



Recent news reports about the possibility of a global pandemic are truly frightening, but the scariest account I've seen so far appeared on October 16th in *The New York Times*. In that account, excerpted from an advance copy of the Bush administration's emergency response plan, the potential results of an outbreak are described in story form:

In some areas, grocery store shelves are empty and social unrest occurs. Long lines form where food and gasoline are available. Elderly patients with chronic, unstable medical conditions hesitate to leave their homes for fear of becoming seriously ill with influenza.

How A Story Makes Bird Flu Even Scarier

Riots occur at some vaccination clinics as people are turned away or supplies run out. Several trucks transporting vaccine are hijacked, and a gray market develops for vaccine and antiviral drugs – many of which are counterfeit.

Family members are distraught and outraged when loved ones die within a matter of a few days. Public anxiety heightens mistrust of government, diminishing compliance with public health advisories. "Worried well" seek medical care despite their absence of influenza illness, further burdening the health care system. Mortuaries and funeral homes are overwhelmed.

(Excerpted from "Pandemic Scenario - Origin and Initial Spread," part of the Bush administration's plan for responding to an outbreak of bird flu.)

Terrifying, yes, but also a sobering reminder that when it comes to capturing attention and galvanizing action, stories mean more to human beings than numbers. ■



Revisiting the B-Word

If talk of *branding* still makes you queasy, it's worth considering the recent experience of New American Dream, a nonprofit whose rebranding has led to measurable improvements in performance.

"Upsize me." "Pimp my ride." "Whoever dies with the most things wins." For decades, Americans have been inundated by messages playing variations on the theme "more is more." And even when we are reminded that the most valuable things in life do not have a price tag, it's a credit card company dispensing such wisdom, which is tantamount to the makers of Viagra extolling the virtues of celibacy.

In 1997, the Center for a New American Dream was founded to give voice to a very different message – namely, that Americans can consume less, enjoy life

more, and promote environmental protection and social justice in the process. Given an initial operating budget of \$170,000 and a two-person staff, though, the Center seemed well equipped for dreaming...but little else.



Eight years later, the organization has grown to 25 full-time employees with an annual operating budget of \$2 million. More importantly, it has steered over 3,000 institutional buyers toward more environmentally responsible purchases, and has enlisted over 80,000 online activists in its cause. Both its growth and effectiveness took a big leap forward in 2004, and if you ask why, Betsy Taylor, the organization's president, will answer with one word: branding.



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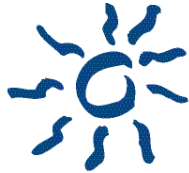
GOOD IDEAS FOR GOOD CAUSES

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Newsletter edited by Carolyn Ramsay.

► The original logo for the Center for a New American Dream (shown here) usually appeared with the tagline, “Helping people consume responsibly to protect the environment, improve the quality of life, and promote social justice.” In theory, a symbol that suggests “shining a light” or “illuminating the way” coupled with a tagline explicitly listing the organization’s objectives should add up to a clear, positive message. In practice, though, it didn’t.



Center for a
New American Dream

“People perceived us as that group that was going to make them give something up,” says Taylor. She recalls with a chuckle how friends would come to her with confessions ranging from eating at McDonalds to driving an SUV, but her laughter fades as she also remembers how businesses avoided serious dealings with the Center because “we were the group that wags its finger.”

In 2004, Bemporad Baranowski Marketing Group (BBMG) was retained to give the new dreamers a new brand. “We saw an organization with incredible programs and fabulous values,” says Raphael Bemporad, “but we also saw a huge disconnect between their values and the language they were using to communicate who they were and why it mattered.” As an example, Bemporad reads from a brochure the Center had been distributing. In the first three paragraphs, the words *suffer*, *debt*, *struggle*, *exhausted*, *pressured*, *hungry*, and *bankruptcy* appear.

BBMG began its rebranding process with a “listening tour” that included the organization’s staff, trustees, stakeholders, and over 1,000 online members. From this research, Bemporad discovered that the Center’s branding solution revolved around a single word: *more*. “People told us that the Center was helping Americans get *more* of what matters in their lives: *more* fairness in the marketplace, *more* exposure to nature, *more* fun every day,” says Bemporad. In its communications, however, the Center kept asking Americans to resist the

“more is better” mantra. Bemporad recognized that for any rebranding effort to succeed, the advocates of less had to find a way to embrace more.

Applying his agencies “Five Laws of Branding” (see box), Bemporad determined that “more” was the word the Center had to own, and that the tagline “more of what matters” allowed the Center to rightfully own it. In developing a new logo that would visually represent this brand (see cover), BBMG stripped the organization’s name down to its three most inspiring words, emphasizing the visionary “dream” while deleting the staid and static “center.”

The use of green and blue in the logo further articulated the brand. “Some

people see the words ‘I can dream’ or ‘I dream’ in it,” says Taylor. Either way, these words reinforce a shift in emphasis from an institution trying to effect change to individuals who are intimately involved in that change. The organization applied the new logo and tagline to all its communications and made other changes to stay true to its new brand—perhaps none more emblematic than the renaming of its newsletter from “Enough!” to “In Balance.”

Having finally embraced “more,” New American Dream is getting more done. Since 2003, the number of online activists responding to the organization’s alerts and spreading its message has increased from 28,000 to 83,000. In the last year, over 200 articles have been written about the organization, and Betsy Taylor now finds herself appearing on the Voice of America and other outlets that had previously shown no interest in her organization’s work. Perhaps most meaningful of all, in September 2005, when the Ford Motor Company announced increased production of hybrid vehicles, Bill Ford specifically cited consumer pressure generated by New American Dream as a contributing factor in the company’s decision.

“We helped them go from don’t to do, from less to more, and from stop to start,” says Bemporad. Considering the results, even a new dreamer like Betsy Taylor has to concede the point: sometimes, more *is* more. ■



As they have developed brands and communications materials for clients ranging from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to the International AIDS Society, Raphael Bemporad and Mitch Baranowski have identified five laws of branding that guide every project they undertake:

Law of the Word: Own a word in the mind of your audience that differentiates your organization from all others. It must be simple, clear, and owned by nobody else in your field.

Law of Focus: Focus your brand on your organization’s unique value proposition – i.e., the unique service or approach that defines all you do and sets you apart.

Law of Leadership: Successful organizations are perceived as being the leaders at what they do. How can your organization be the first to develop a unique approach or service?

Law of Authenticity: Authenticity is the proof behind the promise inherent in your brand. Ensuring that you “walk your talk” in everything you do helps maintain your brand’s integrity.

Law of Consistency: A brand cannot get into the mind of your audience unless it is communicated clearly and consistently over time. Stay “on message”.

(Excerpted with permission from “Brand-driven Communications for Nonprofit Organizations,” which can be downloaded in its entirety at www.bbm.com.)

BBMG’s
Five Laws
of Branding