

## Building a Library Brand

Apple. Starbucks. Michael Moore. What do they have in common? All three have a strong brand identity. Whether it is the elegant design of an iPod, the perfect foam on a custom latte, or a special kind of cinematic mudraking- you know exactly what you get with each of these powerful brands.

What do people think when they hear the name of your library? A brand is a promise. It is the symbol – expressed by everything from a logo to the way the phone is answered – that communicates the essence of what the library delivers to the customer.

Think about Nike’s “swish” logo, “Just do it” tag line and the drama of its commercials. A brand links the organization to consistent images, symbols and words that communicate the organization’s identity in a visceral way. In the case of the library, the public may know in a logical way that it is good, but a brand makes the emotional connection that builds loyalty and support.

Brand is expressed in visual cues like signage, letterhead, advertising and websites. It helps the public cut through the clutter of images and words that are part of modern life. But creating a brand identity is more than an exercise in graphic design. Everyone in the organization must understand how they contribute to the image of the library.

Here are a few things library leaders consider when building a library brand:

- Meeting with stakeholders to discuss the words and images that represent the library. After some brainstorming, these ideas are distilled into a meaningful phrase that says “who we are.”
- Unifying the “look” of the library by standardizing the color palette, fonts, style and vocabulary that is used in library communication. Adhering to this unified

look in everything the library produces – from signs to bookmarks- helps to make the connection in the minds of customers that all branches and services are part of the same library.

- Agreeing on the vocabulary that staff and advocates use when they are promoting the library. When vocabulary changes, (like “customer service” instead of “circulation”) everyone needs to be aware of the change and understand why it was made.
- Distributing talking points to help library staff and advocates promote the library and focus its message.
- Organizing the library’s promotions into campaigns to strengthen the brand. In an operation that has something for everyone, it can be helpful to have advocates and staff members talking about the same thing at the same time.

The library’s brand is a shortcut that “tells the story” of the library and helps the public immediately identify that each piece of the organization is part of the same system. Taking the time and effort to build a brand is a worthwhile investment. In a world where everyone and everything is branded, a brand is essential for defining the library in a new, competitive environment.

