

Turnstiles: Marketing for Event Managers

By Sean King

BUILDING BLOCKS OF

BRAND

TEN BASIC QUESTIONS ABOUT BRAND



QUESTION:

What does every corporation, non-profit organization, festival, event and individual have, but has virtually no control over?

A tax ID or social security number? Free will? Good guesses, but we were thinking more about A BRAND.

While many of us toil in obscurity thinking there's no way we have the time or resources to manage our BRAND, one might argue the exact opposite is true. There's a school of thought that all of the time we spend on our marketing and advertising should be done in support of our BRAND.

Personally, I come down in the middle of the discussion. Even the smallest shops need to pay some amount of time to their BRAND, however not all decisions can ever be dictated solely with the intent of protecting the BRAND.

Think of BRAND as the 401K of your organization. But instead of financial contributions, you're building a nest egg of good will with posts, articles, videos and day of event operations whether it's a single day, full weekend, week or month-long festival you are bringing to life.

So whether you are a one-person marketing team at a small event or have an army of paid personnel, interns and volunteers, the following questions provide you with opportunities to begin or continue developing your BRAND.

BLOCK #1 **Why is BRAND So Important?**

Simply put the definition of BRAND is not what you say it is, but rather it is what others say, feel and think about your event, your organization and YOU!

BRAND is what the stranger on the street knows about your event. BRAND is also what your most loyal supporter says to her closest friends over dinner about you.

Sponsors align themselves with BRANDS that are similar. Sure sponsors are about engagement and ROI, but if both of your BRANDS are aligned, the easier the pitch and the conversation will be. In turn, the more successful the activation with your audience will be as well.

BLOCK #2

Where Does BRAND Exist?

The true meaning of BRAND is not what is at the surface, but it is what exists several layers below. The difficult process of building BRAND is to find the deeper meaning to what it is you are doing and recognize those components as the main attributes you want to build upon.

In order for you to begin to do the real work of BRAND building, you must leave the world of operations. Trite as it might sound, operations are simply operational. Operations are widgets and processes. Brands are intangible, yet have a very direct effect on attendance, financial support, sponsorship and volunteerism and the overall long-term existence and impact of your event.

BLOCK #3

What are You Really Trying To Do?

Here's a quick game to play alone or with other team members, volunteers and other stakeholders. Ask everyone "What are we trying to do here?"

Don't take your first answer or your third or your fifth. Keep asking yourself the same question until you are quite certain there's nothing more left to give. That is when the first glimpse of what your BRAND is and what it could be.

Money is a terrible motivator. Passion can be even worse. But you can't live without either of them, but they aren't really attributes of a BRAND. When it comes to BRAND, you must strip most of those outside elements away and be left with the real truth staring you squarely in the face. That is the spark of BRAND.

BLOCK #4

Isn't a Logo Enough?

Many BRAND neophytes look at a slick logo with a great graphic and typography and say "We've got our BRAND." When really all they have is a terrific visual vehicle for the BRAND to be identified. To paraphrase author and marketing guru Seth Godin, "Nike spent \$250 for a logo, yet their brand is worth billions. And they probably paid too much for the artwork."

We're not fortunate to have so much valuation to our BRAND, but the concept should leave an impression on you. While the design is a piece of the puzzle, it's by far not the most important.

The place where most businesses fail to reach their full potential is that they believe BRAND is an achievement, when it is a journey.

BLOCK #5

Is Your Mission Your BRAND?

Any great invention, service or event starts with an idea. After the initial glim-

mer of success, those positioned for the long term do the hard work to determine their BRAND and then begin building around those core values and attributes.

While your mission and vision guide where it is you want to go, your BRAND is where you stand today and reflects the history of your event and organization and what it means to your stakeholders. Your BRAND is the GPS and your mission is the map application. Without the GPS to tell you where you are, you can't tell whether you are on the right pathway. While without your map app, you're destined to lose track of where you want to go.

BLOCK #6

SO WHY DON'T WE HAVE A BRAND?

Here's the truth: you already do have a BRAND. Whether you are doing anything with that brand to expand your impact and broaden the scope of your engagement is the question.

The key to leveraging your BRAND is to acknowledge the core attributes and never lose sight of them. Keep them in the back of your mind whenever you're writing copy, designing a marketing piece, posting a photo or sending an email. BRAND should also be prevalent when deciding what partners to work with, how your volunteers interact with attendees and whether you should add a certain style of new programming.

BRAND is always functioning as your event's conscience, keeping you on message and staying connected to your supporters. Meanwhile, it's your responsibility to use your BRAND to find more folks just like them to expand your audience and deepen your relationship with partners.

BRAND is what you do. It's how you do it. It's for how long you've been doing it. And most importantly, it's also who's doing it.

Block #7

Isn't It Harder to Build BRAND Than to Devise New and Different Concepts?

Consistency is the enemy of apathy in building a BRAND. Once again, BRAND is more than just a style guide for your logo and boilerplate press release copy.

Even the most successful brands have times when their BRAND came off the tracks. More times than not, those incidents are usually facilitated by the need to make sales results. Entities make quick decisions to create new marketing campaigns or dramatic shifts that do not reflect the true BRAND usually wind up hurting more than helping.

Here's where consistency can win.

Don't feel the necessity of having to think up the next brilliant tagline each

year or to out-do last year's graphics with an entirely new package. If you're putting your best foot forward, then refine, update and move on. That's not to say you shouldn't try new things, but instead of spending all of the time on reinventing items that already work, take some of that time to invest in a new medium, a new outreach or a new promotional idea. Of course, whatever you do, make sure it is tied in with the BRAND attributes you and your supporters hold close.

BLOCK #8

Do BRANDS Fail?

Not all BRANDS work. You can have great ideas and execution on the branding components, but still fail if you can't deliver on the promises you make operationally.

As we all know in the world of events, festivals and non-profit organizations, failure is a rainy day or a fundraising shortfall away. History is filled with passionate people who did amazing things for organizations that no longer exist.

In most of these cases, the money ran out a long time before the passion. However, those failures also stem in part from the inability to build a BRAND over a period of time and failed to connect the BRAND with the people whom the cause or the event really impacted.

Let's face one fact: we only have a limited amount of time and money. The landscape is littered with tweets and videos and ads of millions of really cool things. We need to stake out our place with those most likely to attend our events and support our mission.

It should be our sole task to create a deliberate plan to identify as many of these people as we can. And leveraging our BRAND is an effective way to achieve that goal on a long-term basis.

BLOCK #9

Do BRANDS Live and Breathe?

If Google and Disney and Apple have BRANDS, why doesn't the local festival or arts organization? Well, they do; everything does. However, the amount of resources and the time that is paid to them by these different organizations is extremely different.

For events and festivals, BRAND has been built with those thousands of attendees that attend each year. They expect the same level of entertainment, service, appearance, engagement and satisfaction as had been provided in prior years. Those are the attributes of your BRAND.

But those attributes also change with the times; not in wide swings, but rather small tweaks that reflect anything from changing community population to

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stylistic changes can and should be reflected in your BRAND.

You must always be listening to your audience, your sponsors and other stakeholders. Surveys, first-person interactions all provide you with a sense as to the impact your brand is having. Find those few questions that reflect your BRAND and consistently measure yourself and your team's performance on BRAND basics.

BLOCK # 10 **So What Can We Do Right Now to Build BRAND?**

Here are a few quick action items you can use as takeaways from this article for you to take your steps on your way to building a successful BRAND.

Take a Survey: If you've never surveyed your audience, staff, volunteers or supporters on the very top level of marketing and branding, this would be a good time.

We recently did a similar exercise at our organization asking questions of 30-50 individuals of how they describe the organization. What words are used? What is the organization's impact on the community served?

On a very basic level, this is the beginning of your branding process. But as I mentioned previously, now you will need to sit with staff and possibly even a facilitator to continue to keep digging below the surface of these words to get to the real truth.

Audit Yourself: It's very important to have an audit of all of your materials from your website to your social media pages to collateral materials to everything in between. As you examine your materials, are they all conveying the same message? Or is it more of a hodge-podge of different ideas at different times for different audiences?

This is not meant to stifle creativity, and no organization wants to have a website circa 2004 still functioning. However,

it is important that at any point in time, there is cohesiveness to the approach in words, graphics and messaging that reflects your BRAND.

If you see a few things that just don't quite belong in the family, this is the time to remove or update so all pieces reflect the same approach and BRAND.

Evaluate Touch Points: How many different ways do you interact with your supporters and attendees? While we all pay great attention to our outbound communications, there are other items from way-finding to third party engagement to sponsor activations that should be reflective of your brand and the message you are trying to deliver.

As part of this audit and analysis you can have a substantive discussion with your entire team and see how each of these touch points connect with your audience. From there, decisions can be made on which items to keep, which to discard and which to add and embellish.

We wish you well on taking the first steps toward building a BRAND for the long-term. And while millions of words have been written on the subject of BRAND, it's most important that you at least get started on some of the very basic building blocks so that you can not only survive but THRIVE!

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