

THE BUZZ ON BRANDING

INDUSTRY EXPERTS
SPILL THE BEANS

by Leslie Pilgrim

We all know table salt is pretty much just that—a pure commodity. But Morton Salt comes with a promise, a brand promise of purity and dependability; it's reliable (your grandmother probably used it) and somehow you feel that this is the best salt money can buy. You don't even mind paying a little bit more for it. Off it goes into the shopping cart. "Colleges and universities are every bit as much a brand as Tide detergent or Microsoft," states Davis Masten, a principal with Cheskin, a Silicon Valley-based strategic market research and consulting firm. "The difference is, brands are consciously managed at the Microsofts and the Hewlett-Packards. A college may not realize it's a brand to be managed." Consciously manage *your* brand, and prospects may reach more often for your school just as you reach for the Morton Salt container at the grocery store.

The trendy- and commercial-sounding word "brand" may make some wince. But, as Kevin Keller, E.B. Osborn Professor of Marketing at Dartmouth College's Amos Tuck School of Business (Hanover, N.H.), points out, branding is a reality, not a fad, in higher education. "To the extent to which consumers have choices, you need to have a brand. When consumers make choices in any category, especially in higher education, the reality is they're going to come up with some consideration set. It's so critical to hit your target market so you get into that consideration set. Any brand that gets into the consideration set gets examined a lot

The last time you bought salt, you probably reached for the package with the image of the little girl wearing a short yellow dress carrying a leaking salt container. What compelled you to select the navy blue container when the less expensive "ABC Salt" was also within reach? Branding—at its best. Businesses around the world have understood the power of branding for decades. Now, many in higher education are realizing that even schools are brands and they may have a thing or two to learn from marketing experts in the corporate arena.

more closely," he explains.

Edward Kramer, associate vice president of marketing and communications at Willamette University (Salem, Ore.), also believes that paying attention to brand is a necessity in today's education market. Before coming to Willamette, Kramer worked for

more than 20 years in marketing and public relations for such brand stalwarts as Xerox and Oracle. "In the commercial world, companies sell products. In the higher education world, we sell reputation, quality and the essence of something good. The fact is, though, we do sell. We are in a competitive environment that becomes increasingly competitive every day. We can have the most wonderful, high-quality educational experience around to offer our students, but if nobody knows about it, it's the proverbial tree falling in the forest," he says.

In their 1998 book, "The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding," Al and Laura Ries explain that "... branding in the marketplace is very similar to branding on the ranch. A branding program should be designed to differentiate your cow from all other cattle on the range." Branding, they explain, "... creates in the mind of the prospect that there is no product on the market quite like your product." The key to this differentiation lies in what your brand promise is, and how you communicate and deliver on that promise.

"From a customer's perspective, a brand is much more than a logo. It really represents a promise," says Dean Adams, director of corporate brand management at 3M Company. "A brand generally has one overriding, overarching promise," he says. According to Adams, that promise is built upon three pillars that support good brand management: 1) Positioning: determining what you want your

promise to be; 2) Communication: creating the expectation in the customer's mind of what that promise is; and 3) Operations: delivering the promise.

"The big challenge in brand management today is getting alignment among all three elements," states Adams.

NOT THE SAME OLD PROMISE

To prospective students, colleges and universities can look very much alike, one indistinguishable from one another. To set themselves apart and to begin the process of branding, every school needs to declare its identity by making a relevant, differentiated promise.

Bradley University (Peoria, Ill.) is one school actively establishing its brand and focusing on just such a differentiated promise. Like many schools across the country, Bradley experienced a period of decreasing enrollments in the early '90s. The school realized it was crucial to differentiate itself from the sea of schools that, on the surface, looked very much alike. Bradley went to work building its own distinct brand in the marketplace.

Bradley began the process with research. "We talked with students and parents about the college search process, how familiar they were with Bradley, why they added Bradley as a school to consider," explains Scott Friedhoff, associate provost for enrollment management. "Over and over again, one of the first things students would make reference to was Bradley's size." Bradley is neither a traditional residential, small, private liberal arts college nor, as Friedhoff calls it, a "megaversity."

"We are a private, comprehensive

university of 5,000 students, in five different colleges. That's unique," says Friedhoff. So unique, in fact, that Bradley is one of only 22 private, medium-sized schools of its kind in the nation. The school's focus shifted from promoting the school to promoting its

"From a customer's perspective, a brand is much more than a logo. It really represents a promise."

—DEAN ADAMS
Director of Corporate Brand Management
at 3M Company
(St. Paul, Minn.)

size category—a size Bradley promotes as being "just right."

"We were identifying a market. We created a positioning question and then followed with a positioning statement. The question was, does the size of a university make a difference? If people asked the question of themselves, they would then start to look at the factors and features of a Bradley-type institution," he says. The payoff from these efforts is clear: The number of applications for admission has increased by 40 percent over the past four years and enrollment is now at capacity.

Narrowing the focus wasn't an entirely comfortable process. "We all had to think a little creatively about this, not to be narrow sighted," explains Friedhoff. "By promoting the category, you might ask, 'Are we losing out by being one of 22?' In fact, it is just the opposite," he says. By creating a category, Bradley is now clear about what it is, as well as what it is not—and clear about what its message should be.

Friedhoff adds that faculty "buy-in" wasn't a problem. "If you're doing it right, there shouldn't have to be a buy-in," he says. "We're not changing the

institution. We're just describing, presenting and differentiating it better."

Another school that is clear about its category within higher education is the University of Phoenix. The school offers a wide range of degrees on more than 90 campuses/learning centers across the country, Puerto Rico and Canada. The university is operated by the Apollo Group, a Nasdaq-traded company; the affiliated University of Phoenix Online is majority-owned by Apollo. The school offers a niche product: accessible degree programs for the busy working professional. The school states that more working professionals

earn a college degree from the University of Phoenix than any other university in the U.S. It also claims that the University of Phoenix Online is the nation's leading online university. "Building our brand began with finding a market need and serving it," explains Chairman John Sperling. "In this case, it happened to be providing access to education for working adults."

As Sperling explains the school's brand identity—which he summarizes as "the intelligent choice for working adults, nationwide and worldwide"—he points to several things. "We had to make sure we were providing value, which for our students meant an engaging learning experience and a quality education. Since some 65 percent of our leads come from students, alumni and faculty, one could say that we have a sort of viral marketing system. Of equal importance to delivering quality service was building a working environment that honored the contributions of our faculty and staff so that their passion for their work would be passed through to our students and would permeate our culture," he says.

Is the school's brand successful? If

HOW DO I LOVE THEE? LET ME EXAMINE YOUR BRAND.

by Leslie Pilgrim

Kevin Roberts, worldwide CEO of the New York-based ad agency Saatchi & Saatchi, believes the strongest brands are the ones that evoke a deep emotional connection with their customers. And when a brand makes this connection, it is no longer just a brand, but a “Lovemark.”

“A Lovemark may be a great brand, but not all great brands will be Lovemarks,” explains Roberts.

Saatchi & Saatchi employs 7,000 people in 150 offices in 90 countries around the world. Clients include Toyota, Procter & Gamble, Sony and Visa. Before Roberts took up his position in 1987, he had worked more than 20 years as a marketing executive for companies that produce some of the world’s most successful brands—Gillette, Procter & Gamble and Pepsi-Cola.

Roberts has a personal interest in education; he is senior fellow of the University of Waikato in New Zealand, where he teaches in the management school. With colleagues from the school he wrote “Peak Performance,” a business study of the world’s top sporting organizations. Here, Roberts shares some of his thoughts about the relevance of branding to higher education.

Q: WHAT IS LOVEMARKING AND WHY SHOULD HIGHER EDUCATION CARE ABOUT THIS CONCEPT, ESPECIALLY AS IT RELATES TO THE CONCEPT OF BRANDING?

Lovemarking is about taking brands into an emotional dimension. Brands are running out of juice. They’re becoming moribund in a time of market change—beached whales in an ebb tide. In the market, power is changing hands; it has gone from producers to retailers. Now it’s going to consumers. The competition for the attention of consumers is almost overwhelming. When I think of the modern consumer, I often think of a teacher, up in front of the class, faced with a forest of raised hands.

There’s something else that will determine the fate of brands. We are living in an age of relationships. In the Western world, certainly, this might seem paradoxical—society seems more fractionalized, more people are living alone. But in these social circumstances, it’s not really surprising that people yearn for connection. The market is also about connections. Anyone who has a brand must understand this. We’re moving from transactions to relationships. We’re entering, therefore, the realm of the emotions. We’re heading to where it’s warm.

What used to sustain a brand was respect—consumer appreciation for a brand’s performance, reliability and availability. But, in the modern market, every segment is full of products that perform well, always work and are easily obtainable. It is increasingly difficult to differentiate on these qualities. Respect for a brand, then, does not guarantee its success. Respect is necessary, but it’s no longer sufficient. Brands must also engender an emotional response; they must invite loyalty and a sense of ownership. If they are to survive, they must become Lovemarks.

I think the reasons why colleges and universities should care about Lovemarking are obvious—like other brands, they’re struggling to form lasting relationships. You have alluded to several characteristics of U.S. higher learning: scary tuition costs; issues of identity; problems of differentiation; the commodification of higher education. The institutional response to the challenges of the modern educational market is ... to project excellence, tradition, relevance. In other words, to aim for respect (and lots of it, to justify the high cost of learning)... There are lots of students at lots of campuses who feel no passion for their schools. And this at the time in their lives when they should be most passionate about everything.

The Jesuits used to say give us a child till he’s seven, and we’ll have him forever. Well, a college has a great opportunity to turn a four-year degree into a commitment for life. But, like passion, lack of passion is easily communicated—to prospective students, parents, alumni. It’s time to understand that respect is just a start. The successful college won’t just be a brand—it’ll be a Lovemark.

Q: WHAT IF YOU WOKE UP ONE MORNING AND FOUND YOURSELF IN CHARGE OF BRANDING FOR A PRIVATE COLLEGE, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

First, I’d reflect on the latest wonderful twist in the course of my life. I left school on the run, impatient to get out into the world. University wasn’t an option for me then, but I’ve sought out smart people ever since... Five minutes later, I’d get out and start Lovemarking my college. I’d talk to people—to teachers and students, administrators and alumni. I’d want to get to the essence of the school. I’d want to find the things about the school that people love; if there weren’t enough of those, then I’d find

out what people had loved about the school. If there weren't enough of them, I'd find out what people could love about the school.


What I'd look for are stories. Storytelling is the scaffolding of relationships. Remember when you fell in love? You couldn't wait to tell each other all about yourselves. Achievements, tradition, the size of the endowment fund—they're in the official record. I'd be looking for mystery and intimacy. I'd be looking for the unofficial stories—the layer on layer of personal narratives that constitute the emotional history of a school. Having found my stories, I'd turn to great storytellers—people who can make a continuum of past, present and future. I'd want to convey the idea of my college, an idea that would be owned by everyone who went to my college and that would be accessible to everyone who was considering going to my college.

Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK IS CRUCIAL TO A SCHOOL IN CONSIDERING ITS BRAND?

Honesty: a school should be true to itself. Of course, it should strive always to be better, but it should not pretend to be what it's not. Consumers love authenticity; they can tell a fake as quickly as a cat sniffs a sardine.

Respect: in relationships you have to give as well as get. A school must take a long-term view; it wants lifelong relationships. Consumers will forgive little faults, provided the school's commitment is never in doubt.

Love: a school must love itself—what it does, what it's for, what it wants to be—before it will be loved. When it communicates that passion, it can become a Lovemark.

One more thing: I know it's hard to avoid, but a school must not use the term "consumer." I hate it—in fact, one of the planners in our London office is offering hard cash for a better word. 

stock price is an indicator of brand success, then the answer is yes. Apollo Group's stock price has jumped from the teens a year ago to recent prices in the mid-\$30s per share—during a period when many stock prices have been heading south.

RESEARCHING YOUR BRAND

It is clear that knowing your category—not just anecdotally but also through research—is important. Once identified, it is an ongoing task to stay in tune with that category.

Northwestern University (Evanston, Ill.) is in the midst of what it calls an "institutional identity initiative." Over an 18-month period, the school has conducted extensive research. "We asked several key audiences their perceptions of Northwestern," explains Alan Cabbage, the school's vice president for university relations. "We had a branding task force that spent a lot of time analyzing the data and interpreting what it was telling us. Some of it was an eye-opener," says Cabbage. Northwestern has always prided itself on its strong engineering

school. Yet one of the things that came through is that it is not particularly well known for its engineering program. Much of the survey data, however, reinforced what the school already knew. "It came through that Northwestern graduates are ready to work. They've got the communication skills, analytical skills—they're ready," says Cabbage.

So why all the research? One of Northwestern's goals was to find out how key audiences perceive the school. "It's important to compare what *you* think you stand for, and what it is your *audience* thinks you stand for. If there's a disconnect, how do you reconcile it?" asks Cabbage.

From this platform, Northwestern is developing its brand-essence statement which emphasizes four key points: 1) the school's unusually broad range of outstanding academic opportunities for a school of its size (7,500 undergraduates) as well as the flexibility for students to take courses within different disciplines; 2) the school's strong emphasis on student collaboration—both with one another

and with faculty; 3) the school's focus on effective communication as a means to make graduates well prepared for the workforce; and 4) the school's location in the economically and culturally vibrant city of Chicago.

After conducting the research, the school is now more assured that these four points are not just what those inside the school think are distinctive. They also align, to a great extent, with how the market perceives Northwestern. "What really counts in all of this is that the actions of the institution reflect our brand promise," says Cabbage.

COMMUNICATING THE PROMISE

Communicating your promise is more than putting words on paper. Once identified, the promise must be communicated in what you say, what you do and how you appear. Although a brand is built from a singular promise, the brand itself is multidimensional. It is a bundle of experiences, attachments, values, emotions and feelings your customers, and potential customers, associate with your school—what

registers when they think of your school, visit your school, hear about your school. Your brand is your faculty, students, curriculum, alumni, the campus landscaping, the voice that answers the phone, the students who give campus tours. Get this feeling right in your communications and interactions with your prospects, and the promise begins to resonate.

Every school has different functional aspects that become key components in a prospect's ultimate school choice. And of course, constituents need a variety of information at different points in time. But a powerful brand makes its impression early, and strong impressions are often based on intangibles. Ask a 14-year-old what colleges he or she knows about and you'll probably be surprised at some of the answers. School names are already on the radar. These are often schools that have a unique essence, a personality and identity. These vivid personalities form lasting impressions. A school like UC-Berkeley—with its creative, avant-garde, intellectual essence—is bursting with personality. It's a memorable brand. Schools are about those hard-to-articulate things like trust, experiences, sense of place and loyalty. Understanding all of those things that resonate with your audiences—from student-to-faculty ratios, the school's history, the size of the endowment, to the feeling someone gets as she walks across campus, sits in class, or remembers your school—helps to communicate and build your brand. Those in the corporate world are keenly aware of the importance of the emotional element in forming brand attachment. And they work hard to get the “feel” right in order to project brand essence.

BRANDING À LA CORPORATE AMERICA

Good brand management doesn't happen by accident.

Target Stores, a division of Target

“Define your brand; be sure of who you are. Communicate your brand consistently. And be dynamic. Keep up with the times and evolve.”

—NANCY CARRUTH

Director of Advertising for Target Stores
(Minneapolis, Minn.)

Corporation (the nation's fourth largest retailer operating 991 Target stores, 266 Mervyn's stores and 64 Marshall Field's stores), is a solid example of a company that pays close attention to how it communicates and delivers its brand promise. Staying relevant to its audience is crucial to this retailer. In 1999, Target Stores identified an opportunity to strengthen its brand by using its traditional red bull's-eye trademark in a fun, hip way. So the merchandise retail giant began an intense internal and external communications campaign to make the red icon as familiar as McDonald's golden arches. The company introduced its “Sign of the Times” theme by placing the bull's-eye everywhere. One playful television commercial featured a red and white world immersed in the circular icon—from bull's-eye wallpaper, to bull's-eye-patterned clothes, to bull's-eye-shaped Jell-O salad. “We take our customer seriously, but we don't want to take ourselves too seriously,” explains Nancy Carruth, director of advertising for Target Stores.

Target has always been clear on its identity. However, with its bull's-eye

campaign, the retailer also wanted to take the opportunity to reinforce its brand within its workforce, which has a distinct, hardworking, Midwestern culture. “Those within Target from the top on down know what Target and the bull's-eye trademark stand for,” says Carruth. “We put together an internal brand video and distributed it to just about everyone in the organization so we all talk the same talk,” she says.

What does Target want you to think when you see its bull's-eye? Carruth doesn't talk about what the stores sell. She talks about ambiance, feelings and perceptions. “We want to be known for our trend-forwardness. We also want the customer to feel assured they'll get a consistent shopping experience from us. We want people to have fun shopping at Target and to be comfortable here—clean stores, wide aisles, no compromises,” explains Carruth. Ultimately, Carruth says the retailer wants people to say, “I love shopping at Target.”

What does Carruth think is most important about the Target brand? “Consistency,” she states. “Inconsistency is frustrating. Inconsistency is the restaurant you go to where you never know what you're going to get.” And to any business trying to build its brand, Carruth makes these recommendations: “Define your brand; be sure of who you are. Communicate your brand consistently. And be dynamic. Keep up with the times and evolve,” she states emphatically.

John Fleming, vice president of merchandising at Walmart.com (the online arm of Wal-Mart Stores), also believes a consistent experience is crucial to brand building. “Over time, a brand truly comes from consistently

meeting the expectations of whoever your customer is,” he says. For the folks at Wal-Mart, trust is a key ingredient in its brand. “The customer trusts that we offer the lowest price, every day; we are the only retailer on the face of the earth that has been able to consistently do this. People trust us. We stand behind everything. If you want to return something you bought from us, we’ll take it back, no receipt, no questions asked. Nobody does this anymore.”

Fleming claims that it is this consistency and trust that creates an emotional bond between Wal-Mart and its customers. And like Carruth of Target, Fleming talks in emotional terms when describing what Wal-Mart’s

brand stands for: “Value, trust and a commitment to the customer,” he says.

Chipotle Mexican Grill—a Denver-based restaurant chain majority owned by McDonald’s—is a good example of how a narrow brand focus (“a quick-gourmet restaurant that serves fresh, made-to-order burritos and tacos”) combined with distinct communication and attention to delivery are the keys to growing a brand. Chipotle is a relatively new entrant in the crowded fast-food restaurant scene, but the restaurant has been well received in the 18 metropolitan areas it has entered so far. The Chipotle brand is a combination of zippy ambiance, youthful personality and high quality food. “A brand is not

just a functional thing,” states Dan Fogarty, the company’s director of marketing. “It is an intangible thing that involves everything that is associated with that name. Once you get the functional side figured out, it’s all a matter of how you add the smell, taste and appeal that goes on top of the functional aspects of the brand. It’s less about product and more about an overall feeling,” he says.

Chipotle is succeeding, in part, due to strong word-of-mouth promotion. As Fogarty explains, “We know we’ve got the food down so we try to do things that make the customer feel good about coming to us, and they tell their friends.” Fogarty easily draws a parallel


GETTING INSIDE A TEEN’S HEAD

by *Leslie Pilgrim*

Communicate your brand promise in a way that connects with your target audience, and you’re on your way to building a healthy brand. Schools have a unique audience in teens, says Davis Masten, a principal with Cheskin, a Silicon Valley-based strategic market research and consulting firm that has done extensive work examining youth culture.

“There’s a concept in branding right now that’s rather popular, called the 360-degree brand. What it means is that every place you are, with all your constituents, wherever people may encounter you—in an ad, a news clipping, driving by, through word-of-mouth, on the web—you need to be consistent in communicating your brand’s essence. Today, there are so many transmedia opportunities to encounter something. And colleges and universities, in communicating their messages to their target audiences—the 17 to 28-year-old—should be aware that this age range is very open to innovation. This is something that really stands out in our research. There’s a more visual and sensory understanding in youth that isn’t as well understood at older ages. Since we typically act emotionally before we act logically, with every one of those 360-degree experiences, you’ve got to get the feeling right. Of course, emotions are supported by logic, but every

communication must be authentic because teens are great detectors of communications that aren’t.

“[In addition to quantitative research], to really understand teens you need to hang out with them. Spend time on their turf—with their friends, their parents. Tag along as they investigate different universities, rather than sitting and chatting in a more artificial context. Immerse yourself in the lives of your prospects. That’s where the real behavior is. Understanding the high-school segmentation, and what the emotions are of those kids, is useful in helping understand how to communicate. There have been some very sophisticated models done in corporations to understand what drives youth in making choices. The Pepsis of the world know this stuff extraordinarily well. They’re trying to stay on the edge of that. But some colleges may not understand this behavior completely because it’s happening before the kids get to them. If schools better understand the depth of the teen experience, they’ll be better able to understand teens’ emotions and authentically tap into them in a way that differentiates the school. The teen market is the toughest market in the U.S., so it’s no surprise many colleges and universities across the country may look and sound alike to them. Many schools aren’t brands. And that just plays to the guys with the brand recognition.” 

between his business and higher education: "It's like when someone says, 'You really should go to that school, it'll be a great experience for you.' The power of that recommendation is stronger than anything you could be told by the organization itself. That's the real strength of a brand."

For colleges and universities, a strong recommendation can lead to sampling. "One of the most important things in marketing is sampling," says Keller of Dartmouth. "If you can get someone to try your product, such as visiting campus, and it's a good product, you often can get the sale."

Perhaps the biggest cue schools can take from corporate America in communicating brand essence is that brands are multi-sensory and should be

projected in a manner that clicks with a specific audience. Successful brand managers pay close attention to the emotional attachments that are formed

"It's challenging to adapt the marketing of products and services to the marketing of experiences. A college education is not just the diploma. It is an experience and a connection that lasts a lifetime."

—LOIS HERR
Director of Marketing and Public Affairs
at Elizabethtown College
(Elizabethtown, Pa.)

in response to sensory cues because it is frequently these attachments that guide consumer choice.

Lois Herr, director of marketing and public affairs at Elizabethtown College in Elizabethtown, Pa., believes this is relevant to schools. "It's challenging to adapt the marketing of products and services to the marketing of experiences," says Herr, who turned to academia after a 26-year career with AT&T during which she wore a variety of hats, from marketing to operations. "A college education is not just the diploma. It is an experience and a connection that lasts a lifetime. We want to do more than just give information about us to our constituents. We want people to *connect* with us. We want to get their attention, to get a slice of their mind. We want to get an emotional response," Herr says.

HOW THIS C.O.W. STANDS OUT ON THE RANGE

by Leslie Pilgrim


The Nike swoosh, the Apple "apple," the Dodge Ram—icons like these create powerful and enduring brand images. The swoosh suggests movement, the apple illustrates simplicity, and the ram is a masculine symbol of toughness. The right icon can speak volumes, quickly expressing the very essence of a brand.

In recently created marketing materials, The College of Wooster (Wooster, Ohio) expressed its very essence by using several icons to convey its brand identity— independence, passion and tradition—presenting them in a lighthearted manner that capitalized on Wooster's appreciation for humor.

"We believe that Wooster is confident enough in its quality that it can both make fun and have fun. This isn't a stuffy place, so we shouldn't look or feel stuffy," says Jeffery Hanna, Wooster's associate vice president of college relations and marketing.

In keeping with its appreciation for humor, students and alumni alike fondly refer to the college by its initials—

C.O.W. [for the College of Wooster], using the acronym on logo wear and on student ID cards, i.e., COW cards. The "cow" is creatively—and playfully—used in the school's new marketing materials. So too are a Scottie dog and bagpipers in kilts—icons of the college's Scottish heritage reflecting the passion and pride felt among students and alumni. A brick imprinted with the name "Wooster" (just like those found on the walkways around campus) does double duty: It not only reinforces the brand attribute of tradition and also illustrates a student's educational path, which requires a good deal of independence (another brand attribute). As a clever yield strategy, Hanna and crew printed t-shirts with all the icons positioned on a path and then mailed the t-shirts to accepted students in a box made to look like ... what else but a Wooster brick.

With icons that express brand attributes and the school's distinctiveness, Wooster clearly has a leg—or at least a kilt-covered knee—up on the competition. 

BRANDING TRUTHS, BRANDING CAVEATS

Brand recognition translates to the bottom line.

John Rehfeld, an author, business and marketing consultant, and adjunct professor in Pepperdine University's M.B.A. program who also sits on the boards of directors for seven California-based high-tech firms, has seen this to be true. "One of my student teams did a marketing analysis of M.B.A. programs in California. Tuition costs ranged from X to 3X. Tuition at the well-branded schools was in the 3X range. You can be sure the cost of delivering the higher-priced programs is not three times more at these schools," he says.

Rehfeld states that a school's brand equity gives it the perception of being better and thus worth any extra costs. "I always say you probably don't learn much more at Harvard than you do at Cal State, Fullerton—and I have a Harvard M.B.A. so I can speak to this. The main difference is the global reputation and the lifetime networking you can get from going to Harvard. It's a strong brand and people will pay more for it," he claims.

As Al and Laura Ries point out in their branding book, "Quality is a nice thing to have, but brands are not built by quality alone." Not only does a strong brand add to [profit] margins, it opens doors. "It's easier for recruiters to do their job when prospective students say, 'Oh, I've heard of you before.' It's the same for fund raising. It keeps you from having to defend who you are all the time," says Herr of the power of a brand.

While brands make promises, it is important not to promise too much. In hashing out its branding message, Northwestern's task force discussed

making it sound more visionary. "A brand is a promise," says Cabbage of Northwestern. "You are saying 'this is what we will deliver.' Visionary statements are certainly important, but

"A brand is a promise. You are saying 'this is what we will deliver.' Visionary statements are certainly important, but they should be in your strategic mission, not in your branding message."

—ALAN CUBBAGE
Vice President of University Relations
at Northwestern University
(Evanston, Ill.)

they should be in your strategic mission, not in your branding message." In other words, it's important to envision what your school can become down the road but to steer clear of including that in branding messages. "Authenticity" is another watchword; your audience will easily detect what doesn't ring true. So is "consistency;" you'll want to communicate the same messages in every prospect encounter. This includes such minute details as controlled and consistent use of your school's logo and wordmark.

Authentic communication also means tackling a school's perceived shortcomings, such as size or location. "You need to differentiate yourself, but you also need to address a school's potential drawbacks," says Keller. "If you don't do that, you'll never get into the consideration set."

Once a plan is put in place, however, building a brand takes time. As Herr of Elizabethtown says, "It's hard to measure because you are investing in people's future actions."

Just as important as having patience in building a brand is keeping it relevant. 3M brand granddaddy Scotch tape has been around for 75 years. "When we first started out it was yellow cellophane tape," explains Adams. "It's gone through many changes such as the frosted invisible tape. Now we've just introduced tape, not in a roll, but in two-inch strips that pop up. It's great if you're trying to wrap packages." Adams' point is that it's important to revisit and even re-envision the promise of a brand. "We add new technologies to keep reinventing the promise of the Scotch brand. We reinvent it, but we're consistent with what the brand stands for."

In branding, there is a temptation to throw advertising dollars at a brand before it is well defined. The recent experience of those trying to do business on the Internet drives home the point that advertising alone does not build a brand. "Many online businesses were spending 30 to 40 percent of their sales on marketing to build a brand," explains Fleming of Walmart.com. "You need to have the fundamentals of the goods and services you're offering your customers before you reach out and get too far ahead of yourself," he says.

Perhaps the dot-coms that now find themselves out of business could have benefited from a few words from Adams of 3M. "Brand management is business management. It goes to the very essence of what your business is about. If you try to run brand management separate from your business management, it doesn't work very well. If your business management incorporates brand management as a core element, it works very, very well," concludes Adams. 