



Our Evolving Brand Identity »

Over the course of two centuries, our brand identity has undergone numerous iterations reflecting both organizational and societal changes. Following is a brief history of service marks that have provided visual context and connection to what our national Movement does and how we present ourselves. (FYI: a service mark is a word, phrase, symbol or logo that brands, identifies and distinguishes a service; a trademark, in contrast, is used to identify a product.)

BRINGING THE BOYS & GIRLS CLUB BRAND TO LIFE!

**Making our mission
and impact clear to all
stakeholders through
words, images & actions**

By John Collins

Brand. It's a word that gets tossed around a lot. Some consider it mainly to be an organization's name, logo and graphic design, or a tool used mostly for fundraising. In actual fact, a brand offers far more value than just a visual identity. It has the capacity to drive long-term goals, as well as strengthen a Boys & Girls Club's internal identity and structure.

Author and brand expert Marty Neumeier has described brand as, "a person's gut feeling about a product, service or organization." In other words, it's what sticks in people's minds. Some call it the public face of our mission.

Our mission statement – *To enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens.* – encapsulates our values, goals and culture as a Movement perfectly. It's our North Star and should be a guide for every decision, strategy and communication that emanates from an organization.

Nevertheless, the Boys & Girls Club brand is also more than our mission. Our brand is an expression that clearly defines what Clubs are and stand for: the promise we make to members, supporters and partners; and their expectations about the quality of service Clubs provide. This promise and these expectations are evoked by our name, logo and language.

Even with our history and legacy, many consumers do not fully understand how Clubs operate and our holistic approach to youth development. Some even confuse us with other youth-serving organizations. To mitigate such misunderstanding, we need to move the needle on our brand recognition and distinguish ourselves from similar nonprofit groups.

That distinction begins with you – the skilled, caring professionals who deliver a high-quality Club Experience, and position us as a leader in the youth development space. Being aligned on key brand differentiators and messaging will elevate the Boys & Girls Club brand and clarify how we impact young lives.



1915

The original service mark for the Boys' Club Federation, said to signify that the "work for boys was the keystone in the arch of social service, and that each Boys' Club was a torch to light boyhood's uncertain way to a worthy goal."



1929

The organization is re-branded as Boys' Clubs of America to distinguish it from similar organizations in other countries.

Brand Evolution

One could argue it was the need for a brand that led to the founding of our national organization. The seeds of Boys & Girls Clubs of America were planted in Boston in 1906, when 53 Boys Clubs decided they could accomplish more together than individually. As The Boys Club Federation, they created a stronger collective that consistently communicated the same core values, allowing them to better promote and expand their services to young people.

Of course, the Boys & Girls Club brand has undergone numerous iterations over the ensuing 111 years, such as when the Boys Club Federation was renamed Boys' Clubs of America in 1931 or when the "clasping hands" service mark was adopted in 1980.

To better understand how contemporary audiences see Clubs, BGCA conducted a brand study with the performance management company Nielsen in 2016. Among the findings, we learned that those who experienced the brand had a positive affinity, with 86 percent of members' parents and 75 percent of Club teens telling us they would recommend the Club to friends and family.

Those are great results. Still, many respondents were unable to distinguish the vital services that Clubs provide from those provided by similar organizations. Our Movement has a unique opportunity to break down this brand confusion, share the Boys & Girls Club story and showcase what happens inside Clubs every day. Through words, images and actions that reinforce why Clubs are as relevant and essential today as ever, we can make our mission and our impact clear to all of our stakeholders.

Club Culture

Brand and culture go hand-in-hand. Staff members and volunteers live and reinforce the Boys & Girls Club brand every day when they demonstrate our core values. Brand culture is represented in the safe, fun place you offer every kid in your community. It's in the supportive relationships you form with youth, and the high expectations you have for them. It's recognizing their successes, and comforting them when they fall short.

Our brand is a promise to donors, stakeholders, employees and volunteers. Delivering on our brand promise is critically important. People want to support brands that align with their personal values and hold meaning for them. And meaning emerges from the values at the core of the brand, which must drive every action and communication.

“**WORDS, IMAGES AND ACTIONS REINFORCE WHY CLUBS ARE AS RELEVANT AND ESSENTIAL TODAY AS EVER.**”

Building a brand culture will, and must, involve our entire Movement. It means living our brand beliefs and values every day. An emotional connection to the mission is what draws many to the Boys & Girls Club Movement. As a Movement of more than 350,000 individuals, we have the opportunity to harness our combined power and live our brand, every day, in everything we do.

Club culture elevates our brand and determines the kind of people who should be involved with your organization. Below are some ways you can start to develop a brand culture that is more focused and aligned with the values that our Clubs represent.

- **Listen and lead.** If you're a Club CEO or director, talk to your staff members on a regular basis. These are the people who will define and cultivate brand culture. Solicit ideas on making improvements. Let them know you value their work. Encourage everyone to speak openly and give them a channel for feedback.
- **Share mission moments.** Grassroots communications are a great way to communicate just what Clubs do. Record and share moments on social media that reflect our mission's aims and values: service projects, healthy meals, homework help, physical activity. Opportunities to tell the Boys & Girls Club story to the public are practically limitless.



1941

The service mark receives a more contemporary treatment, appropriate to the times.



1956

To commemorate 50 years of serving youth, and also receiving a congressional charter, the brand identity is updated to include a new background, founding year, and notice of congressional charter.

- **Know the mission.** Commit the mission statement to memory. It's a simple but powerful expression of what Clubs do every day. To get everyone thinking about our guiding principles, consider displaying the mission statement prominently in your Club.
- **Know the brand.** Consistent branding starts by knowing our brand guidelines. You can download BGCA's brand standards and messaging guidelines on BGCA.net/Marketing.

By putting a stake in the ground in the form of values that never change, a brand culture allows potential supporters, stakeholders and volunteers to evaluate how *your* values align with *their* values. When people identify with the Boys & Girls Club brand, you've made an emotional connection to them. The brand becomes part of their values, fortifying the idea that they are part of a solution.

“OUR MISSION STATEMENT – TO ENABLE ALL YOUNG PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO NEED US MOST, TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL AS PRODUCTIVE, CARING, RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS – ENCAPSULATES OUR VALUES, GOALS AND CULTURE AS A MOVEMENT PERFECTLY.”

Every one of us is a brand ambassador. Imagine how we can elevate the Boys & Girls Club brand if all staff members, volunteers and board members consistently speak in one voice about the services Clubs provide to kids and regularly demonstrate our brand values. Think how much better the public would understand *exactly* what Boys & Girls Clubs do for our kids, communities and country.

By knowing our mission and brand guidelines, and speaking in one voice, we can each contribute toward a stronger, better recognized brand. Businesses need a strong brand to turn a profit. Clubs need a strong brand to reach and impact more young people. And the Boys & Girls Club brand is a powerful one. This is our opportunity to leverage that power and strengthen Clubs' capacity Movement-wide to reach, impact and serve more young people.

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1980

Iconic Academy Award-winning graphic designer Saul Bass is retained to update the organization's national brand identity. His resulting work, a minimalistic rendition of clasped hands, signifies the Club's role as a connecting agent to youth.



1990

With the nation's girls officially offered membership to Boys & Girls Clubs, the national service mark is adapted accordingly.



BRAND

A person's perception of a product, service, experience or organization; a commercial reputation.

BRAND EXPERIENCE

All the interactions people have with a product, service or organization.

DIFFERENTIATION

The process of establishing a unique market category to increase profit margins and avoid commoditization; a central principle of positioning.

INTERNAL BRANDING

The process of spreading brand knowledge and brand skills throughout an organization by use of a shared vision, storytelling, training and creative councils.

POSITIONING

The process of differentiating a product, service, or company in a customer's mind to obtain a competitive advantage.

TOUCHPOINT

Any place where people encounter a brand, including product use, packaging, advertising, websites, movies, store environments, company employees and conversation.

Excerpted from the "The Dictionary of Brand" by Marty Neumeier. To download the free digital version, go to LiquidAgency.com/dictionary-of-brand.