

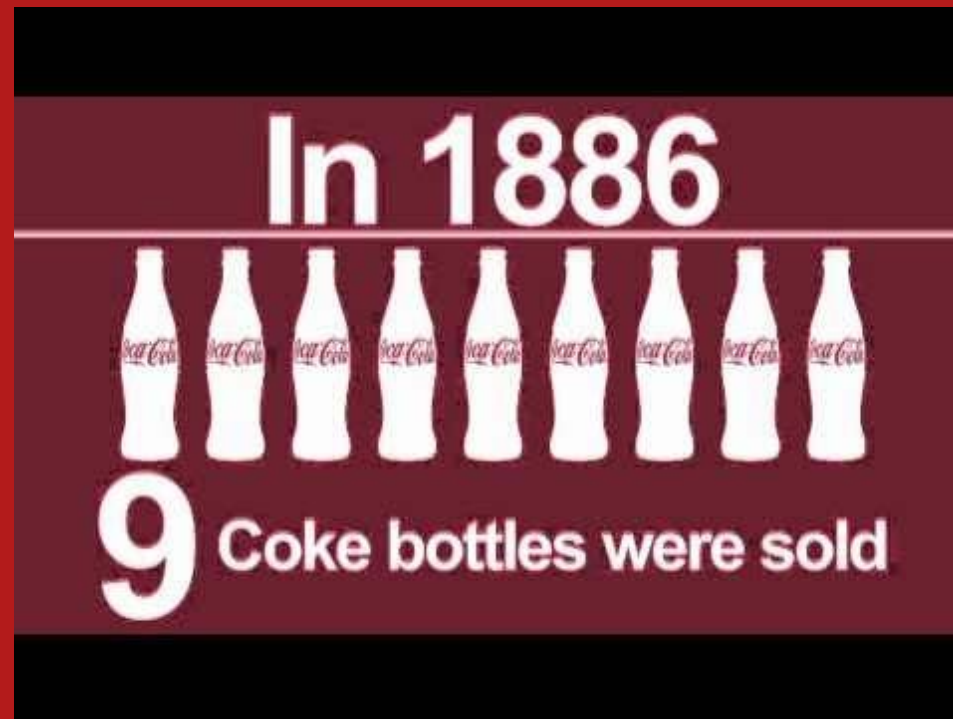
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What is a Brand and Why is it Important in the Modern Digital Age?

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What is Branding?



Everyone in this room needs to think about their brand.

Really.



What is a brand (and why should you care)?

A brand is intangible but extremely important:

- A promise to consumers
- It's what audiences will get when they purchase or interact with your products/programs/service
- It's also a tool that conveys a set of beliefs or ideas to your audiences
- It helps people determine WHY they should interact with you
- Brand is something you interact with every day. It helps you form your own consumer choices.

What is a brand? Cont.

- Brand is not something you put on a shelf – it's something your whole organization lives every day
- Typically once you determine your brand, you write a brand strategy that will help the staff of your organization be consistent with expressing what that brand is
- A brand can help people inside and outside the organization know how to relate to the essence of what the place stands for and why it exists
- You can have a strategic plan to help people in an organization know where they are going without them understanding WHY they are going there

Brand Plan vs. Strategic Plan

Some of you might be thinking: this sounds like a strategic plan. Isn't that the process where we determine our mission and vision?

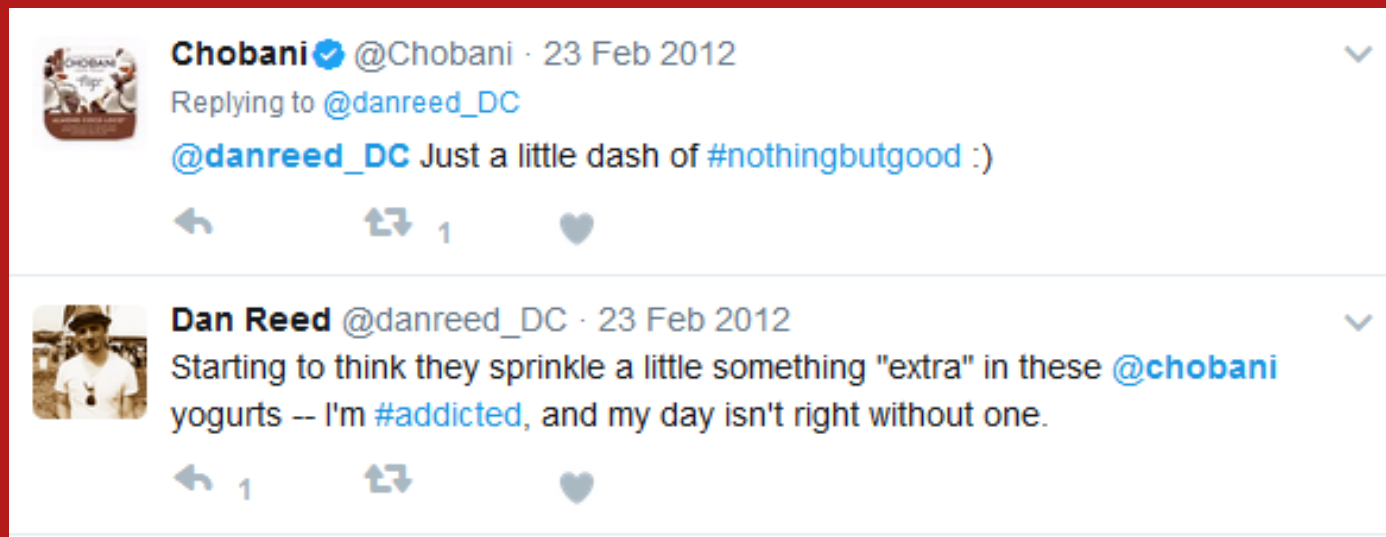
YES.

A strategic plan articulates what you want to do and **how** you plan to do it

A brand plan tells you (and everyone else) **why** you do what you do – it articulates your reputation so you can fulfill your mission

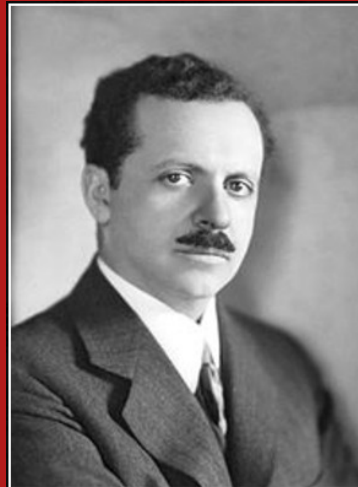
What is the power of having a brand identity?

An example:



But isn't all this just propaganda or manipulation? Meet Edward Bernays.

- *He developed a concept called the "engineering of consent"*
- *His work demonstrated that appealing to the subconscious, not the rational mind, was the way to control and regiment the masses*
- *He famously marketed cigarettes to women by using*



We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of.

— Edward Bernays —

AZ QUOTES

Branding as a force for good

- Just because companies use branding to sell products does not mean you should avoid it
- Branding itself can be honest, authentic and will create a dialogue with your stakeholders and key audiences
- It can help generate excitement in your cause



Branding and higher education

- About 20 years ago, higher education institutions began to see an increase in direct competition to their business model
- Students began to want a more developed sense of the lifestyle they would have at an institution, and to demand a more diverse set of educational products that include online learning
- In response, colleges and universities began to realize the importance of creating a “branded house” to help prospective students choose
- What else happened 20 years ago? The rise of the digital age!

Communication became a two-way street



The Digital Age changed everything

- Orgs. understood the new era and began using the Internet as an extension of their brand.
- Audiences could now seek out information directly, and lots more of it. They also gained access to the brands directly through such tools as social media.
- The strong voice that audiences gained through social media use began to have as much power to influence the reputation of a brand as whatever the company or organization did.
- People began to also have conversations with many others with more ease.

The times, they are changing: More people interact with your brand digitally than ever

before

Search engines are how people find you and find out about you

- 71% of B2B researchers start their research with a generic search. (Google)
- In 2012, a Google study found that online search was the most common influencer for shoppers; trumping family and friends as the most-used source of information for the first time ever.

Increasingly, mobile internet use is key

- More Google searches take place on mobile devices than on computers in 10 countries including the U.S. and Japan. (Google, 2015)
- 61% of consumers said that they are more likely to contact a local business if they have a mobile optimized site. (Brightlocal, 2015)

Which means if you are concerned about your reputation, you cannot ignore your digital self

- A key part of understanding your brand identity is having a strategy for how you do your business while considering how it should be managed in the digital age.
- Creating a responsive website and a brand identity that stands the test of time and delivers in the digital world is now a priority. People are online right now who you could use your help. How will they find you?
- The digital experience you offer your audiences is a reflection of who you are and how much you value them.
- What will people find out about your agricultural station, or college, or system, or program, on the Internet? Who is monitoring that?

In the digital era, you cannot control your brand

- You and your organization may manage your brand but you cannot control it. What it requires is that you express yourself consistently so people learn by repetition. If every time they interact with your brand you deliver a consistent experience or impression, then that is the lasting feeling they will have toward you.

Things to think about

- Successful branding starts with a clear strategic vision
- Presenting a concrete vision gives your audiences confidence in their choice to interact with your people and services.
- Don't get caught up in the DOING. If you're burying your research deep within a website that no one visits, does it make a sound?
- Do you have a communications strategy? Do you understand your key audiences and how to reach them? Do you understand how they perceive you? What reputation challenges do you face and how should you overcome them?

Things to think about

- It's important to identify stakeholders and their motivations for interacting with your institution. Some are obvious – students and their parents, gardeners, growers. But do you have a strategy for attracting donors? What about citizens in the state where you live, do they know your value? What do these groups think about you: funding decision-makers in government, corporate business partners and sponsors, and the local community?

How a developed sense of brand can help

Once you determine what your brand is, a variety of tools can be used to communicate brand to audiences. If you are struggling with any of these things, you should consider that the answer lies within an exploration of your brand:

- Visual identity: Photography, website layout, logo
- Messaging strategy/Tone: What issues do we write op-eds about? Which research do we prioritize publicizing? What is our personality like as we talk about ourselves? How do we know what stories we tell will best resonate?
- Behavior: How do you act as an organization? Do you share the values of your audiences?

Talk to your
communications
people



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