

MARKETING GUIDE

The BrandEquation™ How to Sum Up Your School Brand

INTRODUCTION

Brand. It's what distinguishes your school from the dozens, hundreds, or thousands of others that families might choose instead.

It's tempting to believe that potential families and staff can easily understand what makes you special. Don't fool yourself, though. In one form or another, you have competition out there. Your programs may differ from those of other schools—but programmatic details aren't what motivates a family to choose your school above others. What engages and animates people is a distinctive brand positioning.

What Is Brand?

Brand is another word for reputation. And can you really afford to let your reputation go unintended? By default, your school already has a brand...but is it one that will advance your mission most effectively?

At Mission Minded, we build brands in partnership with our schools. Our BrandEquation™ sessions unearth brands that are authentic and powerful and unique to each school we serve. They are the perfect sum of internal wisdom, external insights, and concerted soul searching.

Having a clear brand pays your school dividends that you can't afford to let pass.

The Benefits of Branding

A strong brand:

- Minimizes competitive threats by making the specific value of an education at your school clear to prospective families, faculty, and staff;
- Helps defend your school against negative news, as a solidly built, positive reputation will encourage your audiences to give you the benefit of the doubt;
- Makes people proud to align with your school as they grow to truly understand why your school matters;
- Provides staff and volunteers with clarity about what differentiates your school, so that everyone associated can reinforce this idea at every touchpoint.

Clarity around your brand is the cornerstone of effective communications. It provides a guide for building the messages and activities for which your school will be celebrated. Defining your brand will help you tell the story of your unique educational approach in a way that makes that story clear and compelling.

The Power of Brand

A thoughtfully developed brand connects you with the community you need to succeed. For example, San Francisco Day School offered something unique, but struggled to get that across to prospective families. Brand work helped them take the spotlight as the only school where academic and creative achievement hold equal weight. “Where intellect and imagination intertwine” became their Brand Positioning, and that served as the foundation for a compelling new visual identity and admission and capital campaign materials. San Francisco Day School didn’t change who they were, they just began broadcasting their identity more effectively using brand—moving closer to mission success.



Audience

You can’t make good decisions about your brand without first identifying which audiences are most important to you. Too often, schools feel they need to reach everyone in order to be effective. Savvy schools, however, know that focusing their limited resources on the audiences most important to their school’s success improves the chances of that success.

The hard truth is that not everyone will care about the work you do (even if they should!). You want to focus on the families most likely to be best served by what you offer. You have to be selective and strategic. Take the time to understand your primary audiences by thinking deeply about who they really are, developing empathy for them, and their connection to your mission. This will help you build a brand that invites them into your school.

Prioritizing your school’s key audiences and favoring what they need to hear over what you want to say leads to brand engagement and mission success.



Your BrandEquation™

At Mission Minded, we define your BrandEquation as four elements, all springing from your mission.

The BrandEquation elements are:

Values

By their very nature, schools are values-oriented. They care about things like education, healthy growth, diversity, opportunity, and community. But schools often fail to articulate their values consistently and clearly. Define your school's values and let them lead you to brand clarity and messages that resonate.

Brand Experience

This component of your BrandEquation answers the question, "What do you want your stakeholders to feel when they engage with you?" As a school, you likely have several sets of stakeholders in the work you do, from your students to your donors and volunteers. Each of these audiences needs a reason to feel connected to your school. Identifying and articulating those reasons is a key step in building your brand.

Brand Personality

Even schools with very similar missions and program areas are likely to have different personalities. These distinguishing traits affect the kind of families who choose to attend.

Schools can be more or less traditional, more competitive, more nurturing, or more or less inclusive. These kinds of choices define your school's personality.

When articulating your school's personality, remember that this component of your BrandEquation should strike a balance between being authentic and aspirational: you want to define your school's ideal personality on its best day (which may not have happened yet!).

Brand Positioning

Families have choices when it comes to schools (including the choice to pursue a public or independent school education). Competition can be fierce. Understanding what's unique about a given school—its competitive advantage—is critical to a clear, strong brand. Your school must emphasize its points of superiority and directly address areas where competition threatens mission success.

“Mission Minded understood both who we are, as well as our aspirational selves. Thank you for all you have done!”

Dr. Priscilla G. Sands
as Head of School
Marlborough School



Your BrandEquation™

With your BrandEquation complete, it's time to bring your brand to life by aligning how you look, how you sound, and how you act.

Let your brand serve as an internal rallying cry for staff and board members. Make sure your BrandEquation is known and understood by everyone within your school, from the head of school to the lunchroom staff. Use your brand positioning as a shorthand way of talking about your school's brand, and as a yardstick for measuring how well what you do, and what you say.

Learn More

Mission Minded is a branding firm that works exclusively with nonprofit organizations.

We believe that a brand that sets you apart is essential to a nonprofit's success. Every day we guide nonprofits to uncover the big, bold idea that will attract more people to their work. Because in today's world, a worthy mission is not enough. You've got to communicate what makes you unique at every opportunity.

Our clients successfully raise more money and attract the support they need to achieve their goals. To find out how Mission Minded can help your organization, call us today at 415-990-9360.

How It All Comes Together



BRAND POSITIONING

Where intellect and imagination intertwine

VALUES

Experiences that bridge intellect and imagination

Mindsets that encourage & empower growth

Community relationships that inspire & connect

Diversity that is broad, evolving, & enriches everyone

Responsibility to ourselves, each other, & society

BRAND EXPERIENCE

When I engage with SF Day School, I feel fulfilled, because every child is challenged in learning that engages their hearts and minds.

BRAND PERSONALITY

Intentional

Creative

Grounded

Confident

Kind