



Standards – Heaven & Hell

Several Cyber-Essays in the Nonprofit ToolKit make the following point:

It doesn't matter whether you place a small order for imprinted products...or license a product line for sale to your chapters and affiliates...or create a print ad campaign...or mount a national multi-channel retail program...or just order letterhead and printed forms. Whatever the scale of your actions, you can't escape this fundamental reality: ***Once an item imprinted with your graphic identity is out there in the hands of end-users, it is forever beyond your control. Yet that item will affect your brand equity in ways that are helpful or harmful as long as it survives.***



Your organization's graphic images and branding elements are among its major assets. You can blow your job security if you don't protect them. The trick is to adopt a graphics standards policy. It will govern simple and complex issues your various printers and designers face when working with your branding elements. Consider the following extremes – heaven and hell:

HEAVEN – everyday activity like having your organization's letterhead printed. The task is so simple you probably won't give it a second thought – until it's printed incorrectly! Then you have to explain why the logo is in the wrong position on the letterhead, or isn't in exactly the right shade of blue, or why the 10th Anniversary cutline was dropped, or why the logo is the wrong size or why the envelope printing and the letterhead printing don't match. You don't want to deal with your boss on matters like these. You also don't want to ask the printer to give you a quick re-run of the job along with a steep discount because you failed to provide proper specifications when you placed the order.

The **graphic standards policy** protects you from these risks. It declares the precise rules for reproducing your organization's branding elements in printer-speak and designer-speak. The policy makes life so much easier for you and for the printer. And safer, too.

HELL – complicated branding activity, like sharing identity space with another organization. Consider the implications of these wonderful scenarios on your organization, which we'll name "ABC Charity":

- Coca Cola offers to sponsor a booth at the county fair. At the booth you will hand out literature about your mission along with inexpensive freebies acknowledging Coca Cola's support of ABC Charity;
- TV station WXYZ wants to remote broadcast the morning talk show from your parking lot. It intends to spotlight your mission and give your honchos some air time. But the interviewer is already a station brand and will carry a microphone with a station logo – while your honcho is unknown to the public.
- The Nike company has offered to underwrite a half page ad in the local newspaper about Nike's support of ABC Charity.

OOPS! These are three great opportunities. But each one forces you to protect the brand equity of ABC Charity:

- You need banners, flyers, posters and freebies that combine ABC Charity branding elements with those of Coke.
- You need a background graphic for the WXYZ interview opportunity, plus a commitment from the WXYZ person in charge of the remote interview that the camera will sweep the logo a couple times plus arrangement for some other graphic images to be picked up in the B-roll insertion during the interview.
- You need to be sure that the marketing people from Nike, who offered to do ad layout for you, don't accidentally put your identity at a disadvantage.

Each of these three opportunities requires you to get your brand out front. In two of them the graphic identity of ABC Charity has to stand up against the thundering graphics of two of the most recognizable brand in the world – Nike and Coke. And the WXYZ interview, by definition, will be a tight shot of the interviewer and your honcho with little opportunity for ABC Charity branding unless you prearrange it.

Graphics issues arise: does each organization permit its logo to be juxtaposed with another? Should one logo be subordinate to the other? Should it be adjacent? Above? Below? How closely may they be spaced? How will conflict between colors be handled? How about the conflict between image densities? Fonts? Space ratio of the logos? How do you keep ABC Charity branding elements from being swamped by the graphics of the better known organization?

All of these are fundamental brand management issues. They are repeatedly faced by organizations that co-sponsor an event...by national organizations with local chapters...by universities with dozens of quasi-independent academic units and auxiliary enterprises...and by organizations that try to fashion their separate graphic identities into a common presentation which does equal honor to each logo and the organization it represents. *This is tricky stuff.*

Bottom Line – You make the decisions that affect your logo. Or they will be made by people in the other organization. Those folks won't intentionally harm your organization's identity – but they will surely protect the graphic image of the outfit that employs them, even if that works to your disadvantage.

Best Option – You are in good shape if the decisions about use of your brand have already been made for you by experts and formally adopted as an organizational policy. Those decisions – your Graphic Standards Policy - guide and empower you to deal with these situations. They also prevent you from having to assume *personal* responsibility beyond your skill set or authority.

Consequently, the search for answers to dual-logo issues, and to a multitude of less complex issues also, begins with a graphic standards policy that has been thoughtfully developed by an experienced graphic designer. It will anticipate the issues you will eventually face and will specify appropriate solutions and outcomes for each one.

NOTE: The Cyber-Essay [*What Your Mother Never Told You About Graphic Standards*](#) explains why this issue is critical to your organization and important to your job security. If you didn't read it yet, you should check it out now.