



by Janay Wittek-Balke

Marketing Lessons School Boards Can't Ignore

Can you remember that rush of adrenaline coursing through your veins when your high school team defeated its rival opponent in an important game? There was no better thrill than showing *them* which school was the best! The crowd cheered, "We're number one!" The excited onlookers proudly waved the school pennant through the air.

But how did you know your school was number one? Did you perform a formal research study and compare your school to other area schools, determining which was better? Did you poll students and parents, asking for their opinion and experiences? Did you look at the data, test scores, drop-out rates? Of course not! You just knew it. It was your "perception." Your loyalty was with your school, and no one could convince you otherwise. You didn't need proof, you simply believed it!

Branding

The loyalty you felt was generated based on the "branding" and "positioning" of the school in your community. "Come again?" you say. Positioning can be defined as

how a product (your school) appears in relation to other competitors (rival schools) in the market (your community or region). Branding is a way of differentiating an organization's product and services from those of its competitors. Who are the competitors? Rival schools, of course!

Background

Brand identity was a concept born in the business world, where customer loyalty and product recognition are king. Public schools are now facing many of the same competitive challenges as their private-sector counterparts. It is time for schools to take a cue from businesses by consciously creating and nurturing their brand identity.

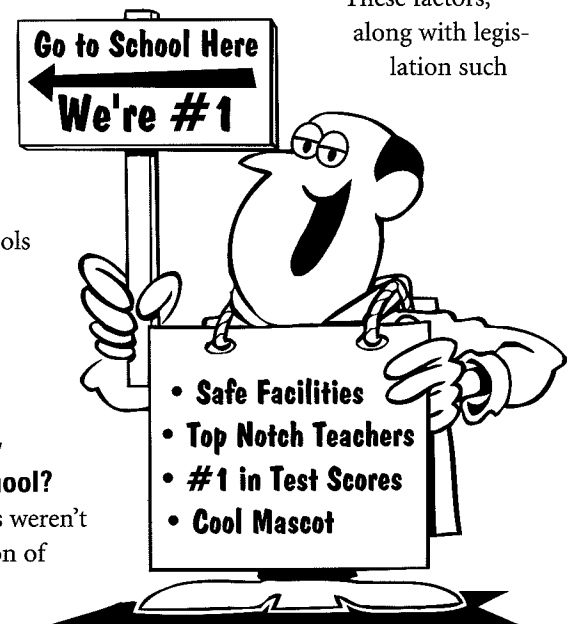
Why is Brand Identity Important to Your School?

For years public schools weren't bothered with the notion of image or identity. The loyal alumni of the

school typically maintained the image of the school without question. Children went to the school their parents attended and sent their own children to that school as well. People did not question the quality of the school; they were raised to believe it was the best choice. In many cases, it was the only choice.

Today our society is more competitive and far more mobile. We no longer consistently live in the community of our childhood.

These factors, along with legislation such



as open enrollment and private school vouchers, have produced a new marketplace, giving parents many different options for their child's education. For example, virtual learning now enables a student in La Crosse to attend schools world-wide.

So what makes your district stand apart from all the other options? This is the question you need to answer.

What is your brand identity?

Product identification is an important component of brand identity. It only takes a moment to recognize your favorite brand of soda pop. When most of us reach for a tissue before we sneeze, we ask for a Kleenex® without even thinking about it as a brand name. But product identification is only a

component of brand identity.

Sue Northey, senior vice president and managing director of brand planning at a marketing company called Cramer Krasselt, describes branding as "creating a good experience for all individuals touched by your organization."

Interbrand, a global branding firm, defines a brand in this way: "A mixture of tangible and intangible attributes symbolized in a trademark, which, if properly managed, creates influence and generates value."

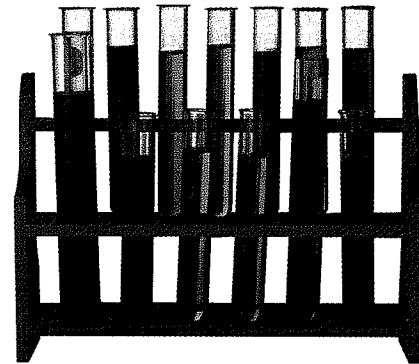
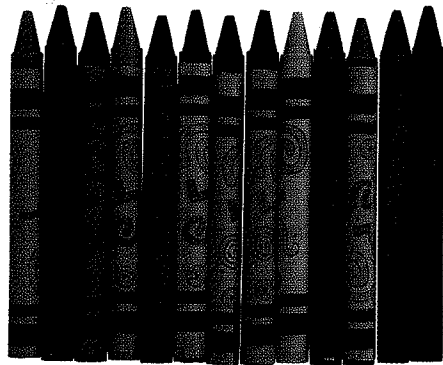
Although the concept of branding can sometimes be hard to fully grasp, the above descriptions clearly define why it is a value to the organization.

What is the Value of Your Brand?

Does your school have high brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality and success? There is plenty of evidence to prove that customers will pay a substantial price premium for a good brand and remain loyal to that brand. We can all understand this as it relates to products or services. Where schools are concerned, brand value can mean the difference between a parent sending a child to the private school down the road or enrolling him or her in your school.

Brand Position

Every product or service has some sort of position—whether intended or not. Positions are based upon consumer perceptions, which may or may not reflect reality. A position is effectively built by communicating a ▶



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consistent message to consumers about the product and where it fits into the market. This is equally important for schools.

For example, television and print media outlets have fixated on incidents of school violence in the past 24 months. This overwhelming exposure has led people to perceive schools to be far more violent today than in the past. The reality, however, is very different. Data indicates students ages 12 through 18 are more likely to be victims of nonfatal violent crime—including rape, sexual assault, robbery and aggravated assault—away from school than when they are at school. This data is from “Indicators of School Crime and Safety,” a 2002 publication of the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice. Similar reports show the rate of school violence in the United States has actually decreased in the past 20 years, including gun violence.

Positioning your school as a safe place for students is necessary to combat these perceptions.

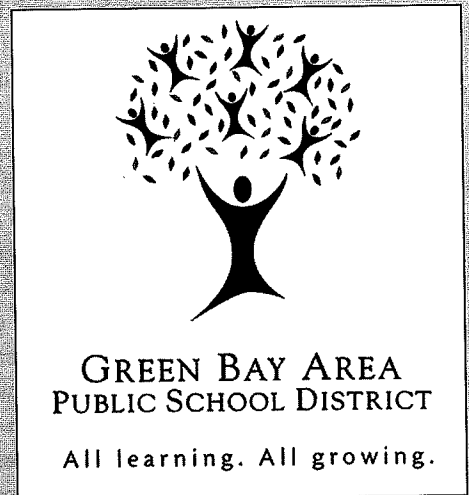
Now that you are aware of the importance of brand identity, where do you begin?

Green Bay Area Public Schools is one district well on the way to repositioning its brand. As a by-product of the district’s recent strategic plan, Green Bay officials aspired to redevelop the district image in the community.

The goal was to develop a brand identity clearly representing the values, beliefs and mission of the district. Plans for integrating technology into communication strategies and developing effective avenues for employee and community input into the

Green Bay Area Public School District Logo Development Rationale

The student/teacher relationship is portrayed in the form of a dynamic, growing tree. The figure representing the trunk of the tree symbolizes the combined efforts of the Green Bay Area Public School District. Scattered throughout the foliage of the tree are figures representing our young students as they grow and are nurtured by these efforts. They are fanned out, almost as if they are about to launch or be launched outward into the world—imagery befitting an institution whose goal is to prepare young minds for the future. The vertical format of the logo accentuates the idea of growth and the tag, “All learning. All growing” reiterates the mission of the Green Bay Area Public School District as embracing learning for all as its highest priority.



decision-making process were a few elements of the plan. The district also needed an updated visual identity.

“Creating a new logo and identity statement were essential to our branding process,” said Amanda Brooker, manager of school and community relations for the Green Bay Area Public School District. “We weren’t just looking for a new logo to update our brochures, we needed something that visually embodied our beliefs and purpose as a district.”

The district was fortunate to work with Imaginasium, a local advertising agency, that donated its time and creativity to create a new logo and identity statement for the district.

The information provided in the shaded boxes should help you get started.

Wittek-Balke, APR, is the communications coordinator for Franklin Public Schools.