

ON-DEMAND PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SERIES



EPISODE 4

Marketing, Branding, and Telling Your School's Story



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doodles and notes



Marketing, branding, public relations, advertising, and messaging are all important aspects of a company's quest to attract new customers, turn them into repeat customers, and perhaps even turn a few of them into raving fans that will spread the good word to others. We know these concepts are important for a company to compete in a free market environment, but do they have currency

in the public education world, where students are often assigned to schools that are all similar by design? The answer is surely yes. While the tactics of marketing and brand building differ in the business and education worlds, the concepts transfer perfectly. School leaders do well to build and position their school's brand in the education marketplace so as to increase engagement, support, and good will.

Some definitions from the business world:

Brand: Unique design, sign, symbol, words, or a combination of these, employed in creating an image that identifies a product and differentiates it from its competitors. Over time, this image becomes associated with a level of credibility, quality, and satisfaction in the consumer's mind (positioning). Brands help harried consumers in a crowded and complex marketplace, by standing for certain benefits and value. (businessdictionary.com)

From Seth Godin's book *Linchpin*- "A brand is the set of expectations, memories, stories, and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer's decision to choose one product or service over another. If the consumer (whether it's a business, a buyer, a voter, or a donor) doesn't pay a premium, make a selection, or spread the word, then no brand value exists for that consumer." (Godin, 2011).

"Your brand is what people say about you when you're not in the room."
(Jeff Bezos, Founder and CEO of Amazon)

Marketing: The management process through which goods and services move from concept to the customer. It includes the coordination of four elements called the 4 P's of marketing: (1) identification, selection and development of a product (2) determination of its price (3) selection of a distribution channel to reach the customer's place (4) development and implementation of a promotional strategy. (businessdictionary.com)

Success Principles for Educational Brand Building:

BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

In *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey reminds us that "all things are created twice," first in our minds and then in reality. Therefore, we should "begin with the end in mind" (Covey, 1989).

The end-product of brand building is to create a specific set of thoughts and feelings in the mind of customers, or constituents. Target... affordable chic; Airbnb... adventure and community; Burt's Bees... natural, high quality body care products with a touch of social/environmental activism; Nike... equipment for greatness- just do it... Ford F-150 pickup truck... tough, capable, best of class.

"A brand for a company is like a reputation for a person. You earn reputation by trying to do hard things well."

Jeff Bezos

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Get the idea? Start with identifying these thoughts and feelings and then build the brand to dependably cause them. What exactly do we want our constituents (parents, students, faculty, community, etc.) to think and feel about our school?

Midwood Elementary School, Home of the Comets... family, optimism, inclusive, become the best version of you, holistic, community

Riverton High School, Home of the Wolves... team-oriented, the pack is the wolf, and the wolf is the pack, future driven, opportunity, purpose, relevance

UNDERSTAND YOUR MARKET

Who, in the total educational marketplace, do you want to engage with your brand? Keep in mind that an effective brand has just as much impact internally as externally. So, include faculty, staff, and other professionals or paraprofessionals that work inside the school. Make a list- Internal constituents: teachers, administrators, staff, itinerant staff... External constituents: Students, parents, community, local businesses, media... Internal/external constituents: Board members, central office leaders, maintenance workers...



CREATE A UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION (USP)

A Unique Selling proposition (USP) is a branding/marketing concept that means a product's (or person's or school's) key points of differentiation in a crowded marketplace. Supermarket shelves are organized by product category, not by brand. So, many products from the same category are right next to each other on the shelves. If Proctor & Gamble's Tide wants to stand out on a shelf full of laundry detergent options, it must lead with its USP- why Tide instead of any of the other options? Tide's USP? Tide is solid, proven, dependable- the gold standard (or orange). Smucker's jelly is displayed right next to many other brands. Why buy Smuckers? Because "With a name like Smuckers, it has to be good." The name Smuckers is unique, it's different, it makes you smile... surely the jelly inside does likewise.

Schools are not positioned on shelves like laundry detergent and jelly, but schools can and should have a well-thought out USP. What makes your school different? What do your students and families receive that isn't offered in other settings? Considering all the pros and cons, why choose your school?

A strong USP helps the marketplace find you. No one drives onto a Volvo sales lot looking for a cheap, sexy car. Volvo stands for safety and longevity, not cheap thrills. Customers are already pre-qualified when they drive onto the lot. Make your school known for its hi tech, innovative programs and families who are looking for hi-tech, innovative programs will find you.

“A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is—it is what consumers tell each other it is.”

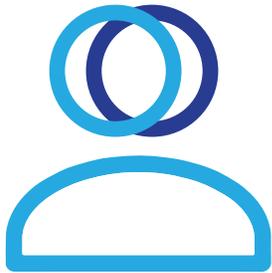
Scott Cook

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People have USPs too. Everyone knows who Dr. Martin Luther King was and exactly what he stood for. Mother Theresa is never confused with Lady Gaga- both have strong, clear USPs.

A school's brand contains its USP. Find your school's unique blend of attributes that complement one another. A school that positions itself as hi-tech and hi-touch, is more compelling than a school that is hi-tech and online.



FIND YOUR COMPLEX DUALITY

Brands and people are more interesting and memorable if they embody a little complexity- not too much, just a little. Dairy Queen, now that it serves both food and ice cream, calls itself Grill n Chill. Target is not just known for low prices, but for low prices on sophisticated, chic items. Tesla cars are not merely electric and therefore eco-friendly, they are also luxury and high-performance.

Princess Diana was both royal and common. Ronald Reagan was known as both strong and warm. Students find teachers who cannot be described with a single descriptor more compelling and memorable. For a teacher, it's better to be known as organized- and occasionally spontaneous, than as organized- and occasionally obsessively organized.

BUILD A BRAND NARRATIVE

Stories and narratives are superb mental models (Rutherford, 2013, p. 87-90). They allow the human brain to recall, process, and transfer great amounts of information. *"Story is a sense-making device. It identifies a necessary ambition, defines challenges that are fighting to keep us from achieving that ambition, and provides a plan to help us conquer those challenges. When we define the elements of a story as it relates to our brand, we create a map that customers can follow to engage our products and services."* (Miller, D. 2017, p.9-10).

NY Times bestselling author Donald Miller, in *Building a Story Brand*, lays out a template for an effective brand story: A character (the hero)... has a problem... and meets a guide... who has a plan... and calls the hero to action... that helps the hero avoid failure... and ends in success. (Miller, D. 2017, p.21).

According to Miller, the most effective brand narratives DO NOT position themselves as the hero of the story. The customer/client is the hero. The brand plays the role of the guide... who has a plan, calls the hero to action, helps the hero avoid failure, and helps the hero realize success (Miller, D. 2017).

School leaders can apply this template to their school's effort to build a brand narrative. The heroes of the story are students, the school plays the role of the guide, who calls the heroes to action, helps them overcome problems to avoid failure, and achieve success. Stories are made even more compelling if they also include villains, external struggles, internal struggles, side-kicks, obstacles, last-minute heroics, etc.

"Products are made in a factory, but brands are created in the mind."

Walter Landor

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