

Simple solutions to strengthen the identity of your organization (and increase awareness at the same time)

When it comes to your organization and how it is perceived, there is nothing more important than your identity and brand, because the lack of a clear identity can lead to confusion about what your organization does, and what it stands for.

The name of your organization, and your logo, are the most important and visible aspects of your identity. For many, the logo is simply the name of the organization presented in a very specific font (typeface) and color or colors. Other organizations use an “icon” along with the logo treatment of their name. An icon can be a very simple and effective identifier -- think of the red cross used by the American Red Cross, or the apple used by Macintosh computers.

It is important to continuously reinforce your identity and brand in all that you do – via such things as simple things as your letterhead, business cards, email, website, etc., and also via more complex things such as signage, vehicles, advertising, etc.

Important things to keep in mind are:

- *Be consistent* – avoid abbreviating the name of your organization if at all possible, but if the name is long and abbreviation is necessary, be sure to abbreviate the name in way that will not confuse anyone as to the identity of your organization. And, use the same abbreviation at all times.
- *Reinforce your message* – get the name of your organization “out there” as frequently as possible to increase awareness of who you are and what you do, thereby strengthening your identity and brand.

How can you get the word out?

There are many things you can do – with little or no cost involved -- to further strengthen your identity and increase awareness of your organization at the same time.

It's important to communicate news about your organization. Consider sharing information (with both internal and external audiences) about things such as:

- new programs or initiatives
- new hires or volunteers
- new board members
- significant accomplishments
- awards or recognition received
- community outreach
- human interest stories (keep an eye on what is happening in your area – there may be a way that you can make a simple, logical connection between your organization and a current event that is “in the news”)

Simple press releases can take just minutes to write, and when shared with the right audiences, can generate much interest in and awareness of your organization. Some lists of basic information to include in a press release are provided at the end of this article*.

Once you prepare a press release, you need to know what to do with it. Consider the following:

- Develop an email address list of individuals interested or involved in your organization – when you have news to share, do a quick email blast to all of them (and be sure that the name/logo of your organization is included!)
- Put together a media list for distribution of press releases* – either via regular mail, fax or email. Many publications (including The Plain Dealer and Crain’s Cleveland Business) feature standard columns in which they publish information about new hires, promotions, appointments to boards of directors, etc.)
- Consider purchasing an annual membership with an organization such as PR Newswire. This is a more expensive option, as there is an annual fee, as well as a fee per press release issued. However, you can specify exactly where your press release will be sent – geographically, by industry, by type of media (web, print, electronic), etc. Using a wire service will ensure that your release is distributed very comprehensively, so is worth considering if you have major news to share that will be of interest to a broad range of audiences. Another plus for using a wire service is that you will receive updates on where your release was picked up, so, you’ll know what kind of results you are getting for your investment.



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