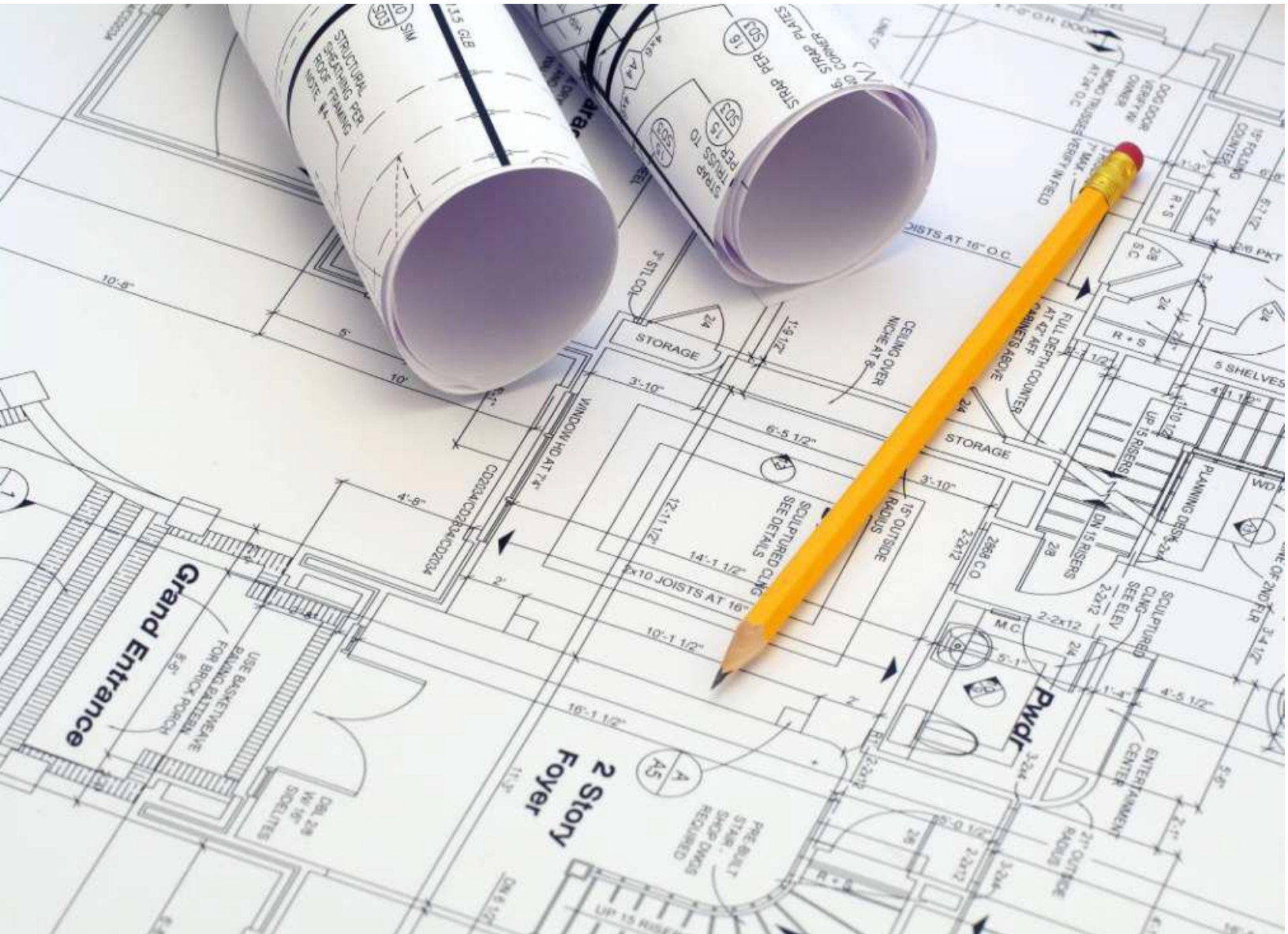


# Constructing a Better Brand

## High Performance Brands Begin with a Solid Foundation



Gelb, An Endeavor Management Company

2700 Post Oak Blvd  
Galleria Tower 1, Suite 1400  
Houston, Texas 77056

P + 713.877.8130  
F + 713.877.1823  
[www.endeavormgmt.com](http://www.endeavormgmt.com)

**Gelb**  
An Endeavor Management Company

# Constructing a Better Brand

**By Kathleen DeVries and John McKeever**

No matter the size of the organization, effective brand management provides the critical link between ambitious business goals, employee behaviors, marketing communications and the ability to deliver exceptional experiences. This is especially true for healthcare institutions.

Much has been written about the definition of Brand, Brand research and how to formulate Brand strategy. Getting started, it seems, is typically the most difficult step. In many instances, hospital and healthcare system marketers identify the need for better brand management, but often lack support to make the changes required.

Successful branding efforts have one thing in common: They are transformed from a short-term project into a long-term discipline. Successful healthcare organizations are looking beyond an annual plan or initiative; rather, they are establishing a different way of thinking about the organization and demonstrating marketing's role in fueling growth.

We have worked with academic medical centers, community hospitals, and health focused non-profit organizations. We've helped these organizations grow smarter by successfully "selling in" the notion that their brand can be a catalyst for change and can fulfill broader business goals. Based on this experience and observations of world-class organizations, we have outlined several concrete examples to support your next brand strategy development process.

Like building a new home, early actions in building buy-in, educations and communicating successes will make or break the entire effort. Choices about participants, scope and communication about the purpose and progress of the process dictate whether brand management becomes a source of alignment or a symbol of failure. Therefore, we have outlined key questions to ask when embarking on any permanent change.

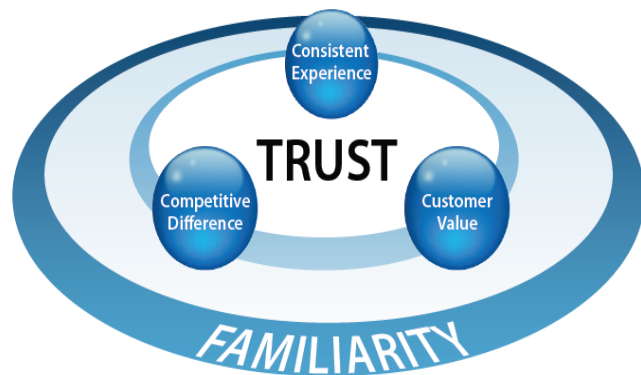
**Why are we building?** Establishing a business case is critical. Your executive team must understand the gains the organizations stands to make by undergoing this time- and resource consuming effort. The foundations for building an effective brand lies in its organizational strategy. This typically includes a mission, vision and core values. You must ask yourself as an organization: "How can a stronger brand support the mission, fulfill the vision, or achieve the business goals?"

First, relate market dynamics to brand performance. These may include business goals for market share improvement, payer mix and recruitment. Well-managed brands also translate into more cost-effective marketing expenditures. Ideally, strong brands translate into operational efficiencies as well. Turning to competitors or other benchmarks is often helpful in making this case. When Competitor A is perceived to be a threat or a nationally renowned healthcare organization is held as an example to emulate, use this as a means to make the connections.

# Constructing a Better Brand

It's also helpful to identify existing change-based initiatives that can be linked to your brand strategy. For example, efforts to improve the patient experience and employee commitment campaigns are all linked to your brand. Similarly, the revamp of a Web site serves as a highly visible cue that things are changing. One of the things that world-class organizations have in common is that they deliver a consistent patient experience and their employees understand the real purpose of their jobs. These must be explicitly linked to your desire to build your brand.

**Exhibit 1**  
Favorability measurement



**Who's involved?** Begin a grassroots campaign by identifying and recruiting key stakeholders. Analogous to subcontractors, these individuals are in a position to secure or advocate for the use of resources in strengthening your brand. You must establish alignment in this group because the likelihood of executive support is lower without a strong sense of ownership and active participation. Organizations that fail tend to make this activity solely a marketing exercise and never gain the buy-in from physicians or nursing executives.

In other words, the broader the scope of your alliance, the more difficult it is for opponents to object. Key members of this alliance should include physician leaders, nursing management, and of course external relations (e.g. marketing, public affairs, physician relations). If your organization has multiple entities (e.g. healthcare systems), try to include a diverse set of representatives to give each a voice in the process.

Furthermore, identify those individuals who are widely respected for their thought and opinion leadership. As you recruit them to the cause, clearly articulate the business case and embrace their contributions. Each individual on this team needs to have a sense of ownership to initially support the strategic initiative and ongoing brand management. They need to bring a consistent message to those they influence in the organization.

If you hire a brand consulting firm, look for those who are willing to impart their knowledge and experience to your team. Examine their process—do they have a clearly defined process that is easy to understand? Remember, you will need to convey and defend key ideas that result from this effort, so it's paramount that you understand the process and that it is translatable to members of your team. To make smart choices, you should be able to visualize every workshop, deliverable and presentation before it is completed. Otherwise, you run the risk of being surprised, if not agitated, by a lack of clarity around the logic of the resulting strategy.

# Constructing a Better Brand

Once the project begins, this group becomes your brand team. Members of this team will be critical in contributing input to the brand strategy and providing ongoing input to its rollout and management. The brand team should be cross functional in nature, ensuring that opportunities are not overlooked and that employees will view the brand strategy as something created by their leaders.

The most difficult requirement of the brand team is time. During the strategy development process, there will be several required meetings, workshops and homework. A well-managed process is not burdensome. Some successful tactics include preparatory work before each meeting to ensure that time is used wisely and making use of questionnaires to evaluate ideas and make contributions to the process.

Your brand team will outline goals for the initial scope and ongoing success of your brand. They will also provide support once final ideas are presented to executive management. As a marketing leader, your role should be to facilitate the process and guide thinking, rather than attempting to be its sole author. This will ensure broad distribution of ownership and responsibility for the brand.

**How will we make decisions?** By letting information guide your strategy, you can address one of the idiosyncrasies of the healthcare industry: evidence-based decision-making. It's in the DNA of most healthcare organizations to have a validated approach, supported by facts and astute observations. Much like academia or technical disciplines, healthcare decision makers embrace information, particularly quantitative findings. Data is your ally—often confirming notions that existed previously, but also presenting new insights in a visually stimulating way to inform your strategy.

Often the insights you need are already included in the marketing research you have gathered to date. Therefore, an information-based approach does not necessarily result in additional research. Rather, it's important to frame the data you have around the brand, identify information gaps and use resources to gather missing information.

Qualitative and quantitative research reports are useful for understanding the current and potential state of your brand. Focus group and in-depth interview transcripts are helpful to understand decision processes, audience vocabulary and levels of conviction. Furthermore, it is a best practice to formulate quantitative tools (surveys) using an initial round of qualitative research to ensure the appropriate questions are being asked.

Quantitative research is most beneficial for identifying powerful qualities of the brand such as access to the latest technology or personal attention. Analytical techniques like regression analysis can identify principal brand associations that drive brand preference, loyalty, satisfaction and reputation.

When considering your research tactics, you'll need perspectives from both internal (e.g., faculty and staff) and external (e.g., referring physicians, healthcare consumers) audiences. By comparing

# Constructing a Better Brand

responses from these audiences, brand teams can identify perceptual gaps and recognize barriers for implementation.

Consulting firms' models differ, but most brand research includes measures of familiarity and favorability. Familiarity measures should include awareness (heard of) and experience (used). In your analysis, it's helpful to recognize the differences between those with direct experience and those who have only heard of your brand. It's important here to recognize experiences with competing brands as well.

Favorability measurements include high-order factors (e.g., reputation, perceived quality, overall satisfaction, preference, likelihood to recommend) and specific associations (i.e., individual words like "community-minded" that help describe the brand).

We have used the model shown in Exhibit 1 to incorporate these measures. In it, the ultimate measure is trust, determined by advocacy for your brand. The other components include customer value, a measure of preference based on benefits of high importance; competitive difference, a measure of reputation based on brand personality measures; and consistent experience, a measure of satisfaction based on steps in the customer journey.

The unique values of qualitative and quantitative research are worth noting. Qualitative techniques such as focus groups should generate insights regarding consumers' expectations of brands, the words they use to describe them, and tactical ideas for brand-building. Quantitative questionnaires are designed with this feedback in mind and used to identify drivers of brand preference and strength of association.

A perceptual map is illustrated in Exhibit 2 to highlight the brand associations (derived from qualitative research) and the strength of the associations with specific brands (derived from quantitative research). The map is derived using special software designed for the task. In this example, Your Competition holds a "leadership" position. Given the strength of this position, it is often difficult (but not impossible with big budgets) to reposition that brand into more of a humanistic brand (as with Your Organization) because most consumers don't view the brand in that light.

**Exhibit 2**  
A perception map



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Beginning with the end in mind, you should assemble a list of key strategic questions the brand research can answer, as indicated in Exhibit 3

## Exhibit 3 Key Strategic Questions

To answer this...	Do this...
What is the market's awareness and understanding of our services?	Review familiarity results by audience of interest. This might include payer mix, geography and groups who share similar attitude about their healthcare.
How does the market distinguish one hospital brand from another?	The best insights come from qualitative interviews when asking respondents to rationalize their choices. The results are often a mix of physician and service line preference (e.g. Hospital ABE is best at heart surgery, but would go elsewhere for cancer care.)
Will audiences believe our new position?	Identify perceptual gaps among audiences. The greater the gaps, the more difficult to align brand perceptions
How strong is our current market position?	Construct a perceptual map that illustrates how strongly each brand is differentiated. The more closely the attributes are to the brand, the stronger the association.
What are our strengths and weaknesses?	Determine performance and relative importance of factors that drive satisfaction and preference.
How well does our brand perform relative to our local competition and national benchmarks?	In addition to side by side comparisons, use a brand equity scoring model to account for familiarity and favorability factors. For example: familiarity X (preference + reputation + satisfaction). This will establish an easy to understand metric for tracking over time.
How difficult will it be to get employees to embrace needed changes?	Review internal perceptual gaps and commitment to the organization. It is frequently the case that some areas of the healthcare system will be more difficult than others. Start from the tails: those with strongest and weakest alignment and work your way to the center.

# Constructing a Better Brand

**How do we plan for the future?** Brand management is new territory for many organizations. In addition to the business case, executives will need to share a common understanding of key concepts. We have seen some organizations go so far as to hire a marketing professor to provide instruction. As an unbiased third-party, he or she can be helpful in relaying information regarding how to best work with brand management firms before developing a request for proposals or starting the process.

One concept frequently misunderstood is the definition of brand. We have had success separating brand into two components—the big “B” Brand and little “b” brands. The Brand is the promise the organization makes to its audiences, both internal and external. It represents the aligning principles of the organization and typically includes brand pillars and a resonant promise. These are often reflected as words or short statements.

Every consulting firm has unique ways to define a brand. However, most should include a positioning statement, value propositions and service standards, all organized around a brand promise. A positioning statement crisply defines how audiences currently or should perceive you and establishes meaningful points of difference. A value proposition, often created by segment, will define the most important benefits provide at what costs (for healthcare, this is often inconvenience). The brand promise is a mantra that guides the efforts of creative teams, customer-facing employees and managers in making effective decisions.

A brand book is a lasting document intended to guide future decisions. This document is not a graphics standards manual, but provides a thorough description of the strategic intent and pillars of the brand. The more powerful examples use a visual vocabulary (i.e., pictures that reinforce the brand) and a message map (i.e., words that reinforce the brand) and organize content in a question-and-answer format.

Contents of a brand book typically answer the following questions:

- How did we arrive at this decision for our brand?
- What promise are we making to patients/physicians/ employees?
- How can employees fulfill this promise?
- Why are we changing?
- How will our customers recognize the change?
- What’s in it for employees/physicians/employees?
- How will we measure success?

The second reference to brands (i.e., visual representations) includes names and logos. These are the visual representations found on signage, in communications materials, and on uniforms. Tackling this naming issue before defining the brand promise is a mistake. Until you define the central tenets of the organization, it is often useless to address hospital names, logos reinforce or roll up to the overarching brand promise. For example, if part of your brand experience is to provide seamless access to care, then this should be reflected in the branding conventions used by each program, center and institution.

# Constructing a Better Brand

Furthermore, since many employees have high levels of emotional attachment to their respective hospital names, logos and care center designations, they are often unwilling to initially embrace change. Overcoming these attachments is much easier with the overarching brand or “promise” in mind first.

Doing this serves to build consensus around a common idea, from which implementation decisions are made.

**How can we sustain momentum?** Ongoing executive support is a requirement. It is not simply a matter of approving a budget for the effort, but an explicit attitudinal and behavioral commitment that the path being taken is the correct one. This includes discussions regarding the brand at key meetings, ongoing reinforcement of ideals in public forums and a demonstrable interest in its success. If your CEO isn’t demonstrating support for the brand, then other employees are given permission to overlook it as well.

Changes will require routine internal and external communication. Detailed rollout plans should be assembled, keeping in mind the variety of audiences with an interest in the brand’s success. Successful organizations have a plan that includes details for initial communications and events (remember executive commitment) as well as a strategy for ongoing reinforcement. Examples of this might include worksite posters, presentations and even lasting mementos.

Some have used internal newsletters for this purpose, showcasing feedback or stories relating to the brand. This gives the organization an opportunity to “catch them being good” and to reinforce its commitment to the promise of the brand.

Having a clear vision for your brand will not only increase the likelihood for getting resources, but will also create momentum within the organization for long-term success. By linking the brand to business outcomes, educating key stakeholders, and letting information guide decision-making, you will give yourself the best chance of establishing a high-performance brand.

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## About the Authors

**Kathleen DeVries** is Director of Marketing, Barnes-Jewish Hospital.

**John McKeever** is Executive Vice President, Gelb, An Endeavor Management Company.

He may be reached at [jmckeever@gelbconsulting.com](mailto:jmckeever@gelbconsulting.com)



# Constructing a Better Brand

## About Endeavor

Endeavor Management is an international management consulting firm that collaboratively works with their clients to achieve greater value from their transformational business initiatives. Endeavor serves as a catalyst by providing pragmatic methodologies and industry expertise in Transformational Strategies, Operational Excellence, Organizational Effectiveness, and Transformational Leadership.

Our clients include those responsible for:

- Business Strategy
- Marketing and Brand Strategy
- Operations
- Technology Deployment
- Strategic Human Capital
- Corporate Finance

The firm's 40 year heritage has produced a substantial portfolio of proven methodologies, deep operational insight and broad industry experience. This experience enables our team to quickly understand the dynamics of client companies and markets. Endeavor's clients span the globe and are typically leaders in their industry.

Gelb Consulting Group, a wholly owned subsidiary, monitors organizational performance and designs winning marketing strategies. Gelb helps organizations focus their marketing initiatives by fully understanding customer needs through proven strategic frameworks to guide marketing strategies, build trusted brands, deliver exceptional experiences and launch new products. Gelb can help you to develop and implement the right strategies. Using advanced research techniques, Gelb can help you to understand the complexities of your market, to develop your strategic decision frameworks and to determine the best deployment of your resources and technology to monitor your successes.

For over 40 years, Gelb has worked with marketing leaders on:

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