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School Branding Guide



Advisory Services



What do people think about when they hear the name of your school?

"The keys to brand success are self-definition, transparency, authenticity and accountability."
– Simon Mainwaring,
CEO of We First

Does your School brand evoke as powerful images and feeling as major sport shoes or cereal brands?

When people think about sport shoes or breakfast cereal, they often think about brands. Ask someone what kind of sneakers they are wearing, and they might answer, "Nike" or "Adidas." Ask about their favorite cereal, and they might say, "Rice Krispies."

When you hear a brand name, a range of emotions, images, and taglines may pop into your mind. When you hear "Nike," you may think of the swoosh and the phrase "Just do it."

You may associate these things with adventure and pushing past your limitations. "Rice Krispies" may bring to mind the characters Snap, Crackle, and Pop, who you may associate with a feeling of fun, delight, and cereal that doesn't get soggy.

If your school doesn't have a brand that evokes strong and memorable ideas and images of what your school is about, you are missing an opportunity to attract and connect with potential new students and their families.

How Branding Helps You Connect With Students & Their Families



If you're competing for students, you need to catch the attention of parents, guardians, and the students themselves when they are considering a new school.

Families are looking for schools where their "protégés" will fit in and thrive. Branding presents an image that they can relate to. It's a quick way to show what your school is all about and to start connecting with them on an intellectual and emotional level.

Every school has a mission and a particular view of the world. Parents and students also have goals and dreams for their education. Branding can help them get an intuitive sense of whether your school shares their values and will be a good fit for them.



Use Branding to Create a Consistent Image

Students and parents evaluating schools may look at printed materials, browse your website, and/or visit your school in person.

When you carefully craft your brand, every encounter families have with your school in any form should reinforce your desired image. It's important to consider every element of your branding and make sure the message you convey is strong, consistent, and memorable.

Good branding not only creates a strong message about your school's core values, practices, and programs,

but it also helps students see how your school is different from other schools they may be considering. You can make it easier for them to evaluate whether your school meets their particular needs.

Consistent branding also helps make your school feel more familiar. People buy Nike's, rather than sport shoes from a company they have never heard of, because they feel they know the brand and can trust that the sport shoes will be good quality.

They also have positive associations - "Just do it!" -



that makes them feel buying the brand will improve their lives in a way a no-name shoe would not.

The same can be true for a school. The more exposure families have to your branding material, the more they will feel they know and are comfortable with the experience your school provides, and the more attractive and "right" your school will feel to them.



How to Start Creating a School Brand

Every successful brand starts with doing a deep dive into the messages you want to convey.

What is it about your school that you most want parents and students to know? What does your school offer to students? What is its philosophy of education? What are its core values? What can students expect?

How will students who attend your school be transformed? What is your school's vision of success? Honesty and transparency are key elements of a brand that will resonate with students and parents.

It's also valuable to learn more about the families who are considering your school and evaluating their options.

Conduct market research to create personas for the parents and students that you would like to reach.

Explore questions such as, what are their needs? What language and images are they most likely to respond to?





How Your Brand's Design Elements Can Convey Your Message

"Today it's important to be present, be relevant and add value."

**- Nick Besbeas,
VP Marketing LinkedIn**

Having a consistent look is important for creating a memorable brand.

All your visual elements, both online and off line, should draw from the same color palette and the same selection of typefaces and fonts.

Basing your palette on your school colors is a great way to start creating a consistent theme.

When choosing fonts, consider how different fonts may evoke different feelings. Page layouts, video styles and images should also convey a consistent tone.

Just as you need a consistent look for your brand, you also need a consistent voice.

Your written marketing materials should be consistent not only in grammar and word choice, but also in overall tone and levels of formality or informality.

Finally, consider as part of your branding efforts all the other elements that can trigger attachment to your school, including anthem, mascot.



Creating Brand Guidelines

Remember that your students and your staff will be the prime vehicles for your school's brand. Strong and shared values will be essential for them to bring the brand to life.

Many people will be working on creating your written and online marketing materials. To ensure consistency, you should create brand guidelines (sometimes also called style sheets or brand guides). Depending on your needs, your brand guidelines may be as short as a page or as long as a heavy manual.

Make sure that everyone who creates materials for your school, including both school employees and outside providers, has easy access to the guidelines and that they understand and adhere to them.

Your brand guidelines should include:

- An introduction explaining what you want to convey about your school with your branding.
- Your school's unique selling proposition, including your school's mission, vision and values and what makes it different from other schools.

- A one-sentence summary of why families should choose your school.
- Your school logo and instructions for when and how it should be used.
- Your school motto.
- The color palette that should be used for all your design elements.
- Fonts and typefaces that should be used for each design element, such as for headings and subheadings.
- Information on how to access photographs, templates, video intro, and illustrations and where they may be used.
- Examples of marketing materials showing how all the elements work together. These may include screenshots of your website, brochures, ads, social media posts, and photographs of school-branded merchandise. If you haven't yet created these materials, then you can include mock-ups instead.





Key Elements of School Branding

It can take years to get a logo memorized and immediately associated to a brand. Think carefully before completely changing your school's logo and consider refreshing it instead.

Every marketing element will contribute to building your school's brand, but some items will form the foundation of your brand. Pay particular attention to your school's logo and name.

Your School's Logo

Logos, like Nike's swoosh, are an important part of a brand's identity. Good logos are instantly recognizable and memorable.

If your school already has a logo that you want to continue using, it can play a leading role in your overall visual design. Along with your school colors, you can use the colors and shape of your logo as inspiration for the color palette and design elements of all of your visual materials.

If your school does not have a logo, or if you want to create a new one, make sure that it is eye-catching, easy to remember, and conveys something about the essence of your school. Given its importance, seeking expert help to create your logo is a best practice.

Your School's Name

Names are a powerful element of branding. If you are opening a new school, or if you are in a position to change your school's name, you should give considerable thought to choosing the right name.

Select a name that is easy to pronounce and easy to remember. It shouldn't be something that will become dated. The name should be unique within your target markets and shouldn't violate another school's copyright or trademark. Check that a website domain is available for your desired name so that your school's website will be easy to find. Although the .edu suffix is ideal for your site, if it's not available to you, you may be able to find a domain using other endings, such as .school.

After you have chosen a logo and name for your school, you should register for a trademark to prevent other schools from using them.





Executing Your School Brand

“Your brand is a story unfolding across all customer touch points.”
– Jonah Sachs,
Co-Founder of Free Range Studios

After all your careful planning, it is now time to unleash your brand into the world. Follow these steps for a successful brand execution:

1. Get your community on board, from students, faculty, staff, to partners and alumni, by sharing the story behind your brand. A launch video can be a very helpful tool.
2. Make sure that everyone at your school, including teaching and non-teaching staff, has access to your brand guidelines, tools and templates.
3. Enlist the media to spread the word to the community.
4. Update your website using the branding elements.
5. Use the branding elements on your school's social media accounts.
6. Incorporate the branding elements into offline marketing materials, which may include ads, signs, and even uniforms.
7. Co-create additional branded material with your students. Mascots, school's hoodies and mugs, songs and videos. There are many opportunities to seek the creativity of your students and make your brand truly loveable in their eyes.

Branding your school will create lasting benefits

**“Make your customer the
hero of your stories.”
– Ann Handley,
CCO of MarketingProfs**

Your school will be better able to attract the attention of prospective students and their parents. Once a prospect has found your school, you can convey the core values and offerings of your school in a way that is easy for families to grasp and remember.

When there is a match between your school’s values and programs and a student's hopes and needs, the consistency of your branding will reinforce their interest in your school. At that point, they will have taken a big step closer to making a choice and selecting your school as the one they have been searching for.



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Ready to start creating your school branding?

Branding your school, as we've seen, can create exciting new opportunities to attract the families and students who would benefit the most from what you have to offer.

But a successful branding campaign has many moving parts.

As an educator, you may want to focus on your core mission and get outside help to create your branding campaign.

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