

Why Does the Name of Your Organization Stink?

I set up a [Cool People Care](#) booth at Vanderbilt University as part of their freshman orientation. I was there - along with hundreds of other community organizations - to chat about what we do and how we can help Vandy's incoming freshman class get involved in the community.

As usual, students quickly wandered over to our booth to listen to my spiel, which I've gotten down to about 20 seconds. Many said, "Cool name" or "I like your name; I'll remember that and visit your site."

Truth be told, we got lucky. Yes, we have a catchy and memorable name. It's part of our allure and our appeal. It's a great asset for us, which is why we paid to have it copyrighted, and helps to sell [organic T-shirts](#) while embodying a larger movement we see happening in society.

Each of the other community organizations had visitors as well. But it's hard to stick in people's minds or stand out in a crowded space when your name isn't catchy or memorable. But it doesn't necessarily have to be either if nonprofits can think both creatively and strategically about branding.

Here's how your nonprofit can start doing that:

- No one needs to go rename themselves. If your organization has had the same name for 50 years, then you should keep it - maybe. You've certainly got a lot of brand equity invested in it, even if most of that equity lies in the hearts of people eligible for Medicare. Just know that if you let that lead in terms of your communications efforts, you may have a long and hard road ahead of you when it comes to appealing to [Gen Y](#).
- To figure out where you might be able to come up with something fresh, keep focusing on the work you do. When [I speak to nonprofits about](#)

[messaging to Gen Y](#), I tell them that their most unique selling point is their work. Hopefully, nonprofits are providing a one-of-a-kind service in a one-of-a-kind way. All that's needed is a way to tell this story in a compelling manner.

- Don't be afraid to do something you've never done before. I could think of countless ways that old nonprofits like United Way, Red Cross and Habitat for Humanity could shake things up a bit. Very few of those ideas have to do with hopping on Twitter, redesigning a Web site or filming a bunch of videos for YouTube. All of those ideas have to do with a unique and memorable message presented in a relevant way. For too long, nonprofits have focused on tools and not message. Until that paradigm shifts, you may still be lonely at your student fair booth.

Ultimately, then, it's not your name that stinks. It's your message and the way you deliver it that stinks. So, the name of this post stinks, but hopefully the message therein didn't. Regardless, I delivered a compelling reason to read that got you this far.

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