



# BRANDING & YOUR RECYCLING PROGRAM

## WHO IS THIS FOR?

Anyone with a stake in their institution's image and mission as it relates to their recycling & sustainability initiatives.

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## ALIGN SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN YOUR MISSION.

**WHAT IS BRANDING?** The term “brand” is really just another way of thinking about your organization’s mission, values and strategy. It’s who you are; your brand tells your story and serves as a guide.

Often mistaken with a logo, a brand is much bigger as it conveys the organization’s personality, tells what it stands for and promises to deliver.

Ultimately, brands are perceptions formed by the consumer – students in the case of higher education. As part of your strategy, your brand should align with your constituents’ needs and expectations.

In higher education, many significant factors make up the brand such as the programs offered, the perceived reputation of the institution and post-graduate job placement. Some of these attributes are seen as “intangibles,” factors that seem to defy explanation but still represent a potent differentiating aspect of the organization.

**WHAT’S A BRAND PROMISE?** Great brands carry a strong promise that can actually change behavior internally and externally. A brand promise is a singular mission that evokes

an emotional response capable of galvanizing staff, faculty and administration toward fulfilling it.

“[A]n effective brand management strategy can be maximized only if the brand carries a promise -- and if every member of the academic community is committed to fulfilling that promise. One of the biggest challenges for leaders is to get everyone in the organization to unite behind the brand strategy.” -Gallup Management Journal

A brand promise, supported by internal stakeholders, is only the beginning. It must be clearly communicated to key target audiences, fulfilled and continually reinforced.

**LIVING YOUR BRAND PROMISE.** Fulfilling the brand promise isn’t an easy task. As noted in the Gallup Management Journal, getting everyone to unite behind the brand strategy can be the biggest challenge. However, when the brand promise is clear, succinct and part of a greater story, it becomes an authentic narrative people can rally behind. Great brands have their story and values ingrained in their DNA – they live it and breathe it every day.

**BRANDING & SUSTAINABILITY** Students have been shown

to take sustainability initiatives into account when choosing between prospective schools. The 2012 Princeton Review's Guide to Green Colleges provides a great snapshot into the sustainability initiatives going on in hundreds of colleges across the United States. According to one of their surveys, of 12,000 college applicants, 64% said "they would value having information about a college's commitment to the environment" and 23% said "such information would 'very much' impact their decision to apply to or attend the school."

In partnership with the U.S. Green Building Council, the Princeton Review's Guide to Green Colleges bases its rating on 10 criteria, including environmental studies, renewable energy use, the school's overall waste diversion rate, etc. Though only a facet of sustainability as a whole, recycling is a highly visible and accessible aspect of "going green."

If integrating green initiatives all the way into your core values is part of your strategy for attracting these students, how will you convey that message and make it stick? Your brand promise can set a vital rallying point within your institution. How will you align and integrate sustainability into your brand?

**WHAT IS BRAND EXTENSION?** Your brand has its own identity. People have worked hard to create that image and everything that stands behind it. Over time, institutions, may want to change their look or "re-brand" their organization. This doesn't necessarily entail a shift in strategy but rather involves new logos and messaging helping to "write the next chapter" of their story.

In terms of your recycling & sustainability efforts, consider creating a spin-off logo leveraging the brand equity of the original [assuming it goes through the proper channels of the university e.g. a visual identity board or committee]. Just as students take pride in competitions like RecycleMania, they take pride in their school logo or mascot and identify with it. Logo applications can serve as a means of associating that

sense of school pride with peripheral values of the institution ,such as recycling & sustainability efforts.

**AESTHETICS MATTER** In terms of your recycling program, high aesthetic bins tend to reflect well on an institution's brand in public spaces. These bins provide a highly visible and accessible means of demonstrating your commitment to sustainability. Bins that look good and are serviced regularly send the right message to users. Taking a step beyond just collecting recyclables, branded recycling programs convey an even greater message to users that there's a bigger idea at play. Additionally, bins that are visually appealing tend to get placed prominently and used more frequently.

**CONSISTENCY & COORDINATION** Depending on the particular area, the appearance of a campus can play a big role in attracting and retaining students, as well as financial benefactors such as alumnae. So too can showcasing a school's commitment to the environment. Investing in high-aesthetic recycling containers that both match the aesthetic needs of the campus and showcase the campus's commitment to the environment may provide far more benefit and return on investment than a hodge-podge of waste & recycling bins relegated into the corner.

Coordinating recycling bins may also help people properly use the bins more quickly and easily. Consistent opening IDs or labels, as well as color-coded bins can help people identify patterns over time and begin to use the bins more intuitively. The end result is that they may recycle more frequently.

Stakeholders within and outside your organization form their perceptions of your brand based on a wide variety of experiences they have interacting with it. Consistent, aesthetic recycling bins provide an additional opportunity to build on your brand image by leaving a positive impression on users.

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## TAKEAWAYS

- A brand is much more than just a logo – it’s the mission and core values lived out by an organization. Brands can be influenced by internal stakeholders but are ultimately decided by the end user.
- A brand promise is the singular mission to rally behind and constantly drive toward.
- Sustainability is becoming more important to prospective students. Integrating recycling and sustainability initiatives into everyday campus life can help fulfill that expectation and attract this demographic.
- Recycling is a highly visible aspect of sustainability and one of the 10 criteria of Princeton Review’s Guide to Green Colleges.
- Brand-extension or “spin-offs” may be a feasible way of associating your brand with sustainability initiatives across campus (e.g. on recycling bins). Many institutions opt to apply their main logo to recycling bins.
- High-aesthetic recycling bins can be a prominent means of showcasing an institution’s commitment to sustainability.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**BRAND** The culmination of intangibles people associate with a product or service in relation to their expectations with it.

**BRAND-EXTENSION** Leveraging the recognition of a brand into another area or category.

**OPENING IDS** Labels on recycling bins denoting which materials belong in each bin.

**DIVERSION RATE** Percentage of waste diverted from landfill to be recovered/recycled.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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