

# The Value of Branding Your School District

*White Paper*





## THE VALUE OF BRANDING YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT

Many parents choose a specific district, school, or teacher before they even send their children to a classroom. Their mindsets and decisions are based on the district's story, history, the news media, or most importantly, how well a district communicates with parents. This type of communication can vary from face-to-face meetings to notifications sharing student progress with parents. Your success will depend on the effective communications that brand your district.

Districts throughout the nation suffer from a lack of consistency, the "big picture" of the district being lost amidst the agendas of all the schools contained within. Districts who find themselves lost in the lack of unity will find decreased enrollment and poorer student performance; however, districts able to bridge the communication divide between parents, teachers, staff, administrators, and the community will achieve lasting results. Only by establishing a district brand or unity will districts enjoy long-term, measurable results.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. WHAT IS BRANDING?
  - II. WHY IS BRANDING NECESSARY?
  - III. THE VALUE OF BRANDING YOUR COMMUNICATION
  - IV. THE ELEMENTS OF BRANDING
    - A. *Image: The Look and Feel of Your Brand*
    - B. *Communication: The Way You Convey Your Message*
    - C. *Implementation: Developing and Executing Your Vision, Image, and Message*
    - D. *Evaluation: Determine the Strategy's Success*
    - E. *Maintenance: Keep Track of the Brand Strategy*
  - V. BRAND STRATEGY
  - VI. PARENTLINK AS A SOLUTION
  - VII. REFERENCES
-

## I. WHAT IS BRANDING?

Branding is a commonly used term for identifying an organization's products, culture, goals, and purpose. This can be characterized by logos, symbols, colors, typefaces, Web sites, etc. For districts, a brand reflects core values and beliefs that distinguish it from other districts and schools. To a degree, branding reflects the performance of a district. For example, when a parent visits a district, they pass judgment on the quality of education offered simply by how the building's landscaping is maintained, how clean the bathrooms are, and how professional the staff is with parents. The parent is already passing judgment without seeing the classrooms or teachers. School districts need to recognize the value of branding and its key elements in order to convey its message to any effective degree.

## II. WHY IS BRANDING NECESSARY?


On a daily basis, you likely encounter problems that keep your district from gaining the positive attention, funding, and increased enrollment you are seeking. Some struggles may be Web presence and use, parent and community perceptions, and consistent information. Each of the problems your district is likely encountering revolves around one key word: **communications**. Your district may not be providing enough or is providing too much information, the theme and goal of the school or district may always be changing until no one

knows what the purpose of the goal is, or the communications taking place are of poor quality and design. Inconsistency and lack of focus or vision impact your communications, and ultimately your brand.

### Web

Oftentimes a Web site will be the first impression a parent has about your district. Does every school reflect your message, your theme, and your goals? Sometimes multiple schools within a school district each have a Web site with its own fonts, color scheme, and logos, oftentimes making it appear that each belongs to a different district. Such variances on how a site looks will make a district appear to have no continuity and a lack of control. Districts need to break free of this environment of "whatever works (or anything goes)" and replace it with non-negotiable style guides that all schools must follow.

Web sites should address the needs of students, parents, and the community. Your Web sites should be consistent, including statements about the school or district's vision, goals, standards, and policies as this is oftentimes a parent's first glimpse of the district as a whole. When customers visit a Web site, you want to have a positive impact upon them. With a branded Web site, parents will feel specially linked to its vision and return to that trusted, familiar Web site again and again.



**The vision and branding of your district doesn't need to be complex. It can and should be simple, to the point, and define measurable goals that make school and district employees accountable.**

## Other Media

**All printed, Web, and audio communications need to have the district's "stamp of approval," or a stylized template.** Are the messages easily recognizable? Do they support your district's vision and goals? Do they state the purpose and topic of the communication in a clear and concise manner? Consistent and effectively branded communications can best be achieved through collateral tools and vendors who understand your vision and partner for success.

**The vision and branding of your district doesn't need to be complex.** It can and should be simple, to the point, and define measurable goals that make school and district employees accountable. Everyone should know the district's mission, understand how to achieve it, and believe in it. By keeping track of the district's progress toward its goals, everyone becomes accountable and it is more likely to succeed.

**Brands evoke emotion and inspire those who buy into it as well as those who sell it.** The brand for a school district is more than a consistent appearance and style, eventually transforming into a way of life that everyone can identify with and choose. Your brand becomes how you treat others, make mistakes, apologize, and make decisions.



A good example of a simple brand image is Google. When you go to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), the browser displays a search bar and a handful of links to help focus your search results. Google maintains a simple and uncluttered format for ease of use, fulfilling their vision and goal of sharing information with the world.



Disney is an excellent example of emotional appeal. When a person says "Disney," you smile to yourself and remember that moment years ago when you first went to Disneyland and saw the Sleeping Beauty Castle or saw a Mickey Mouse

### In Stephen Covey's, "The 8th Habit" of 23,000 employees polled:

- Only 37% have a clear understanding of what their organization is trying to achieve and why.
- Only 20% were enthusiastic about their team's and their organization's goals.
- Only 20% had a clear line of sight between their tasks and their organization's goals.
- Only 15% felt that their organization fully enables them to execute key goals.
- Only 20% fully trusted the organization they work for.

### In the paper, "Hidden in Plain View," Michael Goree compares these percentages to a team of 11 players on a football team:

- "Only 4 of 11 would know which end they are defending.
- Only 2 of 11 would care.
- Only 2 of 11 would know what position they play and know exactly what they are supposed to do.
- And all but 2 would, in some way, be competing against their own team members rather than their opponent."