

Branding Moments e-Message

September 16, 2008 - The Elements of the Utility Brand – Character and Commitments

In previous installments of “Branding Moments,” we have discussed branding principles and why they apply to utilities. But how do we define the utility brand?

The elements of the brand will be different for each utility depending on its roles and the unique aspects of its community, but there are common elements. It is important to recognize that the utility is its employees, so the brand of the utility is closely tied to the characteristics of the general manager and employees. Because of this, the elements of the brand fall into two general categories: 1) the characteristics of the staff (their character), and 2) specific organizational commitments that address important value issues like public health, the environment, and sound financial management. Each of these categories includes several essentials:

Staff Characteristics

- Being Honest, Open
- Having Integrity
- Being Clear
- Collaborative
- Proactive Problem Solvers
- Innovative Leaders
- Being Professional

Organizational Commitments

- Sound Planning and Appropriate Investment
- Water Reliability and Water Quality
- Protection of Public Health
- Protection of Natural and Local Environments
- Stewards of Important Resources
- Sound Financial Management
- Increasing Efficiency
- Excellent Customer and Community Service
- Trusted Source of Information on Water and the Environment

These two branding categories support each other. The organizational commitments provide structure (clarity of value and purpose) and, therefore, are a critical tool for demonstrating integrity. They provide the meaningful context for discussions about investment and serving customers. These commitments should be the organizing structure for planning documents, decision making processes, and communications. The character of the staff defines how things get done, including methods, behaviors, and the energy level of the staff. It is useful to think of the staff characteristics as the mindset or culture of the organization.

When applied in concert, these two categories of the brand are a powerful tool for building trust and increasing support and investment. In future Branding Moments, we will cover in more detail what these organizational commitments and staff characteristics mean and how they are used to build a strong brand.