

## Managing Your PAC's Brand

By Karen Bauer Fabean

As consumers, we are deluged with public relations and advertising campaigns to convince us to choose certain brands of products or services over others. For example, my brand preference for toothpaste is Crest (with extra whitening power!), because I perceive it as a superior product that will keep me out of a dentist's chair. I am so brand loyal that I won't buy anything else--even if it is less expensive. Whether we realize it or not, our purchasing decisions and loyalty to those decisions often are driven by our perceptions, which are driven by how well the brand is managed.

The application of the business process of brand management has received a lot of attention in the PAC world in recent years. We tend to call it developing "brand identity," and define it as creating a tagline and a new logo for the PAC. It can—and should—be much more than that, however, if we truly want to have strong PACs. The purpose of this article is to explore what brand management means for PACs.

First, let's define what we are talking about. When used as a noun, brand tends to apply to an organizational entity ("Nike"), a product ("Crest") or service ("FedEx") or a unique mark such as a logo (the red "Target"). Brand management involves managing both the tangible and intangible aspects of a brand in order to increase its perceived value by customers.

### Developing Brand Awareness is Not Enough

Developing your PAC's brand identity and brand awareness is important. This often involves the development of a logo and possibly a tag line that is incorporated into the PAC's print and electronic materials. It establishes the look of the PAC and it should contain a succinct statement about the PAC's value. Once the PAC's brand identity is established and regularly communicated, PAC eligibles will become more aware of the PAC. But, establishing greater PAC awareness only means your PAC eligibles may better recognize the PAC—it doesn't mean they prefer it.

So, creating brand identity and awareness are only the beginning of the process of managing a PAC's brand. A PAC's brand is much more than a symbol and a few words. The brand is a confluence of many factors—real and perceived--that creates overall impressions or emotions donors will associate with your PAC. It is these tangible and intangible factors that must be managed proactively.

That's a tall order. But, remember the old adage: perception is reality. Managing your PAC's brand is all about managing and shaping perceptions. If you stop at the identity stage, your PAC-eligibles will still have perceptions about the PAC--and not ones that you necessarily want them to have.

Quite a few PACs manage their brand by focusing primarily on the tangible factors—typically gifts and perks--that appeal to donors. In fact, their donors develop strong attachments to the perks rather than any value the PAC delivers. So, the bar is raised higher and higher every year to deliver more perks, because the PAC has failed to communicate those intangible qualities about the PAC that can shape positive perceptions.

It is easier to promote the tangible benefits of a PAC than the intangible added-value it offers your organization and its people. Yet, in marketing, branding is about making specific promises of value and consistently and reliably delivering that value over time. Communicating your PAC's value effectively will have a more lasting impact on a PAC's growth and its ability to retain loyal members.

Consider three critical elements to managing your PAC's brand: defining your PAC's purpose, articulating your PAC's promise and walking the talk.

### **Define Your PAC's Purpose**

Too often we give little thought to defining a PAC's purpose or mission, because we think it is obvious. Take a few moments to read your PAC's mission statement from the perspective of your donors. Does it communicate to them the PAC's value and why they should care?

Your PAC's purpose or mission is the foundation upon which to build your brand. Let's compare two versions of a PAC mission statement. Decide which statement would create a unique and positive impression in the minds of your donors and cause them to place greater value on the PAC:

A: *“The Widget PAC helps to elect candidates to public office who understand and support our interests and concerns on the issues facing our company.”*

B. *“The Widget PAC empowers our employees to help shape the political environment in order to advance our company's ability to produce and deliver quality widgets for the manufacture of superior products.”*

As you can see, the second mission statement creates a positive, mental picture about the PAC in which prospective donors may include themselves. For optimal performance, your PAC's purpose or mission should be aligned with the mission of your organization, especially if your PAC-eligibles are highly tuned into it. For example, one of my corporate clients talks of “winning the right way” in all aspects of its business. Their PAC has aligned its mission with this value and communicates how this can be accomplished by participating in the political process.

Mission statements alone don't sell a PAC, but they are an important foundation upon which you can begin to effectively communicate about your PAC and manage the perceptions of your donors and potential donors.

### **Articulate Your PAC's Promise**

Your PAC's promise isn't a tag line or its purpose. This step requires your PAC to communicate that which sets it apart, what differentiates it from all other forms of political involvement—including the choice to do nothing. The "promise" involves what the PAC does uniquely in order to accomplish its purpose and in a way that will evoke positive, emotional responses from PAC eligibles.

Positioning a PAC's promise often begins with conducting research among PAC-eligibles to gauge their understanding, attitudes and expectations towards the PAC. This research will help you understand what they know and how they presently view your PAC.

Our research among PAC-eligibles consistently indicates that people believe their PACs are organizations that lobby issues. In fact, many want to know what the PAC's positions are on specific issues or why the PAC lobbies or doesn't lobby a particular issue. This occurs largely because PACs fail to communicate their intrinsic value and, as a result, many individuals have a skewed understanding of their PAC. This makes it difficult to manage their perceptions of the PAC brand and secure their loyal preference.

To formulate your PAC's promise and why it is a superior choice relative to all other forms of political involvement, answer questions like these:

- *Why does the PAC operate?*
- *What does the PAC do for donors that they cannot get anywhere else?*
- *What qualities about the PAC attract PAC eligibles?*
- *How does the PAC connect with those things that PAC eligibles are passionate about in their industry, business or profession?*

The following examples are PAC promises. Decide which of these statements deliver the more compelling message:

*"The Widget PAC helps our company have a stronger voice in the political process and make our views heard."*

*"The Widget PAC is a unique employee program to elect candidates who will seek public policies that support our mission."*

## **Walk the Talk**

Managing the PAC brand is about messages, but it also is about how you act on those messages to secure a positive perception of the PAC as a preferred brand. It's about walking the talk.

Here are some actions to think about:

- Relevancy – are the PAC's marketing communications relevant to the audience(s) they are reaching?
- Consistency – are the PAC's messages consistently communicated and on a regular basis?
- Trust – can PAC eligibles trust the PAC with their financial donations? Are its activities open and transparent?
- Alignment – are the PAC's goals aligned with the organization's key initiatives?
- Touch points – is every point of contact the PAC has with donors and potential donors managed well, i.e. reinforcing the brand message and continually building a positive perception? This includes not only the points of contact you have with PAC eligibles, but also those of other people in your organization.

## **Why Care About Your PAC Brand**

Creating a strong PAC brand within your organization brings many benefits. Just as in the world of branding products and services, the benefits can include:

- Making it easier for PAC eligibles to decide to support the PAC
- Securing higher donations from individual contributors
- Creating trust in and building loyalty for the PAC
- Building greater awareness and understanding of the PAC in a context that matters to potential donors
- Shaping positive, lasting impressions about the PAC with potential donors
- Articulating the real values of the PAC versus chasing after new and improved features
- Retaining PAC members
- Achieving solid growth and meeting your PAC's goals

These are compelling reasons for taking steps that go beyond developing a PAC's brand identity and getting serious about managing a PAC's brand--from top to bottom.

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