

Branding

PMM5 Postscript™ Number 6

Background Information: Marketing and promotion optimizes the quality of a meeting and enhances the number of people who ultimately attend. Chapter 5, Marketing and Promotion: Strategy and Collaboration for Success, in *Professional Meeting Management®*, fifth edition, includes overall marketing information for meeting managers including:

- Creating an integrated marketing strategy
- Preparing a work plan and timeline for a marketing plan
- Incorporating integrated marketing strategies into sponsorship and fundraising efforts

The concept of branding offers valuable lessons for staging a great meeting. Ellen Toups touches on the importance of branding in Chapter 5 where she remarks about the importance of a “marketing message that is consistent and that your meeting has a brand identity that remains constant” (Toups, p. 64).

PMM5 Postscriptä Use: Branding is a business concept of which all meeting managers should be aware. As a marketing tactic available to marketing professionals, meetings can help reinforce or detract from an organization’s brand. Branding can help sharpen a meeting manager’s focus on a meeting ensuring that the experience furthers the organization’s brand equity. The PMM5 Postscript™ also includes additional group discussion or research projects to supplement the PMM5 chapter. PMM5 Postscript™ Number 15 on post-event marketing may also be of interest.

Learner Outcomes: At the completion of this reading, you should be able to:

- Define a brand.
- Identify the role meetings play in organizational branding.
- Assess at least two ways to improve branding of meetings.

Related PMM5 Chapter: Chapter 5, Marketing and Promotion: Strategy and Collaboration for Success
Author: Ellen J. Toups, CMP



What is a Brand?

A brand is not merely a symbol or a name, but the culmination of communications and experiences that a person receives from every contact with an organization. A brand is the proprietary visual, emotional, rational, and cultural image that a person associates with a company or a product.

Strong brands share four characteristics:

- Possess a share of mind
- Create trust
- Are focused
- Based on emotions or beliefs

Brands create relationships between a person and the company or product. The brand relationship is akin to a close friendship. Friendships develop over time and are built on trust and emotion. Friendships allow for less than perfect relationship, although over time a friendship can disintegrate if it fails to meet expectations.

Strong brands have the following advantages. A strong brand will help:

- Market to the right people — the ones who value the “brand” promise
- Make the right products or offer the right services
- Plan the strategic direction
- Hire and retain the right employees/members
- Increase customer/members and employee loyalty

Branding In Action

Building an effective brand is done through a strategy orchestrated by marketing and fully supported by the management of the organization. However, simply having a strategy does not make a brand. And interestingly, it is in the execution of a branding program where meetings and brands intersect.

Organizations with strong brands understand that having regular communication through meetings and other two-way conversations with all members of their brand communities is critical to successful branding. A brand community is made up of executives, employees, partners and alliances, customers, prospects, industry peers, media, suppliers and shareholders.

Strong branding becomes part of the culture when employees or members, partners, customers and shareholders are fully cognizant of the brand. A brand is strong when employees live up to a brand promise or when a customer makes a referral based on successful delivery of the product or service.

Mark Di Somma says that three things needed to build a brand-aligned culture are “information, inspiration and motivation” (Di Somma). A fabulous way to spread that information, inspiration and motivation is through meetings. Those meetings include:

- Internal meetings
- Meetings with customers and prospects
- Investor relations meetings
- Stockholders meetings

Especially in internal meetings, employees watch upper management live up to their core values and brand promise. They see leadership walk the talk in meetings. PMM5 Postscript™ Number 9 specifically discusses the link between leadership and meetings.

Meetings are the Medium

Meetings are a superb medium to integrate a brand. Meetings create opportunities to:

- Model behavior
- Create passion and inspiration
- Create energy

Successful branding requires that culture and people are aligned to the brand. Branding is an investment just like investments in buildings, information technology and research and development. Without this investment an organization operates at a competitive disadvantage.

It is also important that employees understand, believe in and act according to an organization's brand. Customers will not be loyal to something that employees don't believe in. Employees must actually live the brand values, and line up internal behavior with external values. Employees will model behavior exhibited in others — especially senior management. Employees actions are an extension of the brand. This creates credibility.

Branding and culture are related because branding provides internal focus; branding can drive the direction of the organization. Through branding an organization can find internal passion and inspiration. A brand will be compromised if departments or areas function in isolation and lose collective sight of the customer. The brand must permeate the culture otherwise pockets or silos will exist where the behavior, attitudes, and processes create an entirely different brand.

At the Institute for International Research's The Branding Trilogy Conference in Santa Barbara, California, Kristine Shattuck, Los Angeles Area Marketing Manager, Southwest Airlines put it well when she said, "Enthusiastic employees spread enthusiasm to customers. Market to your employees as much as your customers. If your employees don't 'get it,' neither will your customers." This can only happen if top management aligns all of its processes and systems in support of its brand's promise.

Better than riches: Benefits of Branding

"A good name is better than riches." said Miguel de Cervantes, the Spanish novelist and author of Don Quixote. Why do people want a Volvo? What is the value of a Tiffany box?

The benefits of branding include:

- **Receiving premium pricing** - Customers pay a premium for security and quality.
- **Offsetting risk** - People prefer the known over the unknown, and stay loyal to brands that "work" for them, both in tangible and intangible ways.
- **Differentiating** - Branding helps create differentiation in a word that is full of products (many of them commoditized) and full of noise.

Branding a Meeting

Meetings help an organization execute its branding strategy. The flip side is what can meeting managers learn from branding that will help meetings?

Meetings Need the 3 C's — Just as marketing has the 4 P's (Placement, Product, Price, and Publicity), branding is driven by the “three C's of branding: Clarity, Consistency, and Constancy. Meetings also benefit from clarity, consistency and constancy.

Alignment is Paramount — Successful branding requires an alignment between the business and brand strategy. Meetings are also a tool to build the business and must be tied to the overall business strategy.

Profound Customer Knowledge is Essential — Any branding initiative must start with a solid understanding of the customers' needs. Likewise, any effort to craft a meeting must begin with understanding of what the participants want to walk away with after the meeting. Remember this Dale Carnegie quote when creating a meeting's brand promise: “People aren't interested in you. They are interested in themselves.”

Brand Relies on Emotions and a Sensory Experience — Emotional connection is what every brand strives for. Branding is built upon awareness and then trust and finally the consumer feels an emotional connection. Brad VanAuken notes that people become emotionally connected to a brand for a number of reasons:

- The brand stands for something important to them.
- The brand is intense and vibrant. It connects with people on multiple levels across several senses.
- The brand is unique.
- The brand is admirable.
- The brand consistently interacts with them. It never disappoints them.
- The brand makes them feel good.

Successful meetings also create emotional connections. This is the uniqueness of face-to-face events. The lesson from branding is to insure that we take full advantage of the emotional and sensory opportunities presented by meetings.

Later in his article where VanAuken cites the 15 most important things to know about Building Winning Brands, he sites #11 as “Create a sense of community.” Like brands, meetings should also create a sense of community. The face-to-face interaction is every meeting's inherent advantage and should be fully capitalized upon in every setting (VanAuken).

Monitor and Measure — In branding, an organization is building brand equity. Like meeting impact, brand equity can be an elusive element to track.

Monitoring has the following three advantages:

- **Dollars and sense** — Brand measurement enables allocation of dollars where it will have the largest impact.
- **Brand bulls-eye** — Measurement keeps the brand on target by evaluating if communications are used effectively and consistently throughout the organization. The results help fine-tune efforts and gauge the responses of various audiences.

- **Follow through** — Measurement allows determination if the brand promise is being delivered.

Measurement always helps support focus and follow-through. Measurement helps refine and make improvements.

Keep the Brand Promise — Nothing is worse than disappointing by not delivering the expected results. Meetings and meeting participants should work hard to keep their promise made before and during meetings. Meeting manager involved in the planning process should deliver what they said they would. Participants should fulfill their role too in keeping the meeting's promise.

Summary

Meetings are one of the core marketing activities of an organization. As a marketing element, meetings can help reinforce an organization's brand. Reinforcement occurs in how meetings are positioned, planned and branded, and the messaging and behavior that occurs in the meeting. The best branded organizations fully engage their employees or members in understanding the brand promise of the organization.

Meetings are opportunities to detract from or contribute to an organization's brand. Everyone attending the meeting experiences the brand through collateral, themes, content, venue, logistics (like registration) and the behavior of the people organizing and leading the meeting.

Jeffrey Cufaude opines on the skills of the future for professional meeting managers in *Professional Meeting Management*. One skill he notes is the ability to "embody and exemplify the mission, vision, goals and brand attributes of the meeting or conference hosts organization" (Cufaude, p. 8). Lessons about branding can help sharpen a meeting manager's focus on a meeting ensuring that the experience furthers the organization's brand equity.

Group Discussion or Projects

1. Describe how various meeting elements could contribute to or detract from an organization's brand. Use the list below as a starting point and add 3 additional meeting elements:
 - Music
 - Registration process
 - Venue
2. Brand attributes are the functional or emotional associations that are assigned to a brand by its customers and prospects. Brand attributes can be either negative or positive and can have varying degrees of relevance and importance to different customer segments. Describe 5-7 brand attributes of a meeting that you have attended or planned.
3. A Brand Audit is a comprehensive and systematic examination of all collateral (both tangible and intangible) which relates to a brand. What collateral would be included in a brand audit for a meeting?

4. The book, *Living the Brand*, posits that it is employees who build brands through their identification with values that enables organizations to generate a commitment that can become intuitive. Identify an organization (preferably in the hospitality or travel industry) that has built its brand (or reinforces its brand) through its employees.
5. "The primary focus of your brand message must be on how special you are, not how cheap you are. The goal must be to sell the distinctive quality of the brand." - Kerry Light, Brand Strategist. Identify 3-5 things that makes your organization special. (Allaboutbranding.com)

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