Developing a Strong Brand Identity for Your Organization: Lessons Learned from the WEPAN Branding Initiative

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Abstract

An essential element of strategic communications for any organization is a strong brand identity. Women in Engineering Programs and Advocates Network recently engaged Cameron, Christopher, Thomas (CCT) Advertising (Denver, CO) to develop an updated brand identity that reflected the organization's new strategic plan. The branding team initially planned to develop a new logo and tagline; however, market research indicated potential benefits associated with changing or modifying the organization's name. The team subsequently investigated alternative names, resulting in a modified version that retained the name recognition of the WEPAN acronym: Women in Engineering ProActive Network. The process WEPAN used in developing its updated brand identity serves as an excellent case study for organizations wishing to develop or strengthen their own brand.

Introduction

Branding originated in ancient Greek and Roman societies, where shopkeepers hung symbols (logos) over their shops to communicate their business to a largely illiterate public (de Chernatony & McDonald, 2003). In the Middle Ages, craftsmen included a distinguishing mark on their products (e.g. a potter's mark), which was also a guarantee of quality (de Chernatony & McDonald, 2003). The word "brand" itself came from the Old Norse worse word "brandyr," or "to burn" (Adamson, 2006; Blackett, 2003; de Chernatony & McDonald, 2003). First Vikings, and later cattlemen in the Wild West burned symbols onto the hide of their animals to differentiate them from those owned by others (Adamson, 2006; de Chernatony & McDonald, 2003). The word took on a more complex meaning with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, which brought not only competition but mass markets into play, necessitating differentiation and relevance of products by various manufacturers (Blackett, 2003).

When one traditionally thinks about brands or branding today, consumer products probably come to mind. Brands communicate more than just a product or service, however, they also communicate *value* and *identity* (Randall, 2000). Adamson describes a brand as "a mental association that gets stirred up when you think about or hear about" a certain product, service, or organization (Adamson, 2006). Holland describes a brand by saying, "it's how you tell your story" (Holland, 2006). Branding communicates the unique tangible and intangible benefits associated with the brand. A brand therefore, serves several purposes (Randall, 2000):

- Identity
- Shorthand summary
- Security (i.e. a guarantee of benefits)
- Differentiation
- Added value

Rather than building increasing profits by persuading people to purchase a product, the goal of branding for non-profit organizations might be to attract and retain membership, build public awareness, and/or gain greater political clout (Holland, 2006). One excellent resource for non-profits considering undertaking a branding initiative is *Branding for Non-Profits: Developing Identity with Integrity* (Holland, 2006). The following discussion on branding non-profit organizations derives from this book. Holland describes a brand as an "expression of core values of your organization," continuing to state that "your brand creates expectations and makes promises, whether they [stakeholders] are already captivated (staff, board members) or they're people you wish to attract (constituents, funders, opinion shapers)." She describes four branding "markers" as reputation, esteem, relevance, and differentiation, and suggests that in order for a non-profits organization's brand to be successful, it must be strong in all of these areas. According to Holland (2006), a strong branding strategy can:

- *Communicate* the organization's value
- *Grow* the organization's audience (this may include membership and/or funders)
- *Motivate* the audience
- *Inform* programming and marketing

Unlike corporations which undergo a branding initiative, however, many non-profit organizations, and particularly volunteer organizations, fail to give branding the attention it deserves. Furthermore, when non-profits are initially naming their organization, factors such as small size, limited financial resources, and a focus on their *cause* rather than branding lead many to go through the naming process without engaging a professional (Holland, 2006). When hiring a consultant, it is important for non-profits to select professionals who are familiar with similar organizations and will involve the organization's leaders in the process. Additionally, building consensus among members and constituents, allowing for feedback, and conducting methodological research during the branding process are crucial for establishing credibility of the process in a non-profit. The roll-out strategy of the newly-developed brand should reinforce the credibility gained by this inclusiveness. Holland also suggests engaging key players in the organization one-on-one to gain support for the new branding and to give members plenty of time to get used to the associated changes (Holland, 2006).

The WEPAN Branding Initiative

Women in Engineering Programs and Advocates network was founded in 1990 by Suzanne Brainard, Susan Staffin-Metz, and Jane Daniels to establish a proactive and systematic approach to catalyzing "change to enhance the success of women in the engineering profession." Early

WEPAN initiatives included conducting regional training seminars on creating Women in Engineering Programs, resulting in a significant increase in WIE programs (from 26 in 1991 to 66 in 1995). Other training and seminars for faculty followed, along with an electronic mentoring program (MentorNet) and outreach activities sponsored by universities and corporate partners (WEPAN, 2000). As the organization entered its second decade, the membership base and focus had expanded significantly beyond that of WIE program directors to include many academic administrators and corporate members. One goal of the new branding initiative was to develop a branding strategy that reflected the organization's current membership and desired future member base.

Figure 1. Former WEPAN name, logo and tagline

In March 2006, the WEPAN Communications Advisory Committee was tasked by the Board of Directors with reinvigorating the WEPAN brand in light of the organization's new Strategic Plan. With the implementation of the new Strategic Plan, the Board recognized that accomplishing the organization's mission would require a larger membership and an expanded programmatic focus. The Board viewed an updated branding strategy as an important tool in the evolution of the dynamic organization. The Executive Director solicited proposals from advertising agencies in the Denver, Colorado area to develop branding messages, update the logo, and develop a targeted set of multi-function print and electronic pieces. The main objective of the project was to develop a well-grounded and emotionally appealing branding program with key messages that would help WEPAN build relationships and commitment among core constituencies (members and potential members, and corporate partners and potential corporate partners). The objectives of the undertaking are summarized in Table 1, which was included in the original request for proposals (RFP).

Branding and Graphic Image Program Objectives		
Increase Membership	Create Commitment	Expand Fundraising
WIE Members
Corporate Members	University Administrators
Wider University Engineering community
Non-Profit Community
Government Agencies	Corporations
Foundations

Table 1. Objectives of WEPAN Branding Initiative

The request for proposals included background about WEPAN's mission, membership, objectives, budget, and project timeline, and requested the following from prospective consultants:

- What is your philosophy of a successful communications program?
- Give case study examples of your best work and tell why it was successful.
- What distinguishes you from other similar companies?
- How do you describe your firm's personality?
- What process would you use to complete the work?
- Enumerate proposed major milestones, deliverables, and schedule.
- What kinds of input, consultation, and decision making teams are needed?
- Give an estimate of anticipated cost for this project.

The WEPAN core branding team consisted of Diane Matt (WEPAN Executive Director), Sheila Edwards Lange (2005-2007 Director of Communications), Julie Martin Trenor (2006-2007 Communications Advisory Committee Chair and 2007-2009 Director of Communications) and later, Carlie Bower (2007-2009 Communication Advisory Committee Chair). The team met weekly for more than 18 months to direct the project. Other members of the WEPAN leadership, including the Board of Directors and Communications Advisory Committee and Membership Committee members were frequently included in the process, as was periodic feedback from other WEPAN members and constituents.

After receiving three proposals, the Executive Director, Director of Communications, and Communications Advisory Committee Chair, along with the President and President Elect interviewed and heard presentations from each agency and reviewed their work based on criteria outlined in the request for proposals. Cameron, Christopher, Thomas (CCT) of Denver was selected in part due to their prior experience working in the education and non-profit sectors.

Process & Results
Cameron, Christopher, Thomas utilizes a unique Brand Ignition Point Process™ for brand development, consisting of three phases.

Phase 1—Assimilation (conducting initial research and assimilating into brand "benefits") and Exploration (market research and refinement of brand benefits)

Phase 2—"Brand Energy Line" (tagline) and logo development.

Phase 3—Integration (incorporating the brand into all aspects of communication pieces, web, membership brochures)

Phase 1:
During the Assimilation portion of Phase 1, CCT familiarized themselves with literature about the status of women in engineering and historical enrollment challenges, researched "sister" organizations, thoroughly reviewed WEPAN's website and communication pieces, and conducted interviews with selected WEPAN founders, board members and past presidents to familiarize themselves with the organization. From this initial assimilation, CCT developed seventeen "Key Benefits"—that is, statements describing the most significant advantages of membership in WEPAN. "Benefit Boards" were created, which consisted of a key benefit accompanied by a stock photo. Using a ranking system, they explored the appeal of these statements during sixteen one-on-one interviews with members, potential members, corporate leaders, deans/dept chairs/faculty identified by the WEPAN branding team. The resulting

"Winning Benefits" (i.e. highly ranked statements) were incorporated into a "Brand Triangle". These benefits, along with the rest of the brand triangle, proved to be key components of establishing clear communication about WEPAN. As Holland put it, "you have to know your story in order to tell it" (Holland, 2006). WEPAN benefit statements, along with their shorter titles, are given in rank order in Table 2.

The "**Nucleus**" of Why People Join WEPAN (The top-ranked benefit statement)	
Strength in Numbers	Want to help bring more women into engineering? Join the 600 university administrators, faculty and deans and corporate executives from 140 academic institutions and 60 corporations committed to increasing the numbers of women in engineering.
The "**Electrons**" That Surround WEPAN's Nucleus Benefit (Elementary Benefits That Are an Important, Yet Secondary, Component of Any WEPAN Message)	
Influencing National Policies	WEPAN is taking a leadership role in influencing national policies to attract and retain more women in engineering and keep its membership informed of the latest policy developments.
Access Untapped Resource	The demand for a skilled technical workforce is increasing exponentially. Yet enrollment in U.S. engineering lags far behind nations like Japan and South Korea in raw numbers of engineering graduates. WEPAN is dedicated to helping America remain competitive by accessing the largely untapped resource of women.
Current Tagline	WEPAN is engineering a diverse future for the engineering profession by helping all women succeed in engineering.
Diversity	Your support of WEPAN's mission to develop a more diverse workforce will tap into America's scientific and technological talent, ultimately leading to greater innovation and better products.
Corporate Sponsors	Some of America's top corporations have partnered with WEPAN to develop groundbreaking initiatives that create a more diverse workforce in the engineering professions.
"**Proton**" Benefits (Elementary Benefits That Have a Positive Value to Prospective Donors)	
Training	WEPAN's training programs help academic institutions and corporations to assess current climate issues with an eye toward improving the recruitment, retention and advancement of women engineers.
Bias	According to a panel of experts convened by the National Academy of Sciences, women in engineering are hindered by bias and outmoded academic programs and procedures at universities. WEPAN is dedicated to eliminating those academic obstacles and enabling the success of all women in engineering programs.
Conferences	WEPAN's annual conference is a thriving marketplace for the exchange of information, ideas, research findings, strategies and best practices on how to attract, educate and retain women in engineering.
Statistical Inequities	Did you know that only 20% of engineering graduates and just 6% of engineering faculty are women? Join WEPAN in helping American women overcome the academic roadblocks that have kept women from entering the engineering professions in equal numbers to men.
Catalyze	WEPAN's programs catalyze change in academic institutions and advance relevant

Change	research, programs and expertise to create a climate of success for all women in engineering.
"Neutron" Benefits (Elementary Benefits That Provide Neither a Positive or Negative Charge to the Argument to Join WEPAN)	
Role of Engineering in Defense	Engineering and science play an important role in our national defense. Yet America is lagging behind many other countries in preparing and training a diverse workforce for engineering careers. WEPAN's mission is to help academic institutions attract, prepare and retain more women for this strategically important profession.
Networking Opportunity	WEPAN offers a unique opportunity to strategically network with other educators and corporate leaders who are dedicated to helping change the climate for women in engineering.
Collaboration	WEPAN collaborates with other engineering organizations to create alliances and conferences for the purpose of bringing about a more diverse academic environment and engineering workforce.
Knowledge Center	WEPAN has developed an online knowledge center that gives educators and corporate leaders immediate access to research, fact sheets, publications, training programs and other relevant information to help foster greater participation of women in engineering.
"Absolute Zero" (Benefits, That Possess , Minimum or No Energy, or Worse Yet, Negative Energy Among Prospective Members)	
Correct a Wrong	Only 20% of engineering graduates are women. When you join WEPAN, you help fight this problem at its roots, and foster change in a field that is not inclusive of women.
Testimonial	"For years I thought I was the only person dealing with the difficult issue of attracting and retaining more women in engineering. Then I went to a WEPAN conference and discovered that there was a whole network of people and information I could tap into for support and knowledge about this very important issue."

Table 2. Rank-ordered key benefits of membership in WEPAN

CCT's "Brand Triangle" consisted of Brand Personality, Brand Attributes and Brand Core Essence, a sample Brand Positioning Statement, and sample Brand Energy Lines. CCT describes these elements as defined below:

- Brand Personality: The emotional and experiential attributes that make your brand unique as described in human terms. The kinds of words loyal members or supporters might use to describe their experience with your brand.
- Brand Attributes: Things you get when your target chooses to do business with your brand. How WEPAN provides its core essence to its audiences and stakeholders. The activities, experiences, and other benefits your brand will provide that will make its core essence believable.
- Brand Core Essence: The core foundation of the brand. A very focused distillation of what the WEPAN brand will provide its supporters that nobody else can provide in quite the same way. Your 'battle flag.'" For example, Volvo's core essence is "safety."

- Formal Positioning Statement: An internal statement that is essentially the organization's "elevator speech.

Following the Assimilation and Exploration activities in Phase 1 of CCT's Brand Ignition Point™ process, CCT presented the WEPAN branding team with the WEPAN Brand Triangle.

Brand Personality
Diverse
Collaborative
Visionary
Accountable
Committed
Proactive

WEPAN Brand Triangle

Brand Attributes
•Working for the full participation of women in engineering.
•Addressing big picture issues facing the profession.
•Bringing diverse interests together higher education, business, government).
•Engaging the leaders of these institutions.
•Serving as a national advocate and resource for women engineers.

Brand Core Essence
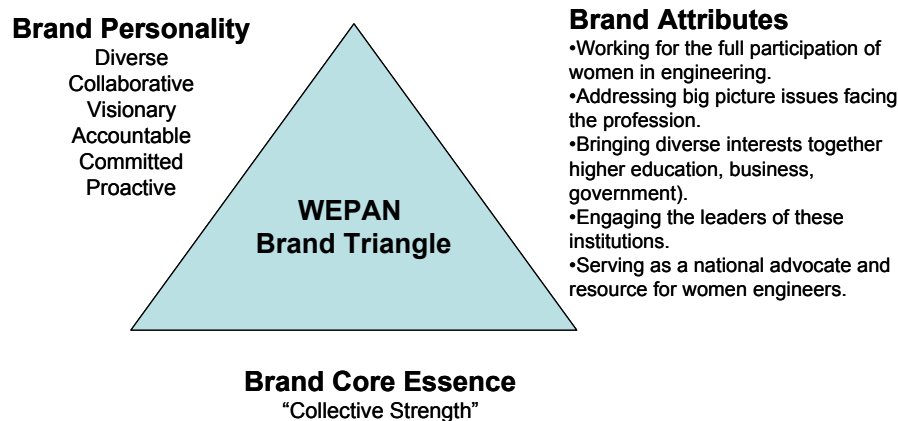"Collective Strength"

Figure 2. WEPAN Brand Triangle

Based on market research and the WEPAN brand triangle, CCT presented the WEPAN branding team with a recommendation that the organization consider a name change to better reflect the brand personality, attributes, and core essence. While consideration of this recommendation significantly altered the branding team's schedule and budget, it the team felt it was necessary to thoroughly explore this option before logo and tagline development could continue, and secured support from the Board of Directors to pursue the project. First, the branding team, in consultation with other WEPAN leadership, developed criteria for the potential name change. The following criteria for the potential name change were adopted in the remaining branding strategy development:

- Memorable, Simple, Visionary
- Forward momentum
- Withstands the test of time
- Differentiates WEPAN
- Complimented by a descriptive tagline

Founding members and other key players were consulted regarding a potential name change, and feedback from founders was sought as CCT advised the team's next steps. CCT developed a list of 100 potential names. The top 25 names were presented to the WEPAN branding team and discussed. While this list included several viable options, none of the potential names resonated with the WEPAN branding team. This "gut check" was an extremely important aspect of the process. While many of these initially generated names met the criteria and would have been excellent candidates for selecting a name for a newly formed organization, the team did not feel not that any of the names generated thus far in the process were "worth" undergoing the process

of *re-naming* an organization that had enjoyed more than 15 years of name equity. In other words, there were many good names, but a candidate name for the re-naming process needed to be significantly *better* than Women in Engineering Programs and Advocates Network in order to justify re-naming the organization. The team's decision making process was therefore somewhat different than an organization being named/branded for the first time.

In response to these concerns, CCT conducted several exercises with the branding team, Communications Advisory and Membership Committees, and Board members to help better define what WEPAN wanted to achieve by establishing a new name. These exercises proved extremely useful not only in the naming process, but also in helping the organization's leadership to verbalize their vision for WEPAN and identify common language to use when talking about WEPAN internally as well as to external stakeholders. CCT facilitated a "name-storm" conference call which consisted of name generation, evolution and evaluation steps. Prior to the conference call, CCT asked each participant to generate 50 nouns to describe what WEPAN is, 50 verbs to describe what WEPAN does, 50 adjectives to describe what WEPAN feels like, 50 ways to describe the world WEPAN will create (i.e. visionary words), and one sentence to describe what differentiates WEPAN from other organizations. The unique results are shown in Table 3 (note that some participants had the same or similar words).

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives	Visionary Words
Bridge	Promote	Collaborative	Empowering
Community	Enhance	Proactive	Enabling
Diversity	Empower	Questioning	Resourceful
Vision	Connect	Strong	Knowledgeable
Promise	Collaborate	Organized	Pioneering
Champions	Build	Strategic	Agent of Change
Leaders	Strategize	Volunteer-based	Fertile
Force	Pathway	Trail blazing	Catalyst
Academics	Catalyze	Focused	Vanguard
Pipeline	Network	Diverse	Thought Leader
Future	Change	Inclusive	Visionary
Pathway	Challenge	Targeted	Competitive
Catalyst	Propel	Innovative	Ground breaking
Tomorrow	Navigate	Respected	Inspirational
Focus	Influence	Professional	
Knowledge	Drive	Recognized	
Strategy	Accelerate	Engaging	
Revolution	Connect	Determined	
Transformation	Challenge	Attractive	
Workforce	Launch	Dedicated	
Standards	Engage	Persistent	
Women	Inspire	Supportive	
Education	Advocate	Inspired	
Wisdom	Educate	Revealing	

Table 3. Name-storm results

CCT then led the group in several exercises to brainstorm new names by combining the above words, combining syllables from the above words, creating sound-alike words, and scrambling the existing WEPAN name. Following this meeting, CCT generated a list of 14 additional possible names. The core team was tasked with identifying a smaller set of finalist names for further consideration, which were then presented to the larger group with sample type treatments. Of these six finalists, one (*Women in Engineering Progressive Action Network*) retained the WEPAN acronym. While the group did not feel that "progressive action" was the best fit, it gravitated heavily toward retaining the WEPAN acronym and accompanying name (acronym) recognition. Since the words "women", engineering" and "network" were deemed to be critical, the CCT guided the group in exploring other option for words beginning with the letters "P" and "A" that would make the organization more inclusive of its expanding membership beyond WIE program directors. The following three names resulted from the final brainstorming session: *Women in Engineering ProActive Network, Women in Engineering Professional Advocacy Network* and *Women in Engineering Professionals and Advocates Network*.

Phase 2:
While CCT initially presented Phase 2 (Brand Energy (tag) Line and logo development) as a sequential step following the development of the WEPAN Brand Triangle, the decision to loop back and consider a possible name change complicated the timeline. Once the initial Brand Triangle was developed, development of the Brand Energy Line took place concurrently and reciprocally with the exploration of a name change.

A number of potential Brand Energy Lines and logos were developed, and were further tweaked as the name change process crystallized. One important point that the team kept in mind throughout this process is that the tagline and name were not meant to stand completely independently—i.e. not all of the information about the organization needed to be conveyed in each piece of the branding, but together, they should complement each other and convey the complete "picture" of the organization. A late iteration of the proposed tagline was "*Creating new academic climates, instruction and community for women in engineering."* Following the selection of the three finalist names, two additional Brand Energy Lines evolved from discussions with CCT: "*Transforming climate and culture in engineering education*" and "*Transforming culture in engineering education.*"

CCT presented the branding team with several potential logos in various color schemes. Various type treatments, overall shapes and word placements were considered. The team initially decided on a swirl logo because it gave the feeling of forward motion with the "W" (signifying women) in a contrasting color Figure 3. Careful attention was paid to selecting a color scheme that would reproduce well in black and white; a blue-gray scheme was initially selected.

Figure 3. WEPAN Branding Team's Initial selection of new name and logo

The branding team solicited online feedback in May 2007 from members and presented the preliminary results for finalist names and taglines to the membership at the annual conference in June 2007. Following member feedback, the logo was modified slightly to include a more robust color scheme (red/gray), rotation of the swirl graphic to emphasize the "W", and rearrangement of the words. The logo, the name *Women in Engineering ProActive Network* and tagline "*Transforming culture in engineering education*" was approved by the Board during the summer of 2007.

The new logo (Figure 4) developed during this phase represents forward motion, progress and change, and the coordinated interaction of many elements advancing together. The core team selected the red colorset because it visually portrays WEPAN's progressive nature. The typeface of the logo text has a clean and strong impact, which puts a fresh new face on the WEPAN brand. The swirl logo was carefully constructed to balance the logo text, highlighting the symbolic red "W". The swirl design subtly implies a rolling, forward motion which parallels WEPAN's drive for progress and change. The new tagline reflects WEPAN's distinctive contributions to *transforming culture in engineering education*.

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Figure 4. WEPAN's new logo.

Phase 3:

A plan to integrate the new branding was developed by the Communications Advisory Committee, and CCT was engaged to develop both web-based and print pieces to support the roll-out process. In addition to items that fell directly within the charge of the Communications Advisory Committee, full implementation of the branding strategy required integration in all areas of WEPAN business to ensure a consistent look and feel associated with the WEPAN

brand. The branding team is currently collaborating with a number of WEPAN committees and peer organizations to introduce the new brand.

Summary

This paper documents the process undertaken to update the WEPAN brand in order to maintain the organization's reputation for high quality, value and relevance. The case study of the WEPAN re-branding initiative serves as a model for other non-profit organizations, including women-in-engineering programs, who wish to establish or update their branding strategy.

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