



BEST PRACTICE #2

Brand Strategy

BRAND VISION / BRAND IDENTITY:

Throughout the course of this project, we wrestled with two overarching brand-related questions: (1) how do you know if you need a brand? and (2) how do you decide whether to use an existing brand or create a new brand? While there are few hard and fast rules, we hope this section will help practitioners think through the most important considerations and learn from our case study examples. At the end of the section, we discuss two additional brand strategy considerations: (1) brands that truly live their vision, and (2) brands that have successfully evolved over a long period of time.

What is a brand?

As outlined in our [key terms and definitions](#), there are many ways to define a brand. The definition we use – a strategic asset with a reputation – conveys several important concepts.

- A brand is a strategic asset, which implies that it has value (derived from awareness, associations, and resonance) and that it can take many forms. For example, a brand can be:
 - a. a person (2008 presidential candidate Barack Obama),
 - b. a behavior change campaign (Truth Initiative anti-smoking campaign),
 - c. a product (Trust condoms),
 - d. a service (Future Fab Diva Clinics),
 - e. a social movement (Brothers for Life efforts to mobilize men to take responsibility for their health), etc.
- A brand can be one or several of these at the same time (e.g., Truth is a campaign that is also a social movement and could create anti-smoking products). All these examples are brands because they have awareness and meaning for the audience they serve.
- We describe the meaning that brands have as a “reputation” – a term that reminds us that a brand is what the audience believes it to be, whether the associations are intended or not.
- A brand, like any other strategic asset (inventory, human resources, buildings and equipment) merits careful resource management to protect its reputation and maximize the value represented in its awareness, associations, and resonance with the audience.

Key take-away: a brand is a strategic asset with a reputation. It can be a person, behavior change campaign, product, service, social movement, place, etc.

What is the role of a brand?

A brand creates awareness, resonance, and meaning in the hearts and minds of its audience. For example, in 2000, the American Legacy Foundation (ALF) launched Truth, an anti-tobacco publicity and mass media campaign targeting American teenagers. The campaign had all the elements of a brand – a vision (end smoking), an identity (which included a distinctive personality and consistent look and feel), and strong presence (over 70% awareness among the target audience within the first year).²⁰ Jeffrey Hicks, the president at the advertising agency behind the Truth mass media campaign explained, *“If we wanted youth to really embrace our anti-tobacco effort, it made sense that we should*

20) Farrelly, et al, “Getting to the Truth: Evaluating National Tobacco Countermarketing Campaigns,” American Journal of Public Health, June 2002

deliver it just like other successful US youth products, such as Adidas, Fubu or Abercrombie—in a branded form they understood. Branding has given the [campaign] the benefit of accumulated awareness. Everything we have created builds on the awareness of the marketing components that preceded it.”

Key take-away: The primary role of the brand is to serve the audience. It creates value and meaning through offerings that help the audience fulfill their needs and desires. However, if it does this job well, it also provides value to the brand owner by enabling the owner to reach and influence the audience.

Does one always need a brand?

Short answer: yes. In the Truth example above, the team intentionally decided to create a brand, but what about examples where the campaign is not branded? In fact, when we originally drafted the best practices framework, we included the brand strategy section as “optional,” with the understanding that social and behavior change campaigns are sometimes unbranded. However, as we continued to review our case studies and reflected on the above definition of a brand, we concluded *that a brand is always part of the initiative, whether an implementer has intentionally thought about creating a brand or not*. Said differently, an implementer may try to run a campaign without its being a brand, but if the campaign is successful, programmers will find that they ended up having created a decent brand after all, as there will be something (a de-facto brand) that has awareness, meaning, and resonance for the audience (e.g., the NURHI “Get It Together” campaign).

Key take-away: By approaching marketing initiatives (whether for people, behaviors, products, services, or movements) as brands, implementers increase the likelihood of creating something that will stand out, be remembered, resonate, and ultimately have an impact.

Brand architecture: when should one use an existing brand vs. creating a new brand?

The range of successful branding approaches in our case studies suggests that there is no one “best” approach to brand architecture. However, because of the significant resource investment required to build a brand, we believe in using existing brands wherever possible, particularly in instances where the audience is already familiar with the brand (e.g., it already exists in the country). The advantages of using an existing brand are largely resource-based, but there are also advantages for the audience. For example, MTN’s²¹ global brand architecture approach yields the benefits of scale, such as global sponsorship opportunities (e.g., the FIFA World Cup) and the ability to use marketing assets across borders. But there are also advantages for the audience: global enterprise customers interact with one brand across markets, and an increasingly global consumer segment benefits from finding a trusted brand wherever they go. We recommend MTV Shuga²² as a best-in-class example of a campaign that harnessed the power of an existing brand. MTV gives the campaign access not only to the audience (MTV fans) but also to a highly relevant brand platform (a brand look and feel that is widely recognized and admired, a relevant brand personality, etc.) which helps the campaign to resonate with the audience.

In order to leverage an existing brand, there must be strong alignment in terms of both the brand’s and the new initiative’s audience – including audience understanding and insight – as well as the brand’s and the new initiative’s vision or benefit. For example, MTV Shuga aims to improve the sexual and reproductive health of young people. In season three, the campaign added a campaign about gender-based violence (GBV) as a sub-plot; this works because the target audience (African youth) and overall vision (improving sexual and reproductive health) are the same for both the MTV Shuga brand and the GBV campaign.

If there is not alignment between either audience or vision, the brand must evolve to include the initiative. For example, Mankind Pharmaceuticals had an existing erectile dysfunction brand, Manforce, which was available by prescription in both pill and gel format. The company launched condoms under the same brand because there was high alignment between the existing brand benefit (sexual performance and virility) and the desired benefit for condoms. Manforce took on the new audience, focusing on male consumers in addition to physicians.

21) MTN is a leading telecommunications company in over 20 countries in Africa and the Middle East.

22) MTV Shuga is mass media behavior change campaign aimed at improving youth sexual and reproductive health.

Finally, sometimes a brand needs to evolve its vision or benefit to take on a new initiative. The Truth Initiative, whose vision is to create a world where young people reject tobacco, recently launched a new campaign, the Truth about Opioids. The target audience – American youth – is the same, and there are similarities between the addictive nature of tobacco and opioids. However, the Truth Initiative will need to evolve its vision over time to continue to support opioid related initiatives.

Key take-away: The use of an existing brand is recommended in the following three scenarios:

- (1) There is alignment between the audiences and the brand vision (or benefit) (MTV Shuga)
- (2) There is alignment between the visions, and the audience can be broadened to embrace the new initiative (Mankind ED and condoms)
- (3) There is alignment between the audiences, and the brand vision can expand to embrace the new initiative (Truth anti-tobacco and opioids)

Brands that truly live their vision:

It is often the brand's behavior, more than vision or look and feel, that forms a brand's reputation. For example, Brothers for Life aims to mobilize men to take responsibility for their own health. Brothers for Life²³ does this not only with communications, but also by engaging ambassador role models, providing resources for men's health (hotline, toolkits), partnership with community-based organizations, training programs for local facilitators, etc.

However, there are also examples from our case studies where initiatives may need to stretch beyond their original programmatic focus to bring the vision to life. As an example, NURHI's "Get It Together" campaign aims to help couples get their lives together. While contraceptives are an obvious means to achieve the vision, one can imagine other programs – financial literacy, income generation, small loans, etc. – that would also contribute to the vision. And finally, we like Airbnb's example, whereby the vision to "create a world where people can belong anywhere" inspired innovation (local activities that help travelers experience a location "like a local") as well as social justice support (providing a system whereby displaced guests including refugees and those fleeing natural disasters can find Airbnb accommodations free of charge).

Key take-away: The best brands are committed to their vision, even if it means venturing outside their original scope.

Brands that stay relevant over time:

As brands that have existed for over two decades, both Truth and Trust needed to reinvent themselves, as their target audiences aged out of the brand categories, and the original brand propositions were not relevant to a younger generation. Both brands undertook extensive consumer research and updated their brand strategies, including their brand visions and identities, to appeal to a new generation of consumers. In the case of Trust (or a similar, donor supported brand), one can imagine a scenario whereby a stakeholder may have advocated for introducing a new brand, as the existing one was not relevant to a youthful audience. However, it is important when possible to maintain existing brands; much has been invested in their development and growth, and they have meaning for the audience. Instead of launching brands, existing brands should be continually renewed and refreshed to maintain resonance.

Key take-away: To maintain resonance, brands need to revisit their assumptions about audience understanding and insights, gain new audience perspective, and use that new learning to refresh the brand every few years.

23) Brothers for Life is a social movement aimed at inspiring men to take responsibility for their own health.