

BUILDING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S BRAND

By **Bill Smith**

One of the essentials of successful marketing is building a brand key audiences care about and one for which they are willing to pay. While many parking organizations don't give a lot of thought to their brands, every organization should. Cities' brands should help fill their parking facilities; consultants' brands should help attract clients needing design or planning services; and technology and other equipment providers' brands should appeal to parking owners and operators.

I recently spoke with Brent Robertson, a partner with branding firm Fathom, about branding and the important role it plays for parking organizations. He had some terrific insight to share.

"Often, business-to-business organizations ignore the importance of establishing a meaningful brand," said Robertson. "Your brand is the sum total of each person's experience with your organization. It's what makes them want to hire or work with you again and again."

Branding: a Definition

One of the challenges organizations have in establishing a brand is that they don't understand what one is. It's not merely an image that you express about your organization. It's how you convey the very essence of your organization.

"Your brand is the promise that you make and keep, the products and services you provide, and the way you make customers feel," Robertson said. "Ultimately, your brand is the story people tell themselves about you—it's what and who you become in their eyes."

I asked Robertson what goes into establishing a brand strategy. He told me it's a matter of making conscious decisions about what you stand for, who you are, and what difference you make in your world. Once that's established, you need to be able to talk about these things in ways audiences care about and understand.

"An effective brand strategy reveals a number of things about your organization," Robertson said. "It reveals your values and cultural drivers, your single-most important commitment, your customers' fundamental need, the greatest benefit you provide, and how you are different."

According to Robertson, the most common mistake business-to-business organizations make is only talking about what they've done and what they know. They never address who they are. Customers want to build


relationships with companies they care about, and if you are successful doing that, they will transact with you again and again. That's why it's important to talk about your organizational values and commitments. When you talk about your commitment to sustainability or to creating a safer parking environment, for example, you can attract customers who share similar values.

Equally important is your ability to convey your understanding of your customers' fundamental challenges and needs and the benefits you provide. When you can demonstrate that you already have a deep understanding of prospective customers' needs, you are on your way to earning their trust.

The Key to Branding

A final step—and one most organizations miss—is setting yourself apart from your competition. When prospective customers think of you as one of many prospective vendors or parking providers, your chance of winning their business drops exponentially. But if you can establish yourself as the only organization that can meet their unique needs, you are well on your way to winning their business.

Once you've figured out how you want customers and prospects to think of you, you can rely on any number of marketing tactics to promote your brand. Your website, a public relations program, social media, electronic publications, and other marketing strategies can be used together to promote your brand to huge numbers of prospective customers.

"When done right, your brand influences how people feel about your company and how much they are willing to pay for your products and services," Robertson said. "An effective brand strategy doesn't just make prospective customers take notice of your firm—it makes them need to hire you." 



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