

Who Are You?

By Penny Hunter

MOST MINISTRY LEADERS NOW EMBRACE THE IDEA OF BRANDING, no longer shying away from this term that in the past felt too commercial. Many spend thousands of dollars creating a logo; some hire professionals to build a website and print beautiful four-color brochures.

However, many leaders I talk with are also frustrated that people still aren't "getting it" – their audience has not embraced their brand. When those same leaders are asked a simple question – "Who are you?" – many launch into a long explanation of the programs, the people they serve, how great their staff is – all wonderful things, but not the simple answer to the simple question: *Who are you?*

Solid branding springs from key messaging, not only knowing who you are as an organization, but knowing *how to talk about who you are*. If every person in the organization is not describing who you are and what you do in the same way, then how can you expect others to embrace your brand?

This is especially true with ministries that provide intan-

gible services not easily packaged. Unlike the Heifer Project, or Habitat for Humanity, whose names are synonymous with their work, some ministries' names and missions aren't so easily recognizable.

In my work with nonprofit clients, I typically start with a meeting of senior executives – those most opinionated and invested in the mission – and together we hammer out one sentence that succinctly describes who they are in a way that communicates to a diverse audience.

If we can't boil it down to this simple statement, then there are likely larger problems stemming from a lack of strategic focus. In this "Message Map" process, we develop a tree of messages all stemming from that one key sentence. The messages become the "song sheet" by which all staff members can answer the question, "Who are you?" and answer it in a way that can be easily understood and embraced. This is truly the first step in building your brand.

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Charting Your Message Map

Here's a hypothetical example of a Message Map for Oak Women's Shelter:

Key Message: Oak Women's Shelter provides emergency housing, counseling, care and feeding programs for women and children suffering physical or emotional abuse.

Supporting Messages:

1. Qualified counselors are available 24/7 to meet with clients.
 - Therapists are carefully screened by the Oak executive director.
 - Christian therapists use biblical counseling to support clients.
2. A security-equipped safe house is provided free of charge to women and children needing help.
 - Oak Shelter is monitored around the clock by security guards.
 - Women and children are given private rooms.

- Oak is funded by individual donors and foundations.
- 3. Medical and legal volunteers make their services available free of charge to Oak clients.
 - A bank of qualified Christian lawyers, doctors and nurses give their time to serve Oak clients and have been fully screened by the executive director.
 - Women and children are provided help regardless of their ability to pay.
 - Medical exams, legal documentation, filing of restraining orders and other services are provided.

This Message Map should then drive the way Oak Women's Shelter communicates about its work in verbal and written communications.

Message Map vs. Mission Statement

Message Map: defines your work to external audiences.

Mission Statement: internal statement that drives strategic direction and decisions.

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