

Healthcare Marketing White Paper



The How-To Guide For Brand Building

A Step-By-Step Process For Healthcare Marketers



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28 years of healthcare marketing has taught us that a differentiating, relevant and inspiring brand makes every marketing effort more effective. In this white paper, healthcare marketing experts at Smith & Jones share a step-by-step process for branding and positioning hospitals, physician practices and healthcare provider networks.

How to create strong healthcare brands

The healthcare industry becomes more competitive every year. Hospitals, physicians practices, walk-in clinics and free-standing care centers all compete for the healthcare consumer's attention and care dollar. Patients are more savvy, self-directed and better informed than ever; they research care options and shop for healthcare brands much like retail consumers do. When you factor in trends such as mobile health, online information sources and patients' increasing willingness to travel for care, the healthcare marketing landscape today bears little resemblance to that of just 30 years ago, when providers didn't even need to advertise.

Now healthcare organizations must aggressively market their business just to remain competitive. They strive for any advantage to move their organization above the rest. The competitive strategies employed by healthcare providers vary widely as they scramble to create, sustain or regain marketshare. Many invest in new facilities and expanded services. Others focus their resources on high-priced advertising campaigns, attempting to dominate their markets by sheer top-of-mind awareness. Yet, surprisingly few invest in the subtle but powerful strategy of brand building.

Branding should remain a priority for hospital marketers because:

- Strong healthcare brands control their own destinies: By identifying an honest, ownable and differentiating competitive position and marketing it to their internal and external audiences, they can drive perceptions and expectations of their brand. They can also more easily weather the pressures of economic and market influences and reduce the likelihood of having to take Draconian measures.
- A clear brand position aligns physicians and staff: They understand their part in the company's mission, expected behavior and the common goals that help the organization deliver a positive, consistent patient experience.
- Maintaining a strong brand identity requires constant vigilance: Brand standards ensure consistent communications and help focus the conversation with the customer.
- Branding supports multichannel and social media initiatives: A consistent voice, a memorable point of difference and a strong identity help hospitals and practices translate into the social realm and every customer touch point, whether it's a one-to-one interaction in the hospital environment, conversations in the social network, or mass communications through paid media channels.

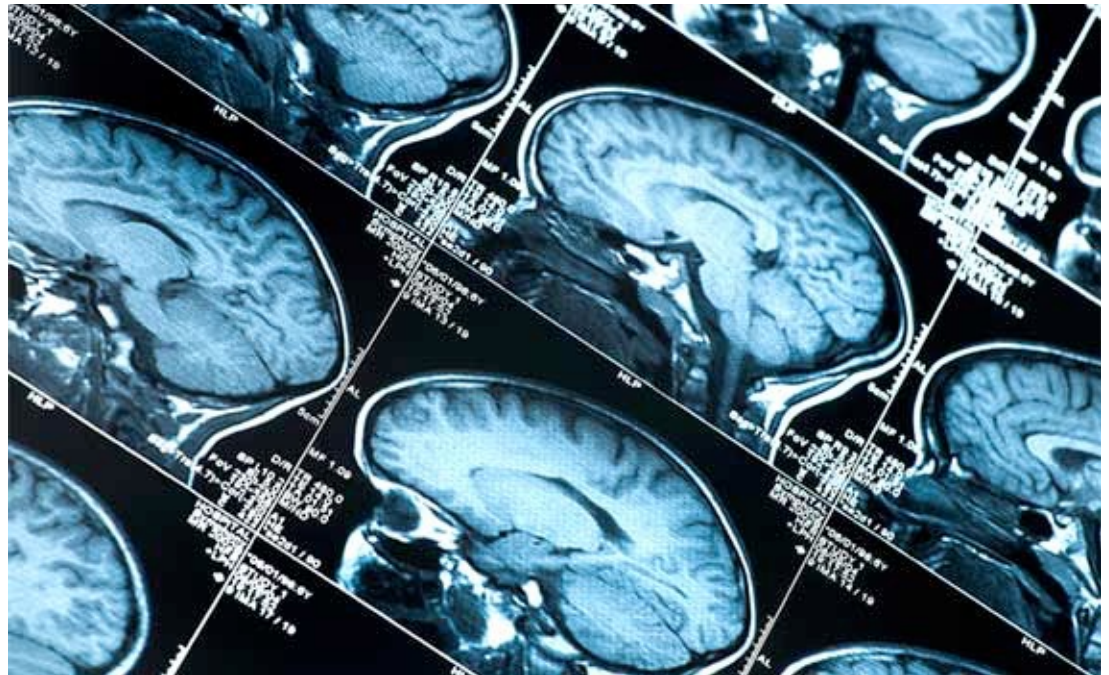
After almost three decades of healthcare marketing experience, we've found that a strong brand position, supported by proven brand communication tools, makes every marketing effort more effective. Branding can help marketers look beyond the symptoms to uncover the most promising pathway to a successful business outcome. Here's how to get there.

Our protocol for branding and positioning hospital systems

This white paper describes Smith & Jones' step-by-step process for brand development and competitive positioning of healthcare organizations. It was developed over the last 25 years and has been applied successfully for hospitals, hospital systems, stand alone clinics and physician practices. While every client and every project objective was unique, these steps represent the key stages to identify an organization's unique point of difference, to communicate it to internal and external audiences and to maintain the brand's integrity over the course of its serviceable lifespan.

PHASE I: DIAGNOSIS – MAPPING THE KNOWN UNIVERSE

The brand building process should begin with a thorough diagnosis of the situation at hand. Talk to the organization's leadership and stakeholders to understand their vision, opportunities and challenges. Gather all key executives, decision makers and anyone with veto power around a table for an input meeting and approval of the brand-building process, deliverables and timeframe. The goal of this meeting is to get everyone on the same page, set clear expectations and reach consensus on the project goals. This phase includes collecting and evaluating information about the brand's market position and competitive environment to uncover practical insights in four dimensions: the brand, the audience, their emotional stages and their consideration set.



Study the history of the brand

It's important to take a good hard look at the organization from an outsider's perspective. How and when did it originate? What does it offer to the community, your patients and care providers? How has it been represented in the past? What is its current positioning in the mind of the consumer, and what is its current market position? How about the people behind the brand? What are they thinking and saying? How do they act? What do they really think of the patients they treat? Answer each question honestly, and you'll have a better appreciation of the qualities that made your brand what it is today.

Fair warning before you start: It won't all be good news, it won't all be pretty; but that's the point. Honest brand positions are built on honest truths. Recognizing where you are on the path to what you want to become helps you chart a course that will correct shortcomings and align your staff to a shared mission.

Get to know your customers

To develop an effective brand position, it's important to understand your customers. In healthcare, that includes both external and internal audiences: end users (patients and potential patients), your staff, all physicians in your market, and even the community at large as potential supporters. Break out all the segments of your audience and then drill down to figure out what makes each of them tick.

Among people who receive healthcare in your competitive space, what are their current perceptions of the category as a whole, your brand and those you compete with? What do physicians and healthcare professionals think? What keeps them up at night? What interests them, makes them happy? How can your brand improve their quality of life? What would make them choose your brand again, and again?

Medical science has proven, through the use of functional MRI, that human decision making is primarily emotional. Ironically, very few healthcare organizations rely on emotion when developing brand and positioning strategies. Focus on the relationship-building drivers, ladder up the list of attributes to get to the place that resonates emotionally with your audiences. What are they willing to believe about your brand that is somehow different and more desirable than the competition?

Identify their emotional stages and relationship drivers

There are many factors to consider when choosing a healthcare brand, whether you're a patient, an employee or a physician. Service offerings, professional affiliations, proximity, technology, amenities and reputation all influence a person's final decision.

Identify all of the attributes in the category and determine which of these are the relationship drivers for your brand. Are the drivers tangible or intangible? Which attributes do you need just to be considered? Which offer the highest return on investment and which aren't worth spending time or money on?

Determine which attributes really influence the patient's (or doctor's) decision to come back to your organization. What's important to your community and what do you do best of all your competitors? This may focus your competitive position and messaging.

Don't be afraid to invest in consumer research (qualitative or quantitative) at this stage. Good fieldwork and analysis can provide actionable insights and reliable decision support.

Analyze the consideration set and competitive idea space

Your brand doesn't exist in a vacuum. Consumers are exposed to thousands of marketing messages each day, many of them from healthcare brands. Take a look at all of your competitors. Reverse-engineer their brands to identify their positioning, what they're saying, how it's different and if it's true. Consider both direct and indirect competition, and any brand that offers an alternative to yours (think outside the box here; healthcare providers aren't your only competition).

After you've completed this, you should have a clear picture of the competitive idea space. This will help you see where there is saturation (similarity and repetition in messaging) and where there is opportunity (untapped ideas or themes that will help your brand stand out from the background noise).

Analyze the four dimensions for insights

Once you have all the facts, you can begin to identify the essential kernels of truth about the brand, the audience, their emotional stages and your competition. What distinguishes your brand from all the rest? What will engage your audiences and inspire them to want a relationship with your brand? Discovering the truth about the brand – that one believable, relevant, memorable and deliverable promise – is the key to finding a position that will be meaningful, different and ownable over the long term.

PHASE 2: PRESCRIPTION – DEFINE YOUR POSITION

The insights gained in the Diagnosis phase help identify what makes a hospital or practice different, desirable, relevant and worthy of the audience's consideration. The prescription phase includes developing a competitive brand positioning statement, identifying the organization's core values (or brand pillars), establishing strategic and creative direction for brand development, outlining short-term tactical priorities and getting buy-in from key decision makers.

Stake out your competitive position

So what's that shimmering, golden kernel of truth that makes your healthcare brand more desirable than your competition? Why are you the best at what you do?

Your brand positioning statement should be:

- Concise, a single word or single sentence, about why you're the best at what you do;
- Distinguishing, so it sets you apart from other brands;
- Honest, believable and deliverable so you can live up to your promise every day;
- Relevant to your audiences' interests and emotional needs;
- Memorable, so people think of you when they need healthcare.

A successful competitive position statement is part corporate mission statement and part emotional promise, distilled down to an engaging and memorable idea. It's a brand promise that sets one brand apart from others in the competitive set. It's not what you do or who you serve, (otherwise all healthcare brands would be commodities that "deliver healthcare to sick people" or "keep people healthy"), it's how you do it differently or better.

Some organizations use a formula to structure the key ideas in the positioning statement. Here are a few simple templates that can be applied:

(One Word or Phrase That Conveys Your Point of Difference)

(Your Business Name) + (What You're Best At) + (Why)

To (Audience), (Brand Name) is (Best At)(Service Offered)

in the (Market or Category) because (Reasons).

(Brand Name) helps solve (Common Problem) by (Unique Solution)

Sometimes a formula is appropriate and very useful to define specific audiences or market segments of your competitive position. However, a brand positioning statement should be more emotional, lyrical or inspirational than a rigid structure permits. Use your instincts to create a positioning statement that accurately captures the mission and personality of the brand.

Don't be afraid to write a position statement that's very different from what your competitors are saying – in fact strive to be different. If you're not distinguishing yourself as the best or only choice for a specific emotional reason, then you're just selling unremarkable features and benefits. Stake your claim and prove your superiority.

And finally, remember that good positioning statements are almost always short, honest and memorable. Inspiring positioning statements lead to inspiring brands.

Identify core values (your brand pillars)

Brand pillars are similar to your organization's core values; the behaviors and characteristics that support your desired brand position and the expected patient experience. Individually, these may not be ownable or differentiating, but no two brands should share the same set of brand pillars. Often core values are a translation of the company mission: a trickle-down of the hospital leadership's vision for how people need to think and act to achieve the common goals. Brand values may be more directly related to your position statement or desired patient experience, however.

Think of the characteristics and qualities that make your organization special. Are you patient focused? Outcome driven? On the leading edge of technology? How would you describe the patient experience? What phrases and adjectives describe the people, behaviors and experiences that reflect your ideals.

If your competitive position really captures the essence of your organization, then identifying your core values should be fairly easy. Make a list, test them against your position, and narrow it down to the top three to seven words that truly fit your brand.

Establish creative direction: the Healthy Brand Board™

The Healthy Brand Board™ is a device that we use to help establish the personality and visual identity of healthcare brands. It's a combination of photographs, graphics and words on a single panel that express the identified brand position. Together these elements should provide an illustrated example of the brand position; imparting the energy, mood and spirit of the brand.



The Healthy Brand Board™ for Vassar Brothers Medical Center

Elements of a Healthy Brand Board™:

- Images that convey the brand's spirit or energy, and reflect visual content likely to appear in marketing communications.
- Text that expresses mood and personality: usually three to seven carefully chosen words that define a feeling, a way of behaving, or a characteristic attitude of the brand. These may be the brand pillars or values.
- Graphic elements, including iconography, color palettes and typography, that foreshadow the brand image and formal brand identity program.

A Healthy Brand Board™ is very helpful in defining a new brand position.

- Initially, the Healthy Brand Board™ is a discussion guide, useful for compiling ideas and testing their relevance to and resonance with the brand position.
- For gaining buy-in and approval of competitive positioning initiatives: If the Healthy Brand Board™ captures the feel of an organization, if it's a believable representation of what makes the brand different, desirable and exciting, then it is likely a successful position.
- An excellent decision-support tool; a Healthy Brand Board™ offers a visual measuring stick that can be help up against creative executions, an acid test for whether communications are on-brand or off-brand. Does a new ad or brochure capture the look and feel of the brand? Does it support the position and promise of value?

The Healthy Brand Board™ is usually the first visual representation of your new competitive brand positioning. It will serve as a template to develop subsequent brand identity and marketing materials. And it can be an agreed-upon point of reference when choosing visual or verbal messages in future communications. In a world of subjective opinions about design and communication, the Healthy Brand Board™ provides an objective tool to help you make important decisions.

Get buy in from all key decision makers

A lot of work has gone into research and interviews, analyzing your findings and winnowing the data down to a few choice morsels of insight. You've identified your brand's unique strengths, and begun to sketch out what your brand communications might look like. At this stage, you should have all the elements you need to present your recommendations to ALL key decision makers in your organization (anyone who participated in the initial stakeholder input meetings).

This is the second feedback stage in the branding process and an important opportunity to review your findings, share your recommendations and get buy-in to move forward. The goal of this presentation is to confirm the logic of your positioning process and connect the dots from the stakeholders' input to the resulting brand position.

Gaining consensus at this stage is important because it:

- Allows everyone to agree with your decision process (not a logo design):
- Leaves room to integrate new ideas or insights from your audience; and
- Assures that everyone is on the same page before the next stage.

When all of your organization's leaders agree on your process and decisions up to this point, it virtually eliminates the likelihood of a significant challenge to subsequent steps. What if they disagree? You've lost a little time, maybe suffered a bit of humility, but you haven't incurred significant costs, and you've gained THEIR insights into what will make your brand great.

PHASE 3: TREATMENT – REALIZING YOUR BRAND

Once the prescription phase is complete, (with buy-in from ALL key decision makers) it's time to realize the new brand. That includes rolling out the competitive positioning and new brand language, first to your internal audiences, then to external audiences, and updating the brand identity.

Speaking the new brand language

Communicating the brand within the organization begins at the top. It's up to the CEO and executive team to translate the competitive position and core values into the goals and daily practices of the hospital. The brand becomes a shared language, part of the organization's vocabulary and culture. It's heard in conversations at board meetings, team huddles and in the stories we tell every day. Through their guidance, leadership can reinforce corporate culture that supports the organization's brand position.

Here are some ways hospital executives can spread the brand position:

- Understand, believe and be passionate about the hospital's competitive position.
- Clarify the brand positioning statement. Learn to articulate it in one sentence, as part of a 15-second elevator speech and a 30-minute presentation.
- Engage your board, managers and staff to define how to deliver the desired customer experience so everyone understands their roles.
- Make the brand story part of everyday conversations. Talk about it with the board, hospital managers, at chamber of commerce events and public-facing functions.

Training staff on the brand promise

Hospital employees and physicians can't be expected to embrace and embody the company brand without understanding how they fit in. It's up to management and marketing to communicate the organization's brand and core values so the staff understand what's expected of them and how they help deliver the desired patient experience. Here are two ways to introduce and reinforce the brand.

Some of the most compelling and memorable examples of a brand position come from the everyday lives of employees and patients. Whether it's a staff member who went beyond the call of duty to assist a coworker or patient, or a patient's experience that exemplifies the best the organization has to offer, there are real life episodes of the brand promise happening all the time.

Identify and share success stories

- ➔ Ask department leaders to report notable outcomes, comments or conversations.
- ➔ Create forums to promote model behavior and recognize high-performing individuals.
- ➔ Get permission to share patient stories with staff, on your website and in marketing.
- ➔ Invite patients or employees as guest speakers at internal meetings and community events.
- ➔ Create incentives for living the brand and identifying people who do.

Provide frequent reminders in the workplace

Hospital environments are busy places. It's easy to lose sight of brand promises, goals and ideals when faced with the everyday dramas of healthcare. That's why it's important to keep the brand promise visible throughout the workplace. Display it everywhere. Repeat it over and over. It takes several exposures to instill a new idea, but only a few moments for it to become a distant memory. Without frequent reminders, the brand will begin to wither and die.

- Use hospital marketing channels (what we call owned media) to translate brand positioning, share core values and model behavior.
- Display creative marketing executions in the care environment – hallway posters, decor and screen savers – to help remind everyone of the organization’s promise.
- Engage your staff with brand-relevant content on the hospital’s website and social media channels.

Integrate positioning into brand communications

Brand is much more than just a logo. It’s an entire communication system that anticipates and addresses every consumer touchpoint. A successful identity system makes every piece look, sound and feel like it comes from the same organization, with the same personality and the same voice, regardless of the individual author. The imagery, typography and graphics should all work together to reinforce your brand promise and competitive position.

Reactions to the design elements of a communication system can be very subjective (some people prefer a specific color or font), but by establishing certain parameters you can ensure that all your brand identity solutions are strategically and aesthetically appropriate. Trust the design to the experts, and don’t let your executive board create Frankenstein’s monster by committee decision making or pandering to the opinion of the CFO’s husband (he does some floral arranging on the side, so he knows good design when he sees it).

Successful healthcare brand communications should be:

- Appropriate to the category or specialty, professional and technically well executed;
- Reflective of the brand position in its personality, tone and style;
- Clear, easy to read and easily reproduced in any medium or production process; and
- Distinctive from every other business in the category or marketplace.

Take your communications for a test drive

When updating your brand communications, it helps to do some pro forma design exercises. Test the new visual identity across a variety of media, and then view them together. Create examples of social media marketing, website design, online ads, owned media, mobile or traditional advertising in the new style to see connections, recognize potential problems and develop integrated visual solutions that reinforce the brand positioning. Working out design applications for the most common channels (and a few less predictable ones) can set precedents for future projects and ensure a more consistent treatment of your brand communications.

Here are some other considerations for identity development:

- **Naming:** Does your new competitive position, a corporate merger, reorganization, market or service change warrant a new business identity? Now is the time to act.
- **Marketing & Advertising:** Branding campaigns can help promote your competitive strengths and build awareness for your new position in the marketplace. Incorporate your new brand messages and identity elements into all of your advertising campaigns, including branding, service line campaigns and recruitment advertising. Refer to your Healthy Brand Board™ and corporate design standards manual to guide your use of imagery, fonts, color and graphics, and to test whether the messages effectively support your new position.
- **Facilities:** A successful brand system should translate easily into the physical environment, with opportunities to apply it to exterior signage, way finding, interior design and decor. Remember to allocate some of your repositioning budget to facility merchandising.
- **Intangibles:** Think beyond your letterhead. Consider how you can apply your brand position to your phone system, answering service, patient information package, new employee orientation, incentive plan, food service, and on and on.

PHASE 4: FOLLOW-UP—LIVING THE BRAND

Congratulations. You've created a unique, differentiating competitive position. You have an honest, engaging and deliverable brand promise. Your staff and physicians understand and rally around the desired patient experience. And your marketing communicates a strong, singular message to the community. You're living the brand... So now what?

You need to protect what you've worked so hard to create. Policing your brand starts on day one, and takes vigilance, constant communication and uncompromising standards for compliance and execution. Here are a few tools and roles we rely on to police healthcare brands and protect their equity.

Tools for sustaining hospital brands:

- **Healthy Brand Board™:** Created during the prescription phase, the Healthy Brand Board™ displays images, graphics and words to communicate the desired brand position, personality and visual identity. It's an objective point of reference to help you make important decisions.
- **Brand Guidelines:** Also known as graphic standards or brand standards, this document is an instruction manual for creating communications that are aligned with the strategic position and identity. It provides specifics for layouts, fonts, colors, artwork, even the proper tone for strategic managers, creative directors, designers and writers. The guidelines help keep the look and tone of communications consistent, so every communication comes from a single voice – recognized, trusted and true – no matter who creates a piece.
- **Brand Toolkit:** Like a craftsman's tool box, the brand toolkit contains resources for marketers and designers: electronic art files, logo graphics, photographs, stationery, ad formats, signage or almost any visual elements that have been created in support of the brand identity. Delivered on a file sharing site, along with the brand guidelines, these files help designers execute the identity consistently, and save time by eliminating the need to recreate graphic elements of the brand.
- **Brand Czar:** A person or team assigned as the keeper of the brand vision, the overseer of all brand communications and identity executions. Depending on the organization, this may be a full-time position, an informal role assumed by someone close to the branding process, or outsourced to an independent contractor (your agency, for instance). But be careful; a hired brand czar must understand what a brand can and can't do, place the brand's interests above their own, collaborate with internal staff and vendors (with whom they might naturally compete) and be willing to take unpopular, yet strategically appropriate positions when policing the brand.

The Annual Brand Check-up

A great way for top management to get a quick read on how well your employees are aligned with positioning and branding is a simple exercise we call the Annual Brand Check Up. It's easy to do, doesn't require much of a time commitment on the part of your staff, and it's relatively inexpensive. Here's how it works.

Choose approximately ten people at random for an informal conversation (employees, customers, end users and, if you can identify them, non-users of your brand but users in the category). Ask each person two questions:

"In three words or less, what does (your brand name here) stand for?"

If they have a problem answering the question or need a little prompting, make a note of it. If they are able to answer the first question, with or without prompting, ask the second question:

"What things does (your brand here) do, day in and day out, that supports the brand promise?"

From their answers, a pattern should emerge. Here's what to look for:

- Can everyone define what the brand stands for?
- Is there consistency in what everyone says the brand stands for?
- Is there consistency between what insiders and outsiders are saying?
- Are the words people use to describe what the brand stands for likely to inspire advocacy?
- Do the things they say that support your brand promise really support it?

If you find yourself answering "yes" to all of these questions, your brand communications program is likely doing its job. On the other hand, if you find yourself answering "no" to any of these, you may want to consider a more comprehensive diagnosis.

The life expectancy of your brand

If you've done your job well, and have systems in place to keep your brand on track, you may be set for decades without a significant rebranding or repositioning. Changing market conditions can make it tempting to shift brand strategy, but if your position is sound, you should be prepared to weather the storm. Stay true to your brand promise, keep an eye on your market share and, with luck, your brand could hold its competitive position for a long time to come. Ⓜ



A BRANDING CASE STUDY

DEVELOPING A HOSPITAL SYSTEM BRAND POSITION

Diagnosis: Formed after a major reorganization and consolidation of services mandated by the Berger Commission and NYS Department of Health, Ellis Medicine united three distinct hospitals to create a single healthcare brand that would provide acute care to a diverse community in and around the Capital Region of upstate New York.

Ellis was perceived as the third player in the market when ranked for the top drivers that influence consumers' healthcare decisions (cardiac care, emergency care, cancer treatment and diagnostics). The organization was in need of a differentiated position and a fresh identity to gain market share in a competitive healthcare environment.

Prescription: The public's poor perception of the state of healthcare, in combination with Schenectady's rich history of invention (the light bulb, etc.) and the massive changes forced by the Berger Commission, presented us with a once in a lifetime opportunity: to position Ellis as a leader in healthcare reform, a hospital system that is reinventing the way we care for the community.

The Competitive Position: "Reinventing healthcare, one patient at a time" became the creative expression of this positioning. The idea acknowledges Ellis Medicine's leadership role, while at the same time recognizing the organization's patient-centered culture and reminding doctors, patients and donors what's in it for them. As a rallying cry it has brought unity to Ellis Medicine's diverse staff and helped set the brand apart in a noisy, "me-too" healthcare market.

What makes this campaign credible to an audience that demands transparency and honesty is the candid interviews with real patients, doctors and staff. Presented in short- and long-format videos for television and the web, their poignant, often touching accounts demonstrate how Ellis delivers on the promise to improve the healthcare experience for every patient.

Treatment: The brand launch led with owned media, exploiting the hospitals' internal signage, brand-inspired interior décor, digital displays and web site to introduce the new brand to the 3,300+ employees, thousands of doctors, patients, family and visitors passing through Ellis's three campuses each day. An integrated, mass market campaign followed with creative executions for print, television, outdoor and online advertising. Service line campaigns for heart, maternity, neurology, emergency care and oncology were rolled out, featuring patients and physicians from each specialty area. The Ellis Medicine website was completely redesigned to reflect the new brand, and overhauled to accommodate the deep and changing content generated for the campaigns.

Follow-up: Public perception of Ellis Medicine rose dramatically after the launch of our rebranding campaign. Website traffic increased 15% each of the first three years, with video views and lengths of visits more than doubling. Campaign elements have been recognized by the Healthcare Advertising Awards, Ragan's HealthCare Marketing and PR Awards, Aster Awards and Telly Awards.

GLOSSARY OF BRANDING TERMS

Brand toolkit: A library of resources for marketers and designers: electronic art files, logo graphics, photographs, stationery, ad formats, signage or almost any visual elements created in support of the brand identity.

Brand (n): An organization's unique identity; or the consumer's perception of that organization.

Branding (v): The act of defining a competitive position through word and image associations or marketing communication messages.

Brand Czar: A person or team assigned as the keeper of the brand vision, the overseer of all brand communications and identity executions.

Brand Guidelines: Also known as graphic standards, this document is an instruction manual for creating communications that are aligned with the strategic position and identity.

Brand identity: The graphic style or iconography of an organization, including logo and communication systems.

Brand pillars: The core values of an organization that support the competitive brand position.

Brand position: The competitive stance of an organization, what sets one company apart from others in their market segment.

Brand promise: A unique customer experience, or in healthcare, a patient experience that an organization actively promotes and strives to deliver.

Brand standards: Also known as graphic standards, this document is an instruction manual for creating communications that are aligned with the strategic position and identity.

Logo: A graphic symbol, with or without typographic elements, that visually and legally represents an organization.

Competitive position: An organization's unique offering or ability that sets it apart from others in their market.

Positioning statement: A short description of an organization's capabilities that differentiates it from competitors.

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