</sup> Sargeant and Ford, “The Power of Brands.”
- <sup>8</sup> Neumeier, *The Brand Gap*, 44 and 47.
- <sup>9</sup> Ries and Ries, *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding*, 26.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.
- <sup>11</sup> Kotler, *According to Kotler*, 63.
- <sup>12</sup> Neumeier, *The Brand Gap*, 2.
- <sup>13</sup> Asacker, *A Clear Eye for Branding*, 32.
- <sup>14</sup> Andreasen & Kotler, *Strategic Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations*, 171.
- <sup>15</sup> Ries and Ries, *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding*, ix.
- <sup>16</sup> Holland, *Branding for Nonprofits*, 5.
- <sup>17</sup> *Wikipedia*—“Brand” (accessed on 2010-8-21).
- <sup>18</sup> *Online Business Dictionary* at <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/brand.html>, accessed on 2010-8-21.
- <sup>19</sup> *New Oxford American Dictionary* in Apple’s Snow Leopard OS 10.6.4 (accessed on 2010-8-21).
- <sup>20</sup> Brand Solutions from brand.com—<http://brand.com/branding-knowledge.htm> (accessed on 2010-8-21).
- <sup>21</sup> Mendonca and Miller, “Crafting a Message that Sticks.” Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*.

*Never doubt that a small group  
of thoughtful, committed people  
can change the world.*

*Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*

— Margaret Mead

# OUR SERVICES AND RESOURCES

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## Consulting and Training Services

We offer a full range of consulting services on planning, marketing, and organizational development—design, surveys, facilitation, implementation, and evaluation. We offer training programs on many subjects. See our *Catalogue of Services on our website* for details.

## Planning and Facilitating Retreats and Board Meetings

Retreats and board meetings are the best times to gain strategic insights and forge strong bonds among leaders. We can help you plan and facilitate these gatherings. We also can help you set their goals, design creative ways to achieve them, and ensure discussions are honest and respectful. Topics can range from emerging opportunities to resolving underlying issues.

Probably the best topic is *“How can we make our organization more successful?”* We’d welcome the opportunity to explore it with your leaders and board from an hour-long meeting to a weekend retreat. They’d consider what success means to their organization; what supports, produces, and drives it; and how to strengthen the forces behind it.

## Keynote Addresses

Topics for our keynote addresses include world-changing strategy, marketing, and leadership, which we tailor to your organization; inspirational stories to motivate staff; and other topics.

## Your Resource Library for Making a Difference in the World

- #1 Strategic Planning Guide: How to Design More Effective Strategies to Deliver on and Support Your Mission** ~55 pages
- #2 Strategic Planning Workbook** ~40 pages (not pictured below)
- #3 Guiding Statements Guide: Core Values, Mission, and Vision** ~25 pages
- #4 Strategic Marketing Guide: How to Better Understand, Engage, and Serve Those Who Determine Your Success** ~50 pages
- #5 Strategic Marketing Workbook** ~50 pages (not pictured below)
- #6 Branding Guide: How to Stand Out from the Herd of Organizations in Your Field** ~25 pages
- #7 Leadership Guide: How to Build a More Successful World-Changing Organization** ~75 pages
- #8 Manager’s Survival Guide: 5 Keys to Guide World-Changing Staff and Projects** ~30 pp.

