

WHITE PAPER

Winning!
The Value of Effective Branding

by Janet Chihocky

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In life, as the old saying goes, you're either growing or you're dying, and the same is true with our brands: We either nurture and grow them or we neglect them, and eventually, they will die.

Having spent my entire career in the Aerospace and Defense markets, and for the past eight years having worked directly with government clients within the Department of Defense (DoD), I have experienced a vast array of perceived definitions and opinions when it comes to branding. Like most communities, the Department of Defense is a club (and a great one at that) with multiple layers. Depending on the layer and even the service entity, the definition of branding differs.

Most organizations equate branding to their logo. Others connect branding to the legacy of their mission. And some conclude that branding is one of those "soft" terms that does not fit neatly into a kinetic energy-minded market, so they would simply rather not deal with it at all.

Clearly, a standard definition would be helpful, so let me take a small liberty and determine that for our club (those who live and work within the DoD space)—branding should reflect the uniqueness of the organization, the mission AND its ability to create and drive a winning value.

No longer can we just provide “value” that we assume is fully understood and that we hope sticks in the minds of our stakeholders—soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, civilians, customers, suppliers, the media, Congress (and the list goes on).

In today’s environment, everything is about having a value that is perceived as winning, and here is the reality: Great brands do win. Winning is a tough game, and it’s especially tough when the environment of readiness is mandatory even as the organization must balance its workload, enhance training requirements, work under continuing resolutions, manage rates if you work within the industrial base, map efforts to strategic priorities and so forth.

So, regardless of your Title 10 responsibility, the following are the four “Ps” of branding that can help us ensure that our brands continue to help us WIN!

1. **Winning Brands communicate a PURPOSE.** Far beyond what we are “required” to do (and thankfully output is done well throughout the DoD), it is necessary for our brands to communicate a PURPOSE that gives homage to our past while leaning far forward into the foxhole where the future is taking us. This is meant to infer that brands should have some level of adaptability so they can grow. Take, as an example, General Electric, or “GE.” When I was growing up, this was the entity that “brought good things to life.” But after Jeff Immelt took over as CEO in the early 2000s, he looked at the horizon and forecasted that for GE to grow and thrive in the future market space, it must migrate to a brand of innovation. Today’s GE is currently one of the top three digital industrial organizations in the world.

2. **Winning brands communicate a PICTURE of where they are going.** “Where there is no vision, any road will do,” author Lewis Carroll once famously observed. As such, when it comes to branding, any picture communicated needs to be one of aspiration. The DoD can never be perceived as anything but purposeful, so stakeholders need to have a clear understanding of where we are headed with our brand and what the successful end-state looks like. Let’s be honest, most of the memorabilia hanging on walls are reflections of the past, and it’s appropriate and necessary to love our history. At the same time and in equal measure, we need to love our future and what it can bring. The greatest challenge I see clients encounter is accepting the reality that change is necessary to grow. Unfortunately, we cannot have change without fear. Fear is a natural and expected emotion, but that should not—and ultimately cannot—divert or impede the necessary task of exploring and envisioning the possibilities of what our brands can accomplish. I am quite certain that GE’s transformation to a brand that fosters ideas through digital industrial platforms was not accomplished quickly or easily, but they were ultimately successful because they initially recognized that they needed to change and willingly step into the future. As such, it is imperative for the brand to have a vision—and a clear one—for where you are going, how you will get there and what success looks like (for everyone affected).

3. **Winning brands have PARTS that need to be incorporated.** A brand that delivers value will ensure that an organization’s stakeholders know where they fit, how they fit and, if necessary, when they fit. How many times have strategic plans been staffed, developed, reviewed and ultimately approved and yet only a handful (at best) of the stakeholders mentioned in the plan know that they have a part to play? One of the most successful inclusions of brand parts that I experienced was with the Army CIO/G-6, the office that sets the strategic direction and objectives for the Army network. When LTG Ferrell rolled out his Army Network Campaign Plan and supporting implementation guidance, he

outlined exactly how the Army would achieve its vision of a secure, integrated, standards-based information environment, including clear, well-defined details on the various roles of all involved, the impact to the strategic stakeholders and how the Lines of Effort (LoEs) work together to enable success. This plan is as alive today as it was when it was first unveiled in 2015. Those operating in the strategic environment impacted by this plan knew their part. So, the salient ingredient in success is not the plan itself or the communications that surrounded it to educate key stakeholders, but rather the ability for each part to fully understand and execute its purpose and role within the plan.

4. **A winning brand PERFORMS.** In the end, performance is the absolute best metric of a winning brand. Look at the 2017 Super Bowl. Whether you are a Patriots fan or not, most knew in their gut that the 21-3 lead by Atlanta “could” be overcome by the Patriots. Why? Because the Patriots know how to perform in all circumstances. An 18-point differential might stifle some teams, but not these guys. They look beyond the “right now” reality, stay focused on the desired end-state, adapt the playbook and perform. That’s not easy for any organization to do, especially under intense pressure, but as the Patriots showed, it can be done.

In sum, great brands know how to perform well because they have a vision and a plan, everyone involved and impacted knows their part in how to achieve that plan, and everyone knows exactly the goal—or end-state—they need to achieve to succeed.

About the Author:

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