

FENTON | communications

# MAKING A NAME FOR YOURSELF

Branding for Non-Profits

# INTRODUCTION

Think of the products you see every day. The ones you remember all have clear brand identities. Those brands stand for something—Volvo (safety), Apple (artful, intuitive design), Doctors without Borders (global medical relief). They are immediately recognizable and distinctive from their competitors.

That's the power of branding.



### What a brand is. And isn't.

Branding gives you immediate currency in today's cluttered environment. It defines you and instills trust in your product, service or cause. For nonprofit organizations, this trust results in greater credibility, influence and fundraising power.

A brand is a promise. It is the expression of the core values of your organization that sums up what you do and why it matters. It articulates the unique benefit that only you can offer to your constituencies, whether they are internal staff, current supporters or new funders, or members and opinion elites.

A brand is not just a campaign, a logo or a color palette. It is all these things — and more. It is the essence of who you are, communicated and reinforced over time through the consistent repetition of graphics, messages and other elements. An effective branding campaign speaks with one voice in all your pieces of communication— from advertising and letterhead to signage and Web presence.

### The value of branding.

Branding is especially valuable to nonprofits that must compete, often with limited resources, in a crowded marketplace where ever-more appeals for support are directed to a limited pool of donors.

A strong branding program will help you:

- Communicate your mission persuasively.
- Encourage internal buy-in and support.
- Recruit and retain new members.
- Develop new sources of funding.
- Enhance your profile among decision-makers and influencers.
- Create more effective marketing and development materials.

Organizations engage in branding for a number of reasons, usually centered on a change in leadership, goals or position. Branding offers an opportunity to reach a different audience, to refresh an outdated image or to celebrate an anniversary. Sometimes it's just the realization that all the great things you do aren't being communicated to all the people you want to reach.

**"FENTON helped us drill down to the heart of who we are as an organization and our driving mission, which is about making sure older adults get the care they deserve. They 'get' who we are – and, equally important, where we want to be."**

**–Jeannine Melly, Deputy Director, Social Work Leadership Institute at the New York Academy of Medicine**

### The branding process.

Branding doesn't just happen. It is a disciplined process that starts with an honest appraisal of your:

- **Profile:** who you are, what you do and why it's important.
- **Market situation:** what is happening in your world and why your organization is relevant or credible in this arena.
- **Target audiences:** who you are trying to reach, help or influence.
- **Competition:** how you compare to other organizations in the same field (size, message, function).
- **Perceptions:** how you are perceived, how you would like to be perceived, how you are different, better or more investment-worthy.
- **Key messages:** what you want your target audiences to know.
- **Measurement of success:** what you expect the new branding or rebranding to deliver (more and larger donations, more authority with legislators, more members).

### Branding, the FENTON way.

FENTON's branding process is customized to the needs of each client and is designed to foster greater communication, understanding and consensus among all members of the team. Our typical branding process begins with three steps:

- Stakeholder survey (staff, board, members, funders) and their perception of your organization.
- Communications audit of your marketing materials.
- Competitive review of peer organizations' messages, positioning and communications materials.

For some projects we may conduct additional research and analysis:

- **Messaging and positioning workshop** to help you define your unique niche.
- **Target polling and research** to identify demographics, attitudes, awareness, behavior concerns, expectations and needs as elements of what your organization provides or delivers.

Based on our findings, we will then develop the:

- **Creative brief** to provide strategic direction for the development of a new brand identity.
- **Visual and verbal elements**, including a logo, tagline, naming and key messages.
- **Style guide** to ensure consistent graphic treatment, tone and execution across all brand communications.

If the budget permits, we may also recommend:

- **Testing** to measure how effectively the messaging and imagery resonate with the target audience.

A branding project at FENTON is an iterative process taking place over three months — yet it costs a fraction of the price of a single ad in *The New York Times*. Together, we will develop a brand that communicates your core values in a way that all your constituencies can embrace.

**"FENTON was pivotal in a repositioning, renaming and rebranding process that has resulted in more effective campaigns, recognition and actual change."**

**—Leslie Samuelrich, Deputy Director,  
Corporate Accountability International**

### The FENTON brand.

FENTON Communications is the largest public-interest advocacy communications firm in the country. Since our founding in 1982, we have developed media relations and marketing campaigns for some of the most important social change movements of the past quarter century — from the fall of apartheid in South Africa to the rise of MoveOn.org as the pre-eminent online political organizer. Our branding work covers a range of clients and issues including education, energy and the environment, global peace, housing affordability, public health and women's rights.

Selected case histories follow below. To see more of our advocacy and branding portfolio, please visit us at [www.fenton.com](http://www.fenton.com).

**Client:** William and Flora Hewlett Foundation  
**Project:** Branding the Open Educational Resources program



## OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Taking a cue from the world of “open source” computer technology, the Hewlett Foundation created a breakthrough program based on the concept of “open source” educational information. FENTON worked with the foundation to position and brand its Open Education Resources program by focusing on its vision of making knowledge free and accessible to anyone in the world with access to the Internet. Our work included the development of a logo modeled after the African symbol for “knowledge.” We also helped the staff distill technological jargon into everyday language and real-life stories about how “OER” resources have helped people globally, from a health worker in a refugee camp in Uganda researching nutrition to a high school student in rural Kentucky downloading advanced placement physics coursework so she can study on her own.

**Client:** Infact/Corporate Accountability International  
**Project:** Renaming and Rebranding the Organization



In 2004, Infact knew it needed a makeover. Over the previous 30 years, the national nonprofit had scored a number of impressive grassroots victories against corporate giants like GE and the tobacco industry. But its name, “Infact,” was actually a holdover from its first campaign in the 1970s against Nestle: Infant Formula Action Coalition.

FENTON took Infact’s staff through a messaging and positioning process that got at the heart of who they are and what set them apart from other activist organizations. We determined that Infact needed to move away from the abstract what (fighting “transnationals”) and move toward a positioning that speaks more directly to the why behind their work. With a new positioning statement in hand as a guide, we moved forward with developing a new name, tagline and logo for the organization.

The new identity system helps draw out the elements that best encapsulate the organization’s strengths and its mission: International in scope and focused on protecting the lives of people endangered by corporate abuses.

**Client:** Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

**Project:** Increasing the impact of the brand



**S O N O M A C O U N T Y**

## AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION AND OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

Fifteen years after local residents voted to create it, the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District had become one of the top five farmland and open space protection programs in the nation. But many current residents were unaware of the important work their Open Space District was doing to protect the family farms, scenic natural areas and unique character that make Sonoma County a wonderful place to live.

A year before going back to the voters to renew their mandate, the Open Space District hired FENTON to help create new messaging, branding and public education materials to support their outreach efforts. FENTON crafted a message platform and brand, including a new tagline and logo that showed why Sonoma County's farms and open space are "worth protecting." On election day, the Open Space District won the support of 75 percent of local voters, successfully providing funding for another 20 years of open space and farmland protection in one of the last remaining agricultural regions in the fast-growing San Francisco Bay area.

**Client:** The Blue Shield of California Foundation

**Project:** Branding within a brand



Blue Shield of California Foundation, funded by the not-for-profit health plan Blue Shield of California, is now one of the largest health philanthropies in California. The foundation sought to more effectively frame its unique role in the field for a range of important stakeholders.

After taking the foundation's staff through a positioning exercise, it was clear that marketing materials should convey the warmth and compassion of their focus on domestic violence and uninsured Californians — as well as the boldness of their dual strategy of meeting immediate funding needs while promoting system change.

After developing their Web site, we created a theme of "building blocks" as the "foundation" for future work for their first-ever annual report, which aimed to reintroduce the foundation to corporate staff and board members. We then began incorporating the building-block theme into their collateral materials, templates, and advertising, helping the foundation strengthen and standardize their brand — a unique identity that is appropriately aligned with their corporate parent's own brand.

## About FENTON Communications

For more than 25 years, FENTON Communications has partnered with nonprofit clients to make social change. We work to protect the environment, improve public health and advance human rights and social justice. This guide is one in a series that we've produced to help build the strategic communications capacity of the nonprofit sector. To download a free copy of this and other FENTON guides, visit [www.fenton.com](http://www.fenton.com).

## Contact Us

Questions? Comments? We welcome your thoughts and ideas.

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