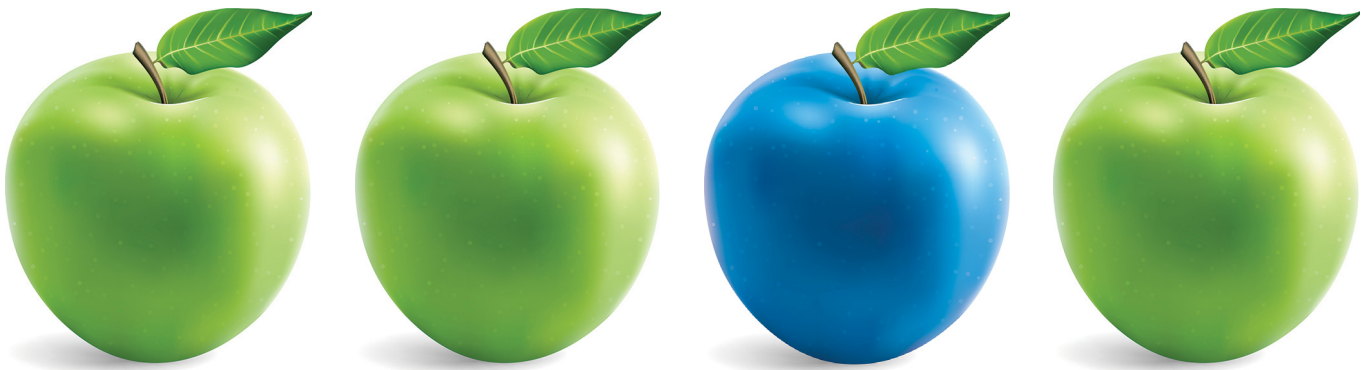


Branding Behavioral Health: Why You Should Care



If you're marketing a brand to a broad and disparate audience, **a distinct, healthy brand will identify and differentiate you**, and promote engagement and connection. It's been that way for thousands of years.



If you believe your behavioral healthcare* organization is immune, or that a healthy brand offers little value, that belief is an obstacle to success.

* For the purposes of this article, “behavioral healthcare” includes mental healthcare and addiction treatment unless otherwise specified.



BRAND HISTORY

The word “brand” has many roots. It derives from the ancient North Scandinavian term “brandr,” meaning “to burn.” It is a reference to the practice of using branding irons to burn a mark into the hides of livestock, and may also refer to the practice of craftsmen engraving brand names into products, tools, or personal belongings. Its practice dates back to at least 2,700 years B.C.E. in Egypt, and was a key component of religious teaching and identification.



For example, Totemism, arguably the world’s most ancient religion, involved local worship centered on everyday items carved in wood or stone or bone, usually a plant or an animal important to that specific village. Villages and cities each had their own totems representing loftier spiritual and metaphysical characteristics than the real-life item. Each totem identified its local population – their history, values, and aspirations.

Branding can be found everywhere in ancient societies – on signs, coins, artwork, weapons, crafts, and professional services. Artists and craftsmen signed their work in unique fashion, often creating unique symbols, to ensure authenticity and to differentiate from imitators and purveyors of products of lesser quality. Recognition promoted trust. Since most people were only semi-literate, **the brand symbol became a primary way to communicate, educate, and engage.** Brands were also used to let people know who was in charge – through faces and symbols on currency.



Bronze Roman Sestertius coin of Roman emperor Nero AD 54-68

A maker’s brand became not only a symbol of ownership and origin, but also a representation of personal reputation. This connection to status expands the power of a brand to engage consumers at a deeper level of conscious choice and personal decision-making. Sellers are forging personal connections with audiences.

The definition of brand expanded, as did its benefits.

The definition we like:

A brand is a multi-layered consumer experience represented by a collection of images and ideas. Often, it refers to a symbol, name, logo, slogan, design scheme, and voice. Brand recognition and other reactions are created by the accumulation of experiences with the specific product or service, both directly relating to its use and through the influence of conversation, design, and media exposure.

It is in this “experience” where the deeper consumer engagement lies.

It derives from within an organization and signals a unified internal culture and vision, integrity in purpose and quality, and an attractive depiction of internal reality in the form of symbol and speech.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE IS A CONSUMER INDUSTRY

More often than not, when speaking to a behavioral health organization about their brand, the response is that they are not a consumer brand. Therefore, the reasoning follows, they do not need to invest much into it.

Today, healthcare brands *are* consumer brands. The consumer segments they need to engage are distinct and varied.

In a strategic approach to healthy branding, an organization effectively self-identifies and knows its audiences and their needs and wants. They know what makes their organization special and know how to communicate it, and they create a plan for every brand interaction.

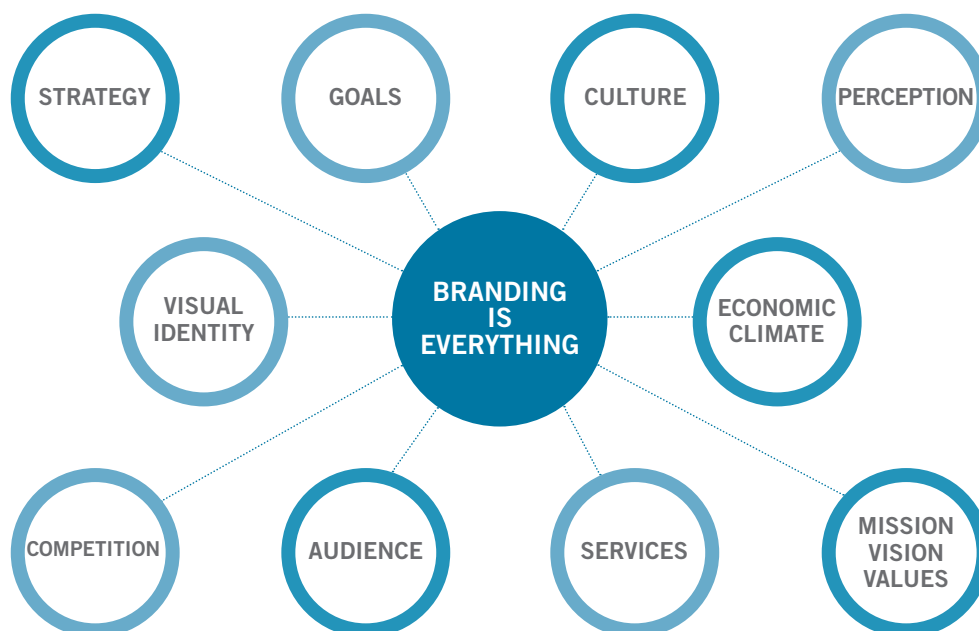
Like most every consumer business, behavioral healthcare organizations face competition. But they compete for more than a share of the market. They also must compete for funding, for physicians, for attention, for staff, and for referrals. In the non-profit world especially, they also face increasing payer control that includes reimbursements tied to volume and outcomes.

Consumer brands are more than just a way to identify and market consumable goods like Coke or Pepsi, McDonald's or Burger King, Nike or Adidas. Healthy brands are relationship brands.

How a behavioral healthcare brand caters to its different consumers and engages its varied audiences is directly related to their sustainability and success.

A website is not a brand. It is a highly important element to the digital brand, and the primary way consumers engage and connect. It is, however, a marketing tactic, not a long-term brand strategy.

A brand is more than a logo, a slogan, or a website. These are branding *components*. The heart of a brand connects with its audience when it conveys the essence of an organization, its origins, its reason for being, its unique nature, and its promise.



True brand connections happen through repeated emotional, personal, practical, anecdotal, and evidential interactions.

Managed care makes things different.

As we know, the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) stimulated the growth of Managed Care Organizations (MCOs). Their desire to manage fewer behavioral healthcare providers has caused many small organizations to fold or be swallowed up by larger competitors. MCOs also want partners to provide a continuum of integrated care services, and they want timely outcomes.

MCOs have altered how behavioral healthcare providers function,

after what once was a relatively static existence. Growth and sustainability are increasingly important to survival, which makes the brand more important. Behavioral healthcare organizations must **engage very disparate audiences**. These normally include prospective patients, influencers (families and loved ones), referring physicians, insurers and MCOs, donors, charitable foundations, government agencies, clinical and administrative staff, and the communities in which they operate.



The trends that will increasingly impact multiple healthcare stakeholders

- 1 Patients becoming more informed consumers
- 2 Growth of structured quality measures
- 3 Revenue-driven consolidation
- 4 New and alternative provider payment models
- 5 Specialty drug use driving the cost of care
- 6 Information technology innovations driving inter-stakeholder communications

American Health and Drug Benefits; 2015; Feb.

To truly connect a brand with its audience(s), repeated multi-tiered interactions are required. True brand connections happen through repeated emotional, personal, practical, anecdotal, and evidential interactions. Their efficacy depends on being able to identify what matters most to each audience segment, and conveying that through the brand. Our research on behalf of a behavioral healthcare client showed that influencers were just as important, sometimes more important, to engage as the patients themselves. In addition, patients themselves were often the most effective influencers for prospective new patients and loved ones.

The overall effects of the brand – how it looked, spoke, felt, and functioned – also encouraged patients to become brand advocates. The opposite is also true when a brand is left dormant as just a logo or a slogan.

BRAND BENEFITS IN REAL LIFE

Investing in brand has proven to provide organizational vision, direction, and unity; promote growth (patient volume and/or revenue); increase referrals; improve staff recruitment and retention; improve community (professional and at-large) awareness and support; increase stakeholder involvement; and encourage funding.



One client we have worked with since 2009 shows the cumulative benefits of a healthy brand in action. This organization, a for-profit (now a non-profit) providing a variety of mental health and addiction treatment services, shows that a healthy brand, when embraced and activated like a consumer brand, offers real, measurable value.

This organization was one of many fragmented behavioral health organizations that could be found scattered around most population centers in the U.S. While their mission to help people was pursued in earnest, their generic brand was virtually indistinguishable from other organizations in the region. With no real sense of direction or vision, they basically did what most others did back then – they saw clients and billed Medicare and Medicaid.

The new owner, however, knew that the behavioral healthcare environment was changing. To meet these changes, he wanted to be able to walk into the offices of a CEO of a huge healthcare network, a Managed Care Organization,

or a government agency and be taken seriously. He knew those high-level relationships would be valuable.

He also sensed that small, static behavioral healthcare providers would be put out of business or swallowed up. So he went to work on a plan for growth.

The plan began with an idea for a new brochure. It blossomed with a new organizational position, a new name, a logo, and a unifying message.

It energized everything.

The process didn't start with a name, a logo, and a tagline plucked out of thin air. It started with an assessment of who his organization was, at its heart, knowing who they served and what they really needed, and what staff really wanted as they moved forward.

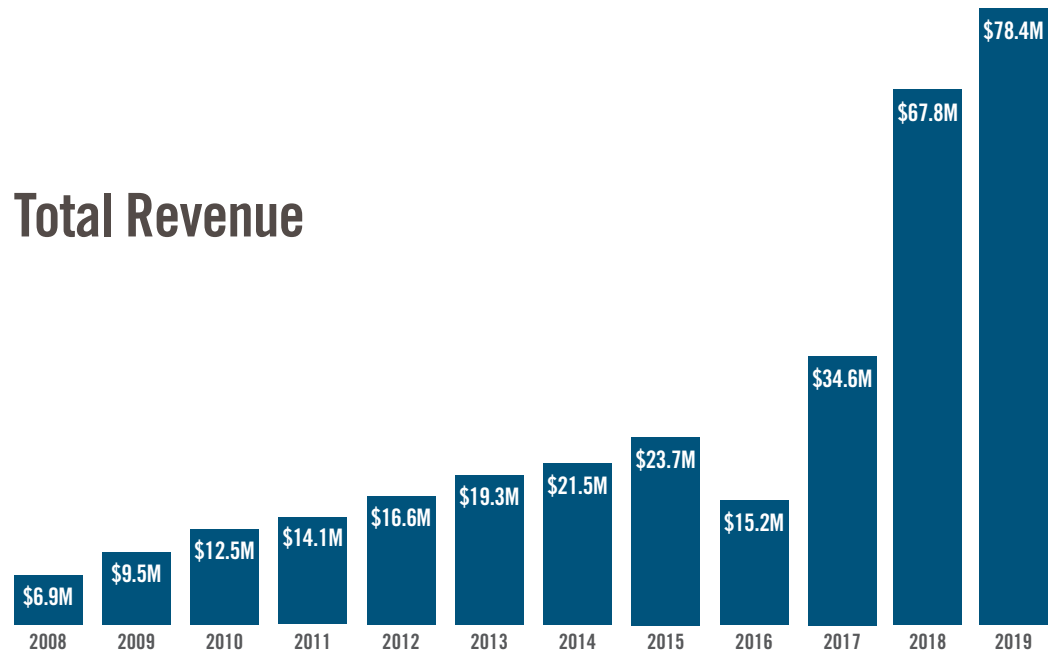
Their new name and brand, to a large degree, were crafted by the organization itself. They came out of responses from staff, clients, and partners. The organization was involved, as was its community. So the brand – and the vision that powered it – was easily embraced inside and outside the organization.

The results are significant.

Did the new brand do all of this?
Of course not. But the new brand,
and the process by which it was
created, encouraged and enabled the
organizational focus, vision, and strategic
planning that allowed this kind of growth.

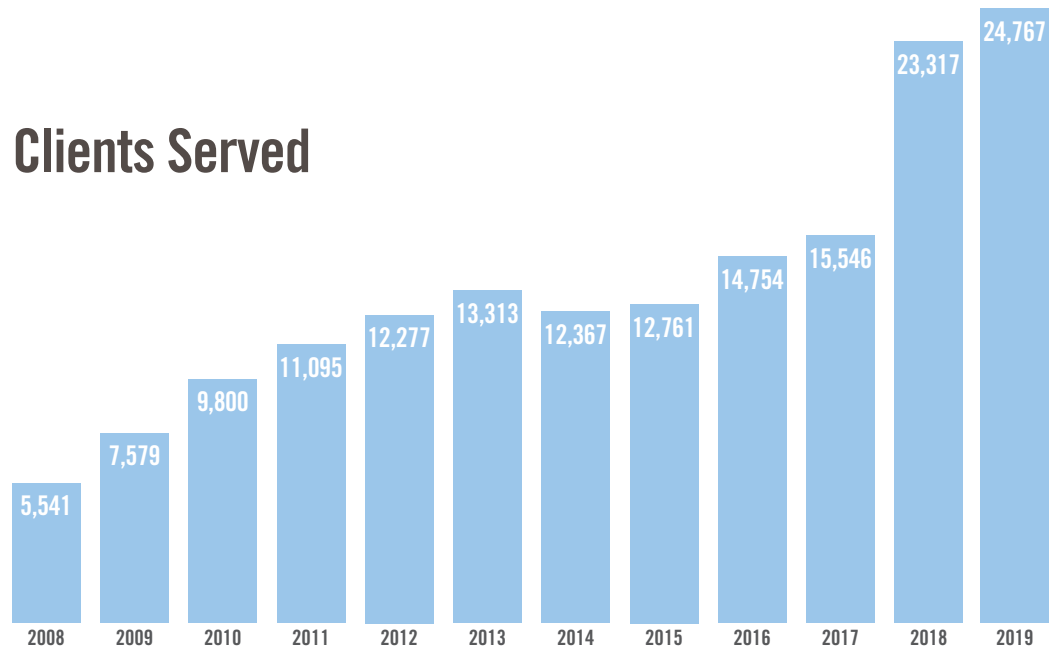
CEO: "...I actually provide
better care because
I went through this
[branding] process."

Total Revenue



* Total only from Jun. 1 to Dec. 31, 2016 due to becoming a non-profit.

Clients Served



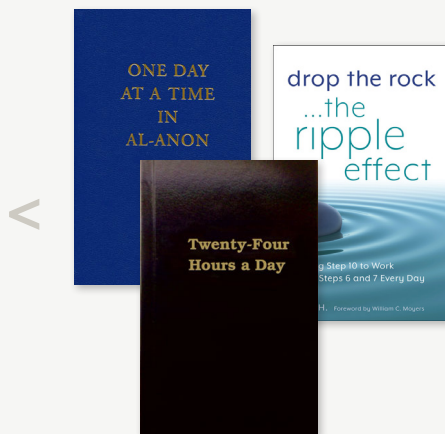
BRAND RECOGNITION



Hazelden/Betty Ford's* status as a leader in addiction treatment is well earned, through practice and branding.

Back in the nineteen-eighties, when it seemed like insurance providers always paid for addiction treatment, treatment centers and counseling centers popped up in practically every hospital, cities, towns, and suburbs. Recovery was big business.

Hazelden was one of the many that prospered, becoming a serious, weighty, recognizable brand. They became the voice of addiction recovery, publishing professional articles, pamphlets, and many books that became required reading in treatment centers, counselor's offices, and 12-step meetings. They connected their name to virtually every aspect of recovery, and became known for their expertise.



So when insurance companies stopped rubber-stamping reimbursements for addiction treatment, many treatment centers downsized or shut down completely. Not Hazelden.

In a downsized competitive environment, their brand remained strong.

Healthcare reform stimulated acquisitions and consolidation. In 2014 Hazelden merged with one of best-known names in treatment, the Betty Ford Center. The brand was once one of the strongest in addiction treatment, with attributes that included quality, integrity, and care. It was a more personal brand than Hazelden, whose name grew around organizational knowledge and expertise.



The Betty Ford Center was a perfect brand from which to engage audiences, encourage investment, and forge connections. But as the treatment environment became more competitive and more populated with for-profit franchises with large marketing budgets, their reliance on the Betty Ford name wasn't enough to ensure success.

The Betty Ford Center provides an attribute of personal caring to a more clinical Hazelden brand. It's a match.

Relationships, resources, and opportunity play significant roles in the history of Hazelden and the Betty Ford Center. However, it can be easily argued that their respective brands, cultivated through years of organizational focus, direction, and action, played significant roles in their growth, and still do.

*Hazelden/Betty Ford is not a designRoom client.

BRAND ATTACHMENT

Creating brand attachment is a key issue in today's marketing world. The strongest attachments are emotional – connecting a good feeling with the mere sight, mention, or thought of a particular brand. We all have them. An effective way to foster these attachments, while maintaining integrity and authenticity, is to match the brand's personality with the consumer's self.

This study shows that a consumer's self-identification with a brand increases their attachment to that brand:

A key question, however, is whether the brand's personality should match the consumer's actual self or the consumer's ideal self. On the basis of two empirical studies of 167 brands (evaluated by 1329 and 980 consumers), the authors show that the implications of self-congruence for consumers' emotional brand attachment are complex and differ by consumers' product involvement, consumers' individual difference variables, and the type of self-congruence (fit of the brand's personality with the consumer's actual self versus with the consumer's ideal self).

On a general level, actual self-congruence has the greatest impact on emotional brand attachment. Product involvement, self-esteem, and public self-consciousness increase the positive impact of actual self-congruence but decrease the impact of ideal self-congruence on emotional brand attachment.

John Santilli, F. Randy Vogenberg / Am. Health Drug Benefits. 2015 Feb.



So what does that mean for a brand?

This study reinforces the necessity of brand authenticity and the benefits of presenting a brand's "actual self" to its consumers. That's where emotional attachment is forged and perpetuated. Awareness is a first step.

Attachment is what we are aiming for.

Pick a category — automobiles, beverages, sports teams, airlines, healthcare, or whatever; we all have brands we are happily, or painfully aware of. Our awareness is simply a first step as those brands work to create a connection and an attachment with us.

Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. When it does, the repeated interaction with a certain brand, be it a breath mint or a hospital, becomes an emotional attachment.

For a daily-use brand, that attachment is relatively simple to reinforce — maintain quality and keep delivering on the promise. Conversely, the attachment is also relatively simple to sever. It's not a very emotionally taxing experience to switch from Tic Tacs to Altoids if those Tic Tacs don't measure up anymore or you need a change to sugarless.

With a behavioral healthcare brand, however, the interaction is more complex. You must know your audience, have a good idea of their sense of self, and be able to authentically connect with them over time. Your unique self must be communicated through symbol, speech, and action, and understood by each audience. Your promise must be fulfilled at every point of interaction. This includes advertising, web site imagery and messaging, how you answer phones, the nature and tone of your conversations, and the support you show for their belief, trust, and ongoing relationship.




The resulting attachment is also more complex and less easily broken. Deliver on your promise as a behavioral healthcare provider, and over time you develop brand evangelists and ambassadors; they will influence countless more loyalists.

You can't deliver, however, if you're not aware of who you are and the promises you are able to make and keep.

Our research for a veteran's behavioral healthcare organization showed that the audiences they needed to engage trusted their peers. So we found other veterans and asked them to speak on behalf of the brand. They were more than happy to spread the word, as they had been helped and promises had been kept.

It is a powerful thing, to build and market a healthy behavioral healthcare brand. Evidence shows that you are a consumer brand and, done right, branding will lead to an energized, unified organization; effective strategic planning; increased brand awareness and attachment; and sustainable success.

The attachment and loyalty a healthy brand creates can last for generations. The good it does in the world will last lifetimes. 



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Kelly Farrell
CEO & Founder
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