

Upending your public image

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Your marketing leadership has devoted many hours of work and significant budget dollars to develop, establish and maintain an impactful and effective brand, capturing your company’s image in ways that support your business objectives. And then someone ordered those golf shirts.

Golf shirts, or perhaps wraps for two new service vans, or maybe an ad supporting the local high school marching band’s fundraising program. We’ve seen it happen with all those and many more.

The manager of one location decided to sponsor the Chamber golf outing and ordered two dozen golf shirts from his buddy at a nearby custom embroidery place. The person who made the shirts found your logo a little complicated, so they simplified it to make the stitching faster and easier. It really didn’t matter that the shirt’s color was a few shades away from the company’s green, did it? The wraps for the service vans carried your company’s previous slogan, not the one you started using last month. And that little ad in the band program misspelled your web address.

Those may seem like small things to you, but each of them is chipping away at the consistent public image you’ve worked so hard to create and maintain.

It’s a common problem in companies — and it gets bigger as those businesses grow. Non-marketing personnel address their own needs without giving any thought to the company’s branding and marketing standards or objectives. Their actions aren’t deliberate attempts to destroy what you’ve done. They simply don’t know better. They have a task to accomplish, and they get it done.

They aren’t trying to upend the thought you’ve put into consistent branding. It’s just when they see your logo, it’s green. They don’t realize your marketing experts chose a particular shade of green that’s one of dozens of different options. Ask most people how many colors exist, and they’ll name the seven in the rainbow — but Pantone’s standardized system lists more than 15,000 different choices.

Compounding the color conundrum are some simple realities. However carefully you try to adjust them, no two monitors will display the same color identically. And the color you chose so thoughtfully when designing that sales flyer will be different on the screen from your laser printer, different from an inkjet printer, and different from how it will look when your professional printer puts it on paper. So, it’s important to ensure you’re being precise. That’s why Pantone numbers exist.

Not a big deal, you think? Ask the company with the service vans. Every time one of the newly wrapped ones parks next to one of the older ones, the company’s owner fumes, because the difference is obvious.

Company leaders prefer team members who are confident self-starters. Think of how many times you’ve seen that phrase in an employment posting. Unfortunately, that confidence sometimes extends well beyond their competence. The problem is exacerbated because some company leaders assign higher levels of significance to other functions rather than marketing. They’d never ask that go-getter admin assistant to generate a study of trends in receivables, but design a van wrap? Heck, anyone can do that.

It’s not a matter of being picky or parochial. Every aspect of how your company presents itself to your audiences affects the way you are perceived. Seeing your van on the road either improves their impression of and familiarity with you or it detracts from it. (You’d probably never think of driving as a marketing function, but how your employees do that in company vehicles also sends messages. Wouldn’t you hate to lose a shot at a nice piece of business because one of your employees cut the decision-maker off in traffic?)

Want to know another “marketing” area many companies neglect? Restrooms. Think of the times you’ve stopped at a fast-food place while on the road and lost your appetite as soon as you stepped into the restroom. When a prospective customer visits your location and makes the quick stop in the restroom, what impressions do they walk away with?

So, what’s my point? Your company’s image and reputation are too important to turn over to amateurs, whether deliberately or because of a lack of internal controls. First, you need clear, easy-to-follow standards for things like marketing materials — and yes, that also includes wearables, vehicle wraps, and signs at youth sporting events. And second, you need a mechanism for enforcing those standards. The right marketing partner can help you accomplish both with less heartburn.

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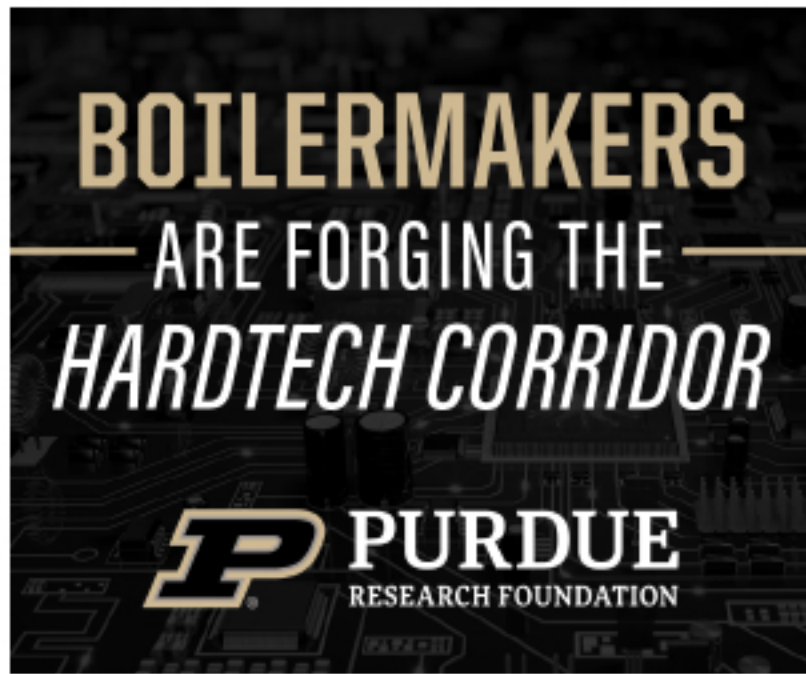
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