

# Conversation 1

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## From Brand to BrandED

Conversation 1 launches the journey to brandED. Leaders learn why the tenets of business brand and marketing, standards in the commercial marketplace, can be comfortably adapted in the 21st century to an educational framework. We will touch on a short history of business branding and understand the marketing discipline that shapes leaders' educational work. Readers learn about the foundational difference between business brand and the educator's adaptation, brandED, which focuses on communicating through showcasing, celebrating, and building powerful relationships that benefit the school community. Businesses focus their brand communication efforts on sales goals; a few select elements that commercial brands employ in brand campaigns can inform educators about reaching their own brandED goals. As educators, we can appreciate brand history as a starting point for our journey, but we keep the foundational difference in mind: This leadership mindset isn't about a bottom-line return. The goal of brandED is the sharing of clear and consistent messages that define our mission to educate our children.

In this ever-changing society, the most powerful and enduring brands are built from the heart. Their foundations are stronger because they are built with the strength of the human spirit, not an ad campaign.

—Howard Schultz, CEO, Starbucks

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## Part One: In Brand We Trust

The brand buzz is everywhere.

We live in a digital and social media world where everything and everyone is branded. What does brand mean? In order to move into brandED leadership, one must start at the beginning, with the word *brand*. Is there a “just right” definition of brand that can inform your own brandED professional leadership journey?

There are as many interpretations of the word brand as there are voices in the business community (Cohen, 2011a). A class of graduate marketing students can provide multiple versions of the meaning of brand. Those definitions might be pretty good ones because our Millennial generation gets the concept. One of the most interesting ideas about what brand is today comes from Marian Goodell, CEO of a distinctive nonprofit with a unique brand, the Burning Man Festival. Goodell claims that brand these days isn’t just created, it’s *cocreated and celebrated* by those who align with and promote its purpose and value (Solis, 2011b). This description of a dedicated brand process is a rallying point for brandED educators, and a place to start our journey toward a collaborative, cocreated educational brand mission.

In the business world, the concept of brand is made up of three foundational business elements:

An **image**

A **promise**

A **result**

These descriptors fit into the selling proposition for products and services that are offered to the marketplace. For example, in the case of the growth of the Burning Man Festival brand (Solis, 2011b), the **image** of an accepting society offers a **promise** of an engaged, fair “gifting economy” and delivers the **result** of a self-reliant, creative, and fulfilling city that appears and disappears each year during the waning days of

summer in a remote desert area. The loyal followers of this distinctive brand savor their experience and, year after year, show repeated brand loyalty to the festival, which is the goal of any provider of a product or service.

Educators are not selling a product or service. But brand is a fit for us in a modern, digital view of professional learning and progressive school thinking. This brand is made up of three foundational school elements:

An **image**

A **promise**

A **result**

The concepts of image, promise, and result can powerfully frame a school’s brand-building communication effort, but with a distinct difference from the way these terms are used in the business world (see Figure 1.1). BrandED thinking around these terms is a frame for developing your own school story: The concepts of image, promise, and result create a frame on which to build a cohesive school brand

**Figure 1.1** Brand and BrandED Tenets Contrasted

THE TENETS OF BRAND	IMAGE	PROMISE	RESULT
	Promoting for selling	Satisfy a need or want	Improves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sales</li><li>• Profit</li><li>• Scale</li></ul>
THE TENETS OF BRANDED	IMAGE	PROMISE	RESULT
	Storytelling to communicate value	Accomplish school goals	Improves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Culture</li><li>• Performance</li><li>• Resourcing</li></ul>

communication presence, one that leads to stakeholder engagement that brings school improvement. In schools, brand is a personification of a community. A strategically marketed brand message about the valuable work of the school is now a necessity for effective school leadership in our digital world because educators now live in a world of increasing school choice options for parents. Offering a strong institutional persona across various channels through a clear brand presence is not an option in our age of visibility. “Define before being defined” is part of the leadership agenda of visibility in a digital and social age.

## **TODAY’S ICONS**

Brand is about visibility. Companies spend millions of dollars to get the attention needed to secure the consumer buy. There is a science to achieving that moment of brand victory, the winning over of the audience, that is focused on the first seconds of recognizing a brand, known as the FMOT, the “first moment of truth” (originally coined by Proctor & Gamble). It’s the traditional face-to-face decision buyers make that leads to a product purchase (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015). As many of us know from our own buying habits, brand is a powerful part of connecting us to the products and services we love to purchase. It’s the repeated exchange that leads to loyalty. Brand use is part of our daily rituals.

As more and more decisions are made online, the FMOT has now morphed into the ZMOT, the zero moment of truth (a term coined by Google in 2011). This is human decision making on steroids. In spite of powerful data platforms and algorithms, it’s often anybody’s guess when, where, and why “we the people” will buy. In today’s exchange, the consumer has the power. In a global competition for the heart, mind, and wallet of customers, there are big winners who know how to woo and win fans. The brand champions affect us in our day-to-day lives—and the communities we lead. Think about how image, promise, and result got these iconic brands to the top in 2016. Each brand lives a powerful, clear image; makes a relevant and genuine promise; and

dedicates itself to continued tangible result that keeps an audience loyal (Interbrand, 2016):

1. Apple
2. Google
3. Coca-Cola
4. Microsoft
5. Toyota
6. IBM
7. Samsung
8. Amazon
9. Mercedes-Benz
10. GE

In the “always open for business” world of online content marketing, these powerhouses are never more than a connecting click or a pop-up away on our devices. We face the deluge of visual content around these and thousands of other brands in daily life. Simon Clift, former chief marketing officer of Unilever, a powerful, iconic global company, believes that brands, even billion-dollar brands at the highest level of success, know they aren’t just about what we see. Clift believes brand to be a contract between a company and consumers (De Swaan Arons, 2011). Every brand on this top 10 list knows about turning an exchange into customer loyalty. Clift’s thinking about a contract implies the feeling of trust that exists in any exchange with the consumer. This same feeling should resonate with educators because schools also work to make contracts with their stakeholders that are built on exchanges leading to trust and loyalty.

Now, equating business brand with trust is a relatively new concept. The traditional world of business sales evokes a classic negative image when it comes to trustworthiness. Schools today struggle with trust

issues as well and need to adapt as business has done. How did things change for business? Today's world of sales is now different because of "positioning": the perception of a brand as unique and set apart from the competition. Positioning a product on the basis of consumer trust didn't emerge in the marketplace until the middle of the last century. Suddenly, products needed to become more than *things* if they were to compete for the buy. Products needed personality. They needed to be *unique* and *different*. They needed to have a story.

Products that created stories and connected with their customers through those tales were on the way to becoming trusted "brands." Digging into brand history is the first step in making brand a part of our own educational brand development.

## **A SHORT BRAND HISTORY FOR BRANDED EDUCATORS**

Go back a hundred years or so when all that it took to sell was to make something of good quality, package it cleanly, and offer it to people with a folksy sales pitch. Saying that your product was "the best soap" or "the best salt" got it sold. But brand has been developing on the fast track since that time.

Long before the early 20th century, clever humans were branding. Product leaders like Morton Salt and Quaker Oats heralded the birth of mass brand presence, complete with simple but powerful icons that are still around today in the modern grocery aisle. These time-tested iconic brands share the stage today with the top 100 brands of 2016 (Interbrand, 2016), including both present-day heavy hitters like BMW, Disney, and the NFL, and newcomers like Uber. All these brands have their loyal followings, but the Pillsbury Doughboy and other time-tested brands are different. They still pack a historical and emotional punch for modern customers: We trust them.

In the 1960s, brand moved beyond simple packaging. Madison Avenue executives (think *Mad Men*) created product "personalities." The Marlboro Man and Maytag Repairman began to build relationships with the consumer through the new "social media" driver of the day: the

color television. Innovative communication and a new way of telling product stories gave birth to the science of brand building and the need for brand management. The golden era of TV and print advertising pushed the growth of brands that delivered new services and products to consumers, who “liked” them way before a social media thumbs-up appeared. Madison Avenue boldly tackled social issues and created campaigns to unify 1960s society, such as the Pepsi Generation campaign. Creatives successfully sold tiny Volkswagens in a time of big sedans (some with tail fins!), succeeding with a counterintuitive campaign that called the VW Beetle what most people thought it was: ugly (“History: 1960s,” 2003).

Today, brand experience—the powerful concept that advances lasting emotional connection with a consumer—shapes our personal buying habits, and in this world, customer engagement through brand experience is king. Creating an experience is a continuing challenge for any brand because of today’s competition. How can brands continue to keep the attention of their audience? How can a brand position itself, offer an experience, and be noticed amid all the noise? The concept of “story” is a big part of brand experience. The successful brands of today are masters of storytelling. A brand’s narrative power in the exchange with its loyal fans separates the winners from the losers. Once in possession of a unique, authentic story that distinguishes it from the competition, the successful brand grows through its consistent, targeted, deliberate messaging. This is as true for classic brands like Coca-Cola as it is for newer players like Google. Each has a story that explains its reason for existence, and each brand tells the story in compelling ways to attract and keep attention.

Connecting through a unique, emotional story is why Nordstrom’s department store soars as JC Penney continues to underperform. The narrative of a successful company is consistent and continually refreshed in exchange with a new social community of fans who want their own distinct stories to be heard. Today’s consumers want to belong to the community. Top brands are not shouting at the consumer as they were in the heyday of advertising. They are listening and acting on what they

hear, making the story fresh and relevant across many communication landscapes. The McDonald's golden arches logo is known in 119 countries, and its successful "I'm Lovin' It" slogan is a differentiator in the fast-food world on a global scale. The success of the company's I'm Lovin' It campaign is based on the connection the brand makes across cultures as it reaches diverse audiences with a simple shared message. McDonald's integrates its brand message from Japan to Brazil to London through shared human stories, which become the key to satisfying fast-food "wants and behaviors" in any culture. (Kotler & Armstrong, 1996). This brand has ranked consistently on Interbrand's list of top global brands. McDonald's gets there by telling its story of the brand in traditional and new-age media messages to children and parents that promote McDonald's consistent, affordable, and reliable delivery of a fast-food product. The company now shows its connection to the changing tastes of its community by expanding its offer to a more health-minded consumer. Millennial parents who played in the McDonald's ball pits as children now bring their kids to enjoy the same experience because those parents are still "Lovin' It." A customer in any part of the world knows the experience of the McDonald's brand because of the company's focused power to tell its story globally, and its ability to translate that experience into local cultures without losing brand recognition.

Brands must also be flexible to have impact (Kapferer, 2012). Apple may be the best example of a flexible brand by virtue of its being able to pivot yearly with a constant, consistent line of products. Apple appeals to its audience by telling the story of an always current, always plugged in, and always supported customer who continually embraces new ideas.

Another reason why the top brands succeed lies in the ways they quickly react to meet the changing needs of diverse niches—the segments and demographics—they serve. This is a prime lesson for school leaders in a rapidly diversifying age. Successful brand building comes from knowing audiences and focusing on what these customers want. Look at the brand behemoths. Microsoft's understanding of the community it serves, for example, recently led to its purchase of the online



professional network, LinkedIn. Brand giants are tops at data collection and social listening and at using that information to drive flexible development of products, services, and relationships. In these times of big data and vast quantities of digital information, new software yields powerful metrics to inform brand managers about the needs and wants of the marketplace. Companies use information hoping to find that elusive ZMOT that will satisfy their communities. Brand winners like Toyota get their audience's attention on multiple digital platforms, using websites, social media, sales incentives, PR, and integrated marketing. Toyota devises ways to get its targets across niches to talk to the company about their needs and wants. The company connects with its engaged consumers on digital and social channels, encouraging them to share personal stories about their own Toyota buying journeys.

BrandED leaders take special note. Educators are joining the brand conversation at a unique, developmental point in brand history. Exchange today is based on a brand's clear narrative, consistent presentation, and ability to confidently engage in multiple ways with its diverse, segmented audiences. Big brands spend billions of dollars engaging with consumers, inviting us into the decision-making process. Like it or not, we are prodded and poked to be "customer engaged" (Hahn, 2014). Thanks to the Internet and social media, brands want to know us, their potentially loyal fans. They tailor stories to get our attention as potential customers. Many of our stakeholders are experienced in the online exchange that leads to satisfaction with a brand, and they seek the brand experience in all aspects of life. Transparent engagement is here to stay. And now it's at the schoolhouse door.

## **ENGAGEMENT EXPECTATION HAS COME TO SCHOOLS**

The great news is that educators in the digital age don't need to spend millions as big business does to harness the power behind brand communication. It's a DIY (do-it-yourself) world, and that applies to the branding process. Consumer understanding of brand presence grows

daily, and so do consumer expectations. Brand development, building compelling missions, and kickstarting fundraising campaigns—all are practiced by millions who own computers or smartphones. Like many others, today’s savvy digital-minded school leaders can create their own powerful home-grown influence without an advertising budget and celebrity endorsements. The Pew Foundation (Smith, 2015) found that 64% of adult Americans now own a smartphone of some form, a number that rose from 35% ownership in 2011. Users connect with brands regularly and use mobile tech to connect with products and services online, from interacting with health providers to doing their banking. The brand buzz that is in our daily lives moves to a complex beat, a symphony of DIY creativity, as entrepreneurial stay-at-home moms and dads, “solo-preneur” moonlighters, job seekers, and Gen Z teens join the brand movement and search for audiences to engage with to advance themselves, to send a message, or to sell a product or service.

Schools are part of the buzz. When Millennial parents in your school community develop Web pages for the unborn, complete with naming campaigns, they are dealing in branding behavior and reaching audiences for their desired result: engagement. With the growth of social media platforms like Instagram, parents can chronicle the moments of their children’s day, engaging their followers in a child’s development from infancy to the first day of school and beyond. The news about student mobile use from EDUCAUSE Center for Analysis and Research (Dahlstrom, 2015) is that in 2015, the percentage of undergraduate students owning smartphones grew to 92%. That figure alone suggests the chosen direction of messaging and access for our students in this new age of engaged communication.

There have been many instances of broken trust to date. One of the most serious recent examples is the case of Volkswagen, whose genius in bringing the Beetle to America in the previous century is now tarnished by the news that it misrepresented the truth regarding emissions of its autos. This illustrates the serious component of building trust in an

exchange, and it illustrates what happens when trust is broken (“VW Chairman Says Parts of Company ‘Tolerated Breaches of Rules,’” 2015). The Chipotle brand, once the envy of the marketplace, has dealt with issues of trust regarding its quality control and food-handling issues (Kline, Duprey, & Noonan, 2016). Samsung is now embroiled in a digital recall of millions of phones. Trust can be destroyed in an instant in our “breaking news” digital media environment. Because trust is a foundation of teaching and learning, and of our education system, conscientious brandED thinking is a must for educators who need to build or repair trust.

Trusted brands today are doing what Mastercard’s agency, the Dentsu Aegis Global Media Group, calls “riding the digital tsunami to relevance” (Dua, 2015), and the company is intense in its pursuit of the new gold standard: customer engagement. Schools are about relevance in our rapidly changing world, and they can engage with their audiences right alongside big brands through multiple communication channels: digital, social, real time, influencer, and traditional media. Schools will win when they make it their business to truly know who they’re engaging with among their varied stakeholder circles. They will create a genuine exchange with these different niche stakeholder groups—kids, staff, teachers, parents, and the greater community—making their audiences trusted partners in the experience of learning. Schools that recognize the diverse, nuanced stakeholder groups that surround them, and that take steps to know the wants, needs, and characteristics of each group of stakeholders, will create brand loyalty in ways that separate them from schools who haven’t yet acknowledged the power of creating a connected, trusting community.

## **WHAT BRAND ISN’T**

You may think you know brand, but think again. At this moment, parents of children K–12 and beyond who are looking at the choices available are online looking for something different. They are looking

for brand. They are seeking brand experience. Relying on the surface elements of what you think brand is will not make your school more attractive in this competitive environment. BrandED leaders must go further in their understanding and leading. These surface elements aren't brand, but you may have mistaken them for it:

- Your school website
- Your school logo
- Your school mascot
- Your school tagline
- Your school teams and clubs

Websites, missions, and mascots are not the brand of educators. They're the places audiences "touch" an education brand; they have important value to the brand experience, but they are identity outlets for the brand story and the growth of the narrative. A brand is something much bigger than these elements. The items listed are important as supportive planks for communicating a clearly articulated brand.

Today's iconic brands all have a look. Visual content communicates brand online, especially with the Millennial generation and their following demographic, Gen Z. But here's another "isn't" for the brand conversation for educators: Despite the need for presenting a consistent look, *powerful branding is more about what isn't seen*. BrandED includes exhibiting a compelling Web presence, but keep the word "feeling" in mind.

## **BRAND IS FEELING**

The Disney brand is conveyed with more than cute cartoons and movies. The company captures the best elements of anyone's childhood in ways that create loyal brand followers, who then become brand ambassadors to their children. The best brands are the leaders of the pack because they create value that is intangible. They've made an emotional connection to the mind of the customer. In that connection lives a message that continually feeds the "wanting to connect to good stuff" that

the brand brings. Take a look at an old-school Good Humor truck. Good Humor isn't as much about ice cream as it is about the delicious story of sweet summer days that many of us can relate to ourselves. Even when we buy a Good Humor product in a mega-supermarket in the dead of winter, we remember reaching for it on the street on hot summer days. The Nike swoosh captures the rush that every athlete, from weekend warrior to the NBA All-Star, feels when connected with the Nike brand experience. Anyone who proudly wears the logo of a university on a T-shirt knows the feeling associated with brand, but let's go deeper with some powerhouses of feeling. Chanel's brand mark speaks volumes to consumers about things like luxury, class, and sexiness, but of course these messages are not just seen in the design of the logo. Chanel's core brand message comes across in powerful, unseen ways that engage loyal audiences in deep, lasting exchange. School leaders have the same power to brand without a Madison Avenue marketing budget.

Creating feeling can cost nothing in a digital world. The Starbucks CEO has access to millions of marketing dollars to advertise his coffee, yet that isn't where his investment in brand value lies. Starbucks isn't just about selling coffee. In fact, Starbucks came late to advertising its brand. It didn't have to because the intangible value it brought to its loyal customers provided enough word-of-mouth advertising that the company didn't need a big marketing budget. Recently, with the rollout of new products and its move to build a luxury coffee experience with specialty-brewing Starbucks locations, more advertising dollars are spent. But Starbucks originally grew its brand from the intangible value of belonging that it brings to daily life. Starbucks launched the idea of a "third place" to belong, after home and work. That's a connection that satisfies beyond the purchase of a high-priced iced double-shot latte.

Connecting to the channel of feeling is key to building your school brand, just as it is key for our fellow business brand managers. When individuals feel that they belong to something bigger than themselves, "brand well-being" is present. One aspect of well-being comes from the feeling of belonging that develops through a trusted exchange with

others who are part of a like-minded community. Distinguished management consultant Peter Drucker said, “People buy with their hearts, not with their minds” (Penhollow, 2014). People also choose education with their hearts, although educators don’t generally think about a “stakeholder buy” as they lead their communities. The image, the promise, and the result of brandED fits when a leader blends the recognizable, consistent signs of a crafted brand with a genuine feeling of an educational experience. BrandED leaders, informed by the impact of experience, exchange, story, and feeling, can deliver the call to elevate education through brand. BrandED leaders focus as the best brand managers do: They make people matter by making engagement a priority. According to Maya Angelou, not a brand manager but a masterful storyteller, “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” Ms. Angelou’s thinking is a powerful cornerstone of a leader’s brandED mindset and well worth cultivating and promoting.

## **PROMOTING A SCHOOL BRAND**

The modern concept of brand evolved from a simple labeling of products during a communication revolution in the last century, one that touched every corner of modern life. When television became present in every home, products needed to become humanized through televised commercial stories. Brand personalities on TV screens aggressively competed for the buy. A respected voice at the time of this evolution was the father of advertising, David Ogilvy (1987), who, when observing the frenzy of the 20th-century age of selling, reasoned that “big ideas are simple ideas” (p. 195). His thoughts about defining and managing brand revealed that in the pivoting world of communication in the mid-20th century, brand was the intangible sum of product attributes, the name, the package, the price, the history, the reputation, and advertising. Ogilvy’s view can inform strategies for brandED leaders. Yet how do we align ourselves in the 21st-century pivot of digital and social communication with an advertising stance? How do educators create intangible brand loyalty for our stakeholders without an Ogilvy advertising agency

budget? As we learned earlier from Starbucks, we don't need advertising to create a remarkable, reputable brand. We can promote a connection to community through our intangible feeling and narratives, and create a sharing experience around these stories with those we engage with daily. We must lead by "leaning into" the opportunity to use the talents of the stakeholders in our schools, the passionate brand advocates who already are engaged in advancing our school's reputation. This collaboration is key to building our message. Finding talented school brand advocates who employ brand exchange in their daily lives provides a leader a chance to grow connection with a collaborative "no cost" team in launching a new school brand strategy. Far from Madison Avenue, a brandED leader will find this goal within reach on any Main Street in any community.

The term *promotion* takes the place of *advertising* in our brandED strategy. It's the necessary adaptation that distances us from sales. Unlike advertising, promotion doesn't have to cost a thing, and it is required in today's world of education to amplify brand power. It's essential for educators to promote themselves in this digital world of connection. Who is better at sharing the school narrative of the wonderful work of the school than those stakeholders who are creating it? Kids, teachers, and staff can be the genuine voices of the narrative of success that promotes a school's brand. A brandED leader creates a culture of innovation using the power of technology, supported by multiple interested stakeholders who collaborate and commit to the brand innovation. Educators who are strategic in promotion can reach stakeholders through the tangible and intangible connection of brand awareness. You won't need a marketing department. School leaders can promote and advance brandED's foundational building blocks: image, promise, and result.

A school brandED Strategic Plan, built under an innovative leadership employing a collaborative effort, will create the essential conditions for making school promotion part of daily school life. Leaders who promote brand without the budget of a marketing executive are sound communicators. They have a sense of the needs, goals, and actions that will attract community interest in supporting the school brand. They get

attention that leads to positive relationship building. Word of mouth is necessary to promotion, and the most successful school brand communicators get their communities talking. Using small communities and subgroups of interested stakeholders, schools can gradually develop a capacity to get the word out. To sustain the promotion, the creation of affinity—the good feeling that comes from the brand narrative—must be a leading part of the effort to promote image, promise, and result.

## **SURVEY THE LANDSCAPE: WHO'S GOT THE FEELING FOR BRANDED?**

Taking on a branded mindset is a commanding role that is suited to today's digital school leader, especially in a time when any teenager on his or her personal brand journey is pursuing the same brand elements—image, promise, and result—using social media platforms like Snapchat and Instagram. As you start your brand journey, survey the landscape and see who has got the feeling for brand. A case in point is that average teen. Granted, this teen is not as informed as a professional, but is “selling” and promoting a narrative to an audience. Why? He or she wants to matter. There's surely a lot of emphasis on image and result on that kid's part, and maybe some attention to genuine promise. Teens are sailing on the social media sea at 15, packaging and delivering personal brand value for better or worse. Recognize that their search to communicate a brand that matters offers you real opportunity. Their natural digital and social savvy and your school leadership as brand steward could make for a great partnership as you start promoting school brand. Keep your eyes open for potential branded stakeholders who may already be positively defining your school brand under their own initiative.

One compelling school example of the support for your brand journey to result is found in an app designed by a Gen Z 16-year-old named Natalie Hamilton. Her innovative app is called Sit with Us, and it allows the mixing of students, the in-crowd and the awkward, through lunch appointments. It was launched as part of an antibullying initiative that reflects a brand of tolerance. These young digital stakeholders are sitting



in our classrooms and are filled with the potential to support brand building. They may be members of your school's business clubs and traditional national organizations like DECA, a high school association of marketing students, but they can also be creative, entrepreneurially minded students as young as 15. They can be among the first to embrace and power the new school brand. You need them on your brand-building team.

Loyalty to a brand's position or its feel is the root of engagement, which marketers call brand equity. It is found in repeated exchange—face-to-face, or through digital and social means—between a brand and its audience. Behavioral habits of exchange are formed when good brand stories are advanced repeatedly, because those stories fuel good feeling and brand affinity. Think of the brands you reach for over and over and the good feeling that results from the connection.

Brand equity is a powerful driver for building a school brand. Strong brand equity rides the waves of good times and bad. Anyone who owns a Samsung phone during the recent recall is seeing brand equity put to the test for that brand giant. Brand equity comes from trust. When educational leaders earn the trust of engaged, loyal school brand fans, the fans return again and again for further supportive school experiences. An improved school community is the result. Look outside your school-house door for a familiar example of brand equity. Who are those members of the community who already see the school as worthy of their loyalty? They are part of the stakeholder community, from the students in your classrooms to local small businesses. They can be the first partners for shared brand leadership as a brand is born. Their good feeling for the school is priceless, and they must contribute to brand building. Use your school calendar of events to go on the hunt for collaborative stakeholders. Meet them face-to-face. Look at your teachers as brand ambassadors. Enlist the interest of teachers who have built relationships with stakeholder parents and who still connect to former students and community leaders through their own interests. Our schools are full of stakeholders who are already using digital communication that advances image, promise, and result in their own lives.

Stakeholders are forming relationships that show their school brand power through personal sharing on social media platforms, reflecting their connection to school activities ranging from gaming to hobbies.

One case in point is teacher Arezou Taheri Montgomery. A weekend warrior as a distance runner, she uses social media to chronicle her success as an athlete along with her passion for education. Because of her sharing of her education life, many of her Facebook followers cheer her passion for teaching as much as her marathon achievements. The students and their parents cheer her on in both realms. Brooklyn professional Betty Lee is a supportive community stakeholder who has a connected tech presence in her career. As a realtor, she sees possibilities in connecting new residents to a school brand; and, as a collaborative member of the school community she serves, she is eager to grow her understanding of support through social media like Snapchat. Adam Leitman Bailey is a former New Jersey high school student who now owns his own successful New York City law firm and has spoken at his former school to inspire students about the value of building a personal brand.

Stakeholders like these number in the thousands across typical school communities. These generous, giving stakeholders have promotional value in schools. They join your collaborative design team at zero cost and bring a richness of skill and talent and their commitment to contribute to the school's success. That's how you creatively do this without the Madison Avenue budget. They join the cause to improve their school, seeing it as a social or moral imperative. First, you create the call to action through developing your own brand. Your model and commitment can be a brand beacon to others. Your effort is powered by technology, and you take advantage of the endless free resources that are available to leaders who want to reinvent and innovate.

Here's the simple map:

1. You develop a school **image** through authentic stories told from every corner of the school community, using the engaging content of your daily school narrative.

2. You purposefully promote your educator's **promise** to create the mix of messages about the mission of the school to create a type of brand harmony, a consistency that feels good, through many messaging channels.
3. You show a tangible, measurable **result**, promoting your narrative to gain resources that can sustain the school in unique ways.

Like Arezou, Betty, and Adam, your own loyal supporters will help you lead, and their energy and creativity spread the word. No marketing dollars are needed for leaders willing to innovate through interactive brand storytelling. Leaders can get the attention of their audiences through their collaborative, inclusive brandED mindset. Your supporters are out there.

## **STRONG BRANDED LEADERSHIP = STRONG BRAND**

Marketing and brand campaigns include deliberate, coordinated steps that lead to brand awareness across many channels (McCulloch, 2000). As a brandED leader, you won't develop a campaign, but you'll move to targeted action and use the familiar structure of educational collaboration, found in the distributed leadership model, to create a shared plan. Collaboration can quickly energize your community into one that supports and celebrates the new school brand. Business brands are built to sell, and, because of that, extensive research goes into their development. They are linked to the bottom line. In schools, we are building brand through stories that show our performance value. We strive for transparency to communicate our content that shows our education success. What is key is our ability to tell the story of the school and to inspire understanding and caring on the part of others to help deliver on a brand promise that our stories illustrate. The skills and talents of committed stakeholders can power the delivery of a brand that all community members can connect with and consistently articulate.

BrandED innovation is instituted through the spirit of a shared journey. The creation of a brandED Strategic Plan guides brand implementation. A strong leadership stance by the school brand builder can move the brandED Strategic Plan, which is the result of collaborative effort, to completion. Having a structured plan ensures that there is a focal point for brand communication. A strong plan is a road map for transformation of the school's image for a positive result. The plan unifies the communication effort through strategies that sustain the brand effort. A plan weaves common threads from across many disparate supporting school efforts into a clear picture of what the school stands for, preparing the school community to face myriad pressures within the school and challenges coming from the larger world. In Conversation 5, leaders guide their community, modeling behavior and preparing the culture for being brand aware. They use a brandED Strategic Plan, built through a step-by-step cocreative process, that sets the direction for building school culture, performance, and resources to deliver the promise of the school brand. For leaders feeling the pull of initiatives, assessment pressures, expectations, budgets, aging infrastructure, mandates, directives, and concerns for the safety of students, a brand strategy functions as a unifier to aggregate a wide array of separate existing messages and programs. Imagine brand as an overarching "umbrella" under which leaders unite disparate agenda items that are part of the promise of the school that must be communicated to stakeholders. Think of the many initiatives and platforms for training, curriculum, policy, and communication that exist within the school organization. A brandED strategy can connect every one of them in one overarching message representing the good work of the school. If you're losing sleep about challenging issues surrounding your school and your ability to manage the "noise," a brandED Strategic Plan can offer a leader control: It streamlines fragmented messaging into a unified, strong brand that promotes the school's various stories of positive result.

Link your ongoing brandED effort to tangible *results*. It advances credibility with your stakeholders who want to know more than your opinion about the value of pursuing a brand presence. They want to

know what is in it for them. Potential fans want feedback on growth. Brand is feeling, but stakeholders look to see results from their engagement with the brand. Results assure them that this institutional commitment is worthwhile. When leaders move the brandedED conversation to a level of planning and strategy that showcases results, the stakeholder community buys in. Leaders who have gathered stakeholders to guide the innovation of a brandedED Strategic Plan share the feeling of new possibilities for improved culture, performance, and resourcing. This positive spirit engages the community. Because feeling is part of the equation of successful brand and brand equity, value comes from seeing the tangible as well as the intangible results of improved school culture, performance, and resourcing. Create a plan that balances good feeling with tangible results.

As early adopters of a brandedED mindset demonstrate, the strategic process of brand building allows administrators to demonstrate key functions of leadership. They promote school brand in accordance with high levels of management. In the view of the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NASSP & NAESP, 2013), the surest elements of strong leadership are attending to a vision of success, creating a climate for achievement, and cultivating leadership across the organization to achieve that success. A brandedED leader develops effective ways to manage people and processes in a new digital world of communication. BrandedED leadership embodies the same key elements of success cited by NASSP/NAESP through the development of a brandedED Strategic Plan. The cornerstone of adapting brand building in education lies in recognizing the difference between business brand and brandedED, your educator-owned tool for professional and organizational development:

Brand = **Sales**

BrandedED = **Showcasing and relationships**

Brand expert Jason Miletsky believes that brand is the sum experience people have with a product or service (Miletsky & Smith, 2009). Value for the receiver, resulting in loyalty to the product or service,

comes from the positive delivery of a provider's promise. Schools provide value every day. A well-defined school brand defined and executed in a strategic plan ensures that the brand promise is made and sustained. Even in times of educational standardization, schools can deliver on a unique promise linked to brand services that connect and engage stakeholders in valuable school experiences that will build a school's reputation beyond a test score. Create communication avenues and proudly share the results of your school's good work. A carefully communicated brand spreads the good news of academic and nonacademic success.

## TALKING THE BRANDED TALK

Where do leaders tell their stories?

Branded messages are placed wherever stakeholders are gathering online and in real time. Invite your various publics—kids, teachers, staff, and parents—to understand that the concept of brand can be powerfully adapted for education, and help them engage in the conversation. Help them recognize the value of brand in unifying a community in changing times. Encourage them to see branded as a way to rise above business as usual, where the tendency is to do the same thing over and over for the same result. Promote the brand effort as something that provides new thinking in a new age in which our students need new answers if they are to be at their best in a rapidly changing economy. The latest group in the branding demography that schools face is referred to as “Plurals” (Hais & Winograd, 2012). Plurals, also known as Gen Z, are those born after 1997. They are called Plurals because they will be the most culturally diverse—“plural”—group of Americans ever recorded. These unique Plurals are sitting in our classrooms today, and we need to engage them.

Plurals are children of the branding world. To many of them, brand doesn't mean narcissistic self-absorption. It's simply self-expression. Brand is now present in the minds of many young teachers and students who have developed their personal brand. *Time* magazine cites that 92%

of American children have an online presence before the age of 2, starting with parents' postings of nearly 1,000 images of their children before their fifth birthday (Sales, 2016). When leaders connect their understanding of brand value to classrooms of Millennial teachers who are already living brand-rich lives on social media, they will gain early adopters, potential collaborative team members, and committed brand ambassadors among teachers and students. They will also gain the attention of those who can collaborate to spread the word about school brand. They are experts in doing this for themselves. As your school brand is built and shared, the world opens easily because of these young stakeholders. The avenues to share your message grow quickly in this new age; online and in face-to-face engagements, the word spreads. Involve the next generations.

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## **Part Two: BrandED Matters to Today's School Leaders**

Branding matters in the changing world of learning, fueled by powerful digital resources (Sheninger, 2014). Telling a powerful school story and reaching an audience have never been more possible than in today's digital world, and never more necessary for a leader to embrace in a new world of competition and choice. Early brand adopters, whom you will meet in the pages of this book, are already out ahead of the pack on digital media, and they are passionate about what they do. They are inspired by their initial success and have developed professionally in ways that make them unique compared to other leaders. A brandED mindset takes professionals to the next level, to add strategic thinking and action steps for brand sustainability.

BrandED school leaders build brand in the name of school improvement, to advance better teaching, learning, and leadership and stronger school communities. The work advanced in the area of servant leadership

reinforces the importance of having a branded strategy. Sipe and Frick (2009) identify the following seven pillars of servant leadership:

- Person of character
- Puts people first
- Skilled communicator
- Compassionate collaborator
- Has foresight
- Systems thinker
- Leads with moral authority

The pillars of servant leadership speak to the mission of being branded; they define leadership as something to be shared, distributed, transparent, and focused on success and happiness. Branded does not rest on the shoulders of one person. It is a distributed, collaborative, service-oriented school improvement effort.

The marketing principle that guides business brand is its drive to build relationships. Branded educators focus strongly on that aspect. Successful school leadership in today's digital world is fueled by connectivity. Aren't educators always building, brokering, and sustaining relationships? Focusing on relationships is a cornerstone of your leadership effort and one that supports your branded strategy. Relationship building is a never-ending process, and in education it is not a part of a "sales cycle" (Connick, 2012) but is instead a part of an "awareness cycle." For any school leader, being relational is as important as being knowledgeable.

Branded behavior strategically focuses on trusted relationships. Mutual trust is a core of brand loyalty in business and in schools. A great workplace is created through organizational credibility, respect, fairness, and a foundation of trust (Mineo, 2014). The work involved in branded development relies on building welcoming access in real time and online so that people feel connected and happy in their work. Access



is supported by people who know that the calendar isn't just about scheduling the day's appointments but also about making time for a ritual of building trust. Your purposeful strategic effort to create relationships is vital.

As you lead your brandED school improvement plan, especially through a time of innovation, the following pillars are places in which to access new connectivity for your own brand and the school's brand. In each area, work on building relationships that promote both.

**Student achievement.** Standardized test scores are most often used to evaluate the overall effectiveness of a school. Public relations and communication efforts focused on evidence of growth in this area and in other academic and nonacademic areas can be conveyed through social media. Doing so will help create and strengthen a school's brand presence and convey why the brand matters.

**Quality of teachers and administrators.** Student achievement is directly linked to the quality of the school staff. Stakeholders are often more than willing to move to towns with higher taxes that attract the best and brightest educators. Utilizing social media to convey staff statistics can build the confidence of any community, which has a positive impact on a school's brand.

**Innovative instructional practices and programs.** Course offerings, curricular decisions, unique programs, and innovative instructional practices play a key role in student engagement while also having a positive impact on student outcomes (Whitehurst, 2009). Unique course offerings, curricula, and programs make a school or district stand out. The publication and dissemination of this information send a powerful message related to college and career readiness and the ability of students to follow their passions.

**Extracurricular activities.** Extracurricular, nonacademic activities are a valued component of any school community and help develop well-rounded students. Leaders who use social media as part of a combined communications and public relations strategy spotlight these activities to gain the attention of stakeholders.

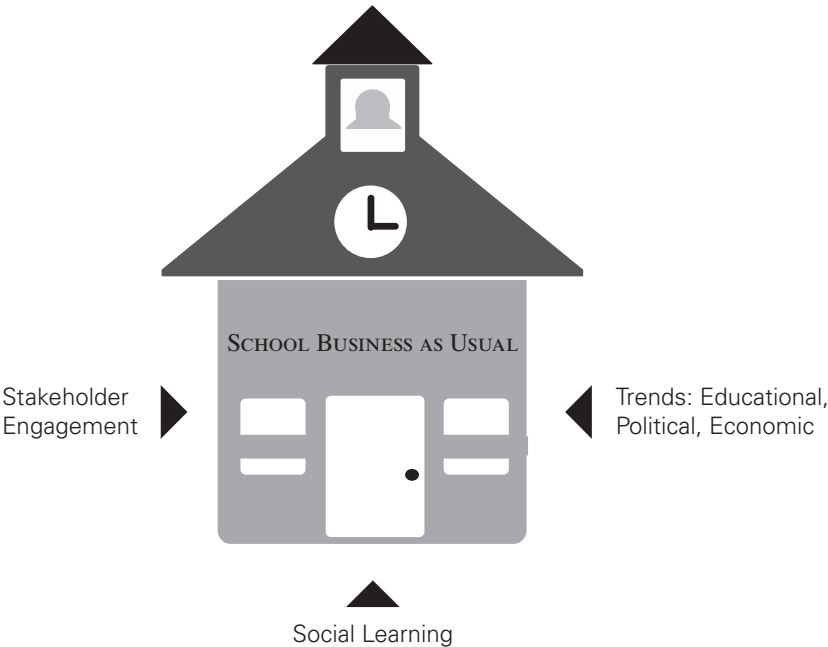
## BRANDED LEADERSHIP IS “BUSINESS AS UNUSUAL”

In his book *The End of Business as Usual*, digital analyst and futurist Brian Solis (2011a) challenged business leaders to face the world of digital and social advancement. He writes of an attitude that comes with the complexity of anytime, anyplace access: a “business as unusual” leadership attitude. BrandED school leaders can adopt this attitude to power relationships. Schools, just like any commercial organization, can’t operate within the business-as-usual model in this digital age. As our schools grow more diverse, they need new communication lanes. At the heart of our diverse communities is a rich mix of students, staff, and parents who want to engage. This is energizing, yet it creates challenges for school leaders today that their predecessors never imagined. Innovators like Mark Cuban and other notable business voices support this view through their own writing and teaching. “To be successful you need to see what others don’t see” (Cuban, cited in Solis, 2011a). By looking through the lens of brand, you can see the opportunity that others don’t see.

Creative branding thinking leads you to a unique vision of school improvement, one in which creativity leads to innovation. To borrow the classic Apple tagline from the 20th century, business as unusual gets you to “Think Different,” which was a key to turning around the Apple brand. As Figure 1.2 illustrates, conditions surrounding schools today form pressures that can result in positive change. Examining the pressures opens your mind to different, new thinking in leadership, enabling you to turn perceived threats into opportunities.

The foundational pressure that brings positive change in a brandED leader’s own Think Different campaign is the pressure of social learning. The online community exchanges through a wealth of content and through a wide range of voices, and it influences as it connects with our schools. Social learning is powered by available online content and tools that are free to all stakeholders. Your awareness of such resources and your willingness to incorporate them into your brand communication plan spark change.

**Figure 1.2** Outside Pressures on Today's Schools



Another pressure is stakeholder engagement, but this can be seen as a positive pressure on the status quo; and again, technology powers the accelerated rate of change. BrandED leaders recognize that their stakeholders have a growing need for connection to their schools, including exchange of information and meaningful dialogue. This pressure generates a positive result as business-as-unusual leaders meet the new needs and wants of stakeholders through a powerfully built brand that can be accessed in new media channels.

Finally, in a business-as-unusual mindset, leaders can build a brand that Thinks Different about protecting the interests of the school and its achievements. The right brand makes the position of the school strong enough to mesh with the current array of initiatives and changes that affect the education of children: Trends in education, politics, and economics influence educational excellence.

This new combination of pressures—social learning; stakeholder engagement; and educational, political, and economic trends—now impact school decision making. This combined pressure did not exist at the turn of this century. The Web 2.0 world created this new mix of conditions, which must usher in innovative practice to replace the unfulfilling cycle of doing the same thing and achieving the same result. In the words of marketing guru Seth Godin (2008), “The job isn’t to catch up with the status quo; the job is to invent the status quo.” That thinking of a new, better status quo is part of a brandED leader’s mission. A business-as-unusual brandED stance that pushes beyond the status quo is powered by the term *unique brand value* (UBV). This is new thinking for educators, but it is a business term used since the 1940s. Now, UBV is championed for use in building a brand outside the world of marketing (Eisenberg, 2016). Before you develop a brandED school strategy in your institution, reflect on your school’s UBV. Ask yourself:

What are my first thoughts about differentiating my school?

What makes it a unique place for me as a leader?

Could my school community be distinguished because of its UBV?

How can I and how can other school leaders convey that value in the way brand managers have done?

When you focus on your school’s UBV, try using a creative technique from the mind of entrepreneur Alp Behar. Behar suggests that leaders should not wait to make dreams come true with a bucket list for retirement. His Twitter post (April 18, 2016) says, “Every time when you have a new idea write them down and put them into your bucket. Check your Bucket every month.” Adapt this “follow your dream now” attitude as a leader of brand. Keep your own brandED bucket as you journey into brand with ideas that are firing up your creativity and that reflect the edge-dweller mindset of brandED leading. These differentiating ideas help you live in an innovative stance beyond the status quo as you begin to build a UBV proposition for your school. Welcome the new ideas that brand thinking ushers into your days, and keep track of them.

Leaders develop new professional skills when they adopt the strategic thinking of brand. As Madison Avenue has shown for years, branding work is a highly creative professional activity. Advertising legend and agency owner Bill Bernbach, said to be the model for the creative characters in TV's *Mad Men* series, celebrated that creative sense of play, changed the advertising industry's way of creating content, and delivered simple but highly creative and memorable campaigns that grew brand loyalty. His award-winning campaigns included the iconic 1960s We Try Harder campaign for Avis. It was the come-from-behind story of a brand, a model that inspires many brands to this day (Petit, 2014). Enjoy this creative part of your brandED leadership journey. If you haven't as yet felt the pull toward enjoying this move toward brand, you will. This activity can be joyful and even playful as it creates exciting new opportunities for change. Creative thinking will expand your possibilities for innovative brandED behavior.

In marketing, the term *brand myopia* refers to the tendency to repeatedly rely on one tried-and-true path to an audience (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015). It never produces creative results. It's a warning for school leaders. BrandED is about new possibilities and solutions. We've all tried to fix problems using status quo remedies. How many leaders have experienced the feeling that they have a lack of new ideas and solutions to address persisting problems. Branding will break you out of a pattern, making you and the team you build ready to take on a business-as-unusual position that is anything but the status quo.

See the shared leadership possibilities of brandED. Look across your digital community. Find talented stakeholders who understand the power of digital content. Include your students, young parents, and teachers who operate in the new business-as-unusual digital and social world. This segment of school stakeholders currently forms 60% of the viewing community of the Snapchat app. Once thought only for tweens, Snapchat's demographic has shifted to 18- to 34-year-olds who are skilled at telling stories in this new high-impact way. Snapchat has already caught the attention of serious marketers and holds a world of promise for educators (Gill, 2016). In September 2016, the company changed its name to simply Snap as it gets ready to support messaging

and engagement in new ways with its growing audience. (You may develop social media credibility using that newest version of the name, but many users still use the name Snapchat.)

Why not power business as unusual with the storytelling ability of these powerful and often creative stakeholders who are spending their lives as online storytellers?

## BRANDED RESULTS CAN EMPOWER SCHOOLS

The day we (Eric and Trish) met, we discussed three reasons why a brandED leadership mindset could matter to schools: improved culture, improved performance, and improved resourcing. BrandED mattered as a unifying school improvement component then, and it means even more now in our increasingly fast-paced digital world of communication. We live in a world where it took 35 days for Angry Birds to reach 50 million users (it took radio 35 years to hit that mark), and in a more recent game changer, it took about a week to make Pokémon Go a worldwide augmented reality experience that attracts millions of player a day (including Norway's prime minister, Erna Solberg, who was caught playing Pokémon Go in a parliament session).

That first brandED meeting was in 2009, before the explosion of apps, social media, and transparent platforms that deliver information to the masses in an instant and enable conversations to start and grow in a few collective keystrokes by users worldwide. The pace of change has quickened since then, and it won't be slowing down soon. What has remained the same since that time is the belief that despite the intensity of the noise in the digital world, leaders can find the right channels for their messages and can weather change. Brand thinking can benefit entire school communities: kids, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. BrandED can elevate a school's unique and valuable profile. Schools that adopt the business-as-unusual attitude see results that matter (Figure 1.3):

1. Improved **culture** shared through internal and external communication

**Figure 1.3** Results: Three Considerations for Becoming BrandED

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2. Expanded **performance** for students, staff, and connected stakeholders
3. Increased **resources** for the school community through internal and external partnerships

A brand doesn't appear overnight in any world, business or educational. BrandED strategy development is a collaborative creative, analytic, strategic journey. It employs a steady process, paced with benchmarks. Before starting on your brandED path and as you move into a brandED leadership mindset, you can spark your journey by asking yourself these questions:

1. What is our school's offer to an audience? What are the defining features of our district or school?

2. Whose attention are we trying to capture, and why? Who are the end users of our brand?
3. Is our audience segmented into smaller communities? Are there subgroups that we serve that have different needs and wants?

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## Part Three: BrandED Unifies a School Improvement Plan

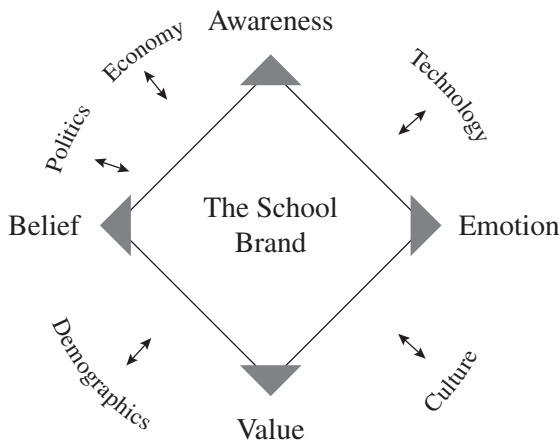
The business-as-unusual direction of brandED makes identifying brand value and articulating a school promise into a shared endeavor. Building a collective brandED team will support a business-as-unusual stance. Leaders create the movement. You claim your own UBV first, and your public commitment to adopting an authentically created personal professional brand can become relatable and compelling enough to draw in like-minded stakeholders and inspire them in the institutional effort to brand. Before you take on the internal microenvironment and external macroenvironment of education, mine your own brand. Once you have created it, live it with transparency. Start to develop relationships in real time and online and test your ability. You want to become aware of which relationships are worth your investment. The fact is that leaders must make the best use of available professional learning network tools, both traditional and new age.

### RELATING TO THE SCHOOL'S EXTERNAL MACROENVIRONMENT

As you build brand, look purposefully and confidently outward into the vast macroenvironment that surrounds schools today. It's the big world of content and communication where your brand and your school's brand will live, thanks to digital reach. Figure 1.4 illustrates the macro-environmental pressures of politics, economics, culture, and technology that may contribute challenges. We want our responses to the challenges to look rational, and brand thinking can help us conduct a deeper dive



**Figure 1.4** Macroenvironment for BrandED



into what our school is about. The stories we can tell about our brand as we face challenges that impact our schools will help us manage both in times of uncertainty and in times of harmony.

As you move among these macro forces, it helps to find another educational edge dweller, a fellow risk-taker and forward-thinking peer whom you can trust as you build brandED. In the military, there are trusted pals called “battle buddies.” You aren’t in a fight, but you’re on a unique, brave new journey, and it’s always better to travel in twos. Choose a brand buddy who is interested in launching a campaign, or someone who is already on the road to brandED and wants to be a mentor. Find someone who can discuss the ways that policy, the economy, and technology develop your brand leadership. Become accountability partners, learn how to work together, communicate and share on a regular basis, and don’t give up (Riviere, 2009).

By sharing with like-minded brand advocates, you can look for ways to deepen your brand endeavors. Use online and real-time engagements with colleagues to help focus your thinking on the ways you can distinguish your school brand as unique. Learn as much as you can through digital and social listening from schools that have found a unique way of

telling the stories of their school through shared messages and connecting content. When you have a crafted school brand that you have tested with others, your emotional connection to stakeholders in the external community and your passion for leading will be evident. In the day-to-day work you do, include the story of your own journey. The community will believe in the brand you've built if you are transparent. As you get to work on your own professional brand, use it often as you build new relationships in your existing circles as well as in new ones. Try out your brand in many ways, both personal and professional. In every meeting, include brand thinking. Ask colleagues about the term; see what they know, and learn how they think being brandED can advance a school community. Brand is based in communication, so talk to everyone about this idea. Someone like Brad Currie can help you find the words.

### **A BrandED Short Story: Brad Currie Gets the Word Out**

Brad Currie is the dean of students and supervisor of instruction for the Chester School District in Chester, New Jersey, and the founding partner and chief information officer for Evolving Educators LLC. He is also an author, blogger, and presenter who shares his passion for branding in education because he firmly believes in the way it can transform culture on a global scale (B. Currie, personal communication, March 30, 2016).

Branding in the educational world is all about getting the word out and creating a positive image of all the great things taking place in classrooms, schools, districts, and organizations. Case in point: Brad's son's teacher does an outstanding job of branding her classroom learning experiences through Twitter. Using the handle @MrsMooreFRSD, she shares what is happening in class with stakeholders on an almost daily basis. It's a

win-win for all involved, on several fronts. Parents can rest easy knowing that their child is in good hands and that learning is at a high level; Mrs. Moore can shed light on all the amazing learning experiences that her students are a part of day in and day out; and students learn that what they are doing has importance beyond the classroom. Right before dinner, Brad will check Mrs. Moore's Twitter feed to see what learning experiences took place in class on that particular day. For example, one time Mrs. Moore tweeted out pictures of students participating in a rock lab. That same night at dinner, Brad was able to have a thoughtful conversation with his son about the different types of rocks that he learned about. Because of Mrs. Moore's approach to branding her classroom, Brad and his son, Cooper, can feel proud of what was accomplished in class and know that those accomplishments are being recognized on a social media platform.

There is no doubt that branding in the educational world is contagious and is directly correlated to promoting the success of all students. Often, Brad will blog about the awesome things that are taking place with the students and staff at Black River Middle School in Chester. For example, he visited Jackie Epler's (@jdepler2) sixth-grade language arts classroom, where students were using an interactive presentation tool called Pear Deck to persuade their classmates to read a certain type of a book. The inspiration he felt from this particular lesson caused him to write a blog post so that others could see how technology can transform learning spaces. Putting this sort of thing out in cyberspace serves several purposes. First, it gives credit where credit is due: to the teacher for creating this wonderful lesson and to the students for having the skills to make an interactive presentation that engaged their peers in the topic at hand. Second, in writing a blog post about this best-practice learning experience, Brad shows readers that the school is doing some remarkable things. Word then starts to spread about how innovative Black River Middle School truly is, and that if those students can do these

*(continued)*

sorts of things with technology, then so can we. As Currie puts it, “Branding helps people reflect, learn, promote, and understand what is possible.” It also cultivates an image and mindset that Black River Middle is a place where innovative learning experiences happen on a daily basis.

Brad lives by this motto: “Promote, promote, promote and when you think you are done promoting, promote some more!” The amount of positive information a person can put out for all the world to consume is infinite. Too often, negative stories are associated with our classrooms, schools, and districts. Fortunately, the tide has turned with the evolution of technology and social media. Now more than ever, educators have the opportunity to connect, collaborate, consume, create, and curate. Sharing can be thrown in there as well. The more that educators share best practices, the better their educational profile becomes. Over the 5 years that Brad has been a connected educator on platforms like Twitter, he has seen many such opportunities arise. For one, he founded #Satchat, a weekly Twitter conversation for current and emerging school leaders that takes place every Saturday morning at 7:30 EST. Brad was also fortunate to write a few books because of the people he knows and respects within his Personal Learning Network (PLN). These accomplishments have become a part of Brad’s own educational brand. Through the work that Brad has done, particularly with educational technology, he has painted a positive picture in people’s minds of the kind of things he can do as they relate to helping learners, teachers, and leaders move forward.

The final destination in Brad’s journey on the educational branding train takes us to a company he formed with his business partners, Scott Rocco and Billy Krakower. Evolving Educators LLC, founded in 2014, takes great pride in providing relevant professional growth opportunities for educators. Looking back at how he built up his personal brand in the education world, Brad aimed to replicate that same success with his new company.

Through planning and holding successful educational technology trainings, the Evolving Educator brand has grown tremendously over the past several years. Word of mouth, coupled with a strategic social media presence, has placed Evolving Educators on the map. The company's website, [www.evolvingeducators.com](http://www.evolvingeducators.com), makes clear the brand that Brad, Scott, and Billy are trying to establish. From the Tomorrow's Classrooms Today Conference to Google Apps for Education Training to the countless speaking engagements around the country, Evolving Educators wants to maintain a positive brand presence and be at the forefront of innovative professional development.

BrandED leaders like Brad connect and share across channels as they grow their brandED community. The forces that school leaders face—culture, economics, society, and policy—will be easier to manage with a strong school brand (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015).

## **STANDARDS AND BRAND BUILDING**

Standardized testing is one of the main macroenvironmental forces that educators live with every day. Creating the narrative of brand among the negative stories of standardized testing from the external community can be a challenge. But brandED can help you tell your school story in ways that communicate the good work of your school in this environment. You can reach beyond a test score and use the business-as-unusual thinking of a brandED leader to illustrate the promise of a school, a promise that is expressed beyond a single sitting during a spring test evaluation and that showcases the authentic learning that your school provides. The culture of defining a school's value exclusively through testing can be changed using a brandED mindset to promote the academic and nonacademic stories that show a school's worth and value to a community. Collectively, brandED leaders with an inclusive mindset for defining education could change the culture of using tests as a sole

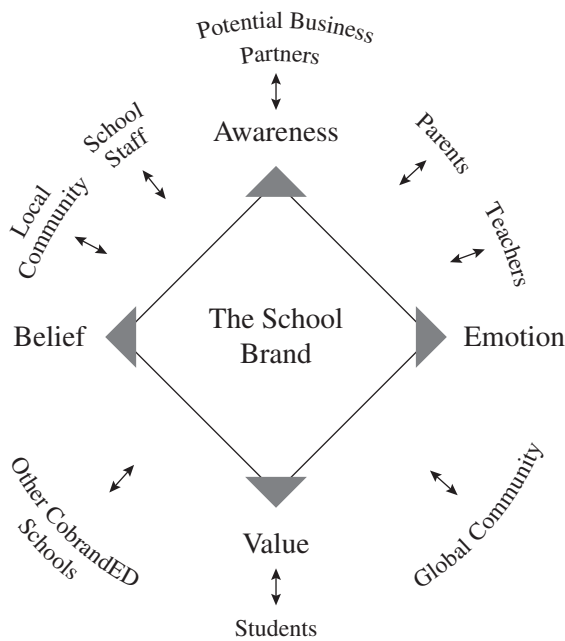
measure of value. A leader who adopts a brandED mindset can model a powerful way to shift current thinking about the quality of education.

Political pressure is one of the macro forces that can be managed with a brandED stance. A district or school should never be branded solely by a result on a standardized test. Your brand can value results that demonstrate capability, including national or state standards, but this is a score-driven marketing approach that uses limited data to describe the school brand. BrandED leaders think bigger and choose academic and social norms to measure as they value performance in a more expansive way. Stakeholders can collaboratively identify data found in the unique stories of your school's mission and purpose. These are narratives that show measurable pride in the educational experience. These are real tales of individuals and communities engaged in learning. A variety of academic and nonacademic content shows the performance of the school in various ways. Attention to brand found in the stories of what is good in a school illustrates a belief in children and teachers, in their growth of pride in their work, and in the celebration of their innovative thinking or the recognition of problem solving. These stories invigorate the brand image and contribute to the school's value as a unique brand. The school will find its distinguishing story in the difference it brings to the task of learning. It's not the brandED approach to strive to be like everyone else. Brand identity is unique.

## **MICROENVIRONMENT AND THE SCHOOL BRAND**

Communicating a UBV supports improvement efforts in the local microenvironment as well. This is the close community beginning with staff, teachers, kids, and parents, one that moves to include the relationships that are built from within, which strengthen the UBV (Figure 1.5). Your focus on brand in your school microenvironment won't upset the balance of the bigger ecosystem of state and federal mandates and of politics and economics. It can only help you develop success.

**Figure 1.5** Microenvironment for BrandED



Schools exist within a microenvironment of inner structures that identify, create, and promote messages (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015). A school with a unique brand—one that shows awareness of its brand mission, that values going beyond the status quo, and that taps into the emotion of learning—has achieved harmony in its microenvironment. A brandedED school promotes itself in an exciting and connected community. With a focus on a strong brand narrative in the brandedED school microenvironment, what is exchanged with the outside macroenvironment makes your brand unique.

A commitment to giving value in credible, innovative ways helps school leaders face challenges to education. Telling the story of the school and educating your community to share the school’s UBV helps enlists them in what Seth Godin (2008) calls “the tribe.” Creating

a unique education tribe is one way to quickly achieve the awareness that leads to building your school's UBV. As the tribe convenes, narratives are of great importance to the brand. The good work of the tribe, the content that you share through many digital and traditional channels, connects to sustaining a school's continuous improvement.

Look at brands that are the best at creating brand messages that connect. Winning brands make the communication flow between brand and audience easy and frictionless. The exchange is harmonious, and people are loyal. The Disney tribe, according to Seth Godin, operates on the simple message, "Make people happy!" Virgin's tribal brand basic is, "Never see obstacles, only opportunities." Tribes who identify a measurable core belief celebrate value together, and that emotion builds more loyalty.

In an education tribe, creating stories and showcasing across channels will indicate success and well-being in ways that scores on a standardized test can't begin to capture. Seth Godin's tribe metaphor captures the connected feeling of brand that gives schools new ways to define and express their worth. BrandED schools can creatively offer real-time demonstrations of authentic learning that teachers create and students value. Schools can champion their students' range of social, civic, and academic achievements and celebrate the school's UBV. What is shared on websites, blogs, and social and digital platforms can communicate a school's value in ways that engage stakeholders emotionally with the brand. Highlighting the evolution of new programs, resources, and curricular adoptions from a storytelling perspective inspires those involved in the endeavor. Honesty and a genuine sense of transparency result. Sharing the stories of new curricular changes through the experiences of those engaged in learning makes the connection to the brandED mission of the school.

The building of a tribe for your school's brand sustains positivity. Tribes are powerful in brand management, and when leaders form communities based on shared well-being, you find a tribe that is happy. Their narratives inspire continued confidence and loyalty among stakeholders. Your strategy distinguishes and promotes the value of your school as much as a company brand does for its consumers.



## **BRANDED CONTENT FUELS STAKEHOLDER CONNECTION**

Storytelling is foundational to your branded strategy. The story of the school is continuously communicated through narratives of your UBV. Educators' storytelling—in real time, through word of mouth, or online in digital and video promotions—is communication of the most authentic and powerful kind. It's a form of content marketing that prevails in business. Using this type of brand content in education can be marketable as it engages communities in your brand messaging on a wide stage through digital and traditional channels. The school experience produces rich content that can be described and shared in original forms and then saved and archived and even used again and again through repurposing to send a robust, consistent message of brand value (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015).

The emotional power of your stories creates brand loyalty for your school. Leading brands like Coke, Nike, and Apple communicate with their loyal Godinesque tribes with crafted stories and engaging personal narratives. The best brands use platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, and Snap in ways that engage and that offer value. Whole Foods has 1.7 million followers on Facebook, and not because the company only thinks about selling to them. Whole Foods thinks about “showing” how it values its followers' healthy lives. A big brand like Target learned to be global as it grew its market, yet it still acts locally. It shows its customers around the world that it values relationships. One way that it tries to show its connection is through affinity, meaning the caring it shows about its customers outside of a buy. Target offers that value connection when it sends online local traffic updates to customers in their local communities. This creates brand engagement and value beyond a sale price.

Be aware of the positive stories that abound in your school community every day and your need to promote them in connection with your school mission and brand. Use new channels available for sharing that help build your presence with the community. In school districts like Baltimore County Public Schools, leaders share unique stories of their

schools' core values and highlight examples of teaching and learning that establish relationships. They harness the power of story.

### **A BrandED Short Story: Ryan Imbriale and the BCPS Art of Storytelling**

Ryan Imbriale, Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) executive director of the Department of Innovative Learning, understands how important the art of storytelling is to the development of a brandED mindset. "In today's social media-rich society, marketing and showcasing the work of a public school system is as critical as the daily operations of teaching and learning" (R. Imbriale, personal communication, April 12, 2016). In this world of instant access to platforms like Facebook and Twitter, if you don't tell your story, someone else will (Sheninger, 2014). Ryan feels strongly that school systems need to be ahead of the message and ensure that the story being told is accurate, timely, and compelling. BCPS, under the leadership of superintendent Dr. S. Dallas Dance, is a leader in brand building and marketing.

One of BCPS's most successful approaches is Team BCPS Day, an annual event held in January, designed to rally the entire community around supporting public education. Since its inception in 2014, Team BCPS stakeholders have been asked to photograph themselves wearing blue and to send or post on social media those photos, as well as photos showcasing BCPS history. The district encourages all current, former, and future students, families, staff, volunteers, partners, and community members to join the party and show their support by participating in special Team BCPS Day activities. Imbriale stated, "Team BCPS Day 2016 yielded more than 3,000 tweets, reaching 2.3 million unique viewers, resulting in the hashtag #BCPSBlue trending in the middle of the day." The power in this annual event is that it celebrates pride in BCPS and an understanding of public education's vital role in the community.

BCPS has been bold to brand its initiatives and highlight the work through multiple media outlets. Two examples of this are the school system's Passport and STAT programs. The Passport program, dedicated to second language acquisition, is designed to ensure that every student becomes proficient in a second language. BCPS is currently implementing a Spanish-language instruction program in elementary schools county wide. It is one thing to implement the program, but BCPS is also not afraid to open its doors to outside visitors and showcase the program with videos and onsite visits ([www.bcps.org/academics/secondLanguageAcquisition.html](http://www.bcps.org/academics/secondLanguageAcquisition.html)).

The same is true of BCPS's initiative on transforming teaching and learning, known as Students & Teachers Accessing Tomorrow, or STAT. STAT is the multiyear transformation of BCPS into a complete 21st-century technology learning environment to prepare globally competitive graduates. As Imbriale puts it, "BCPS is first redesigning core content curriculum to redefine what instruction will look like in a blended learning environment, while placing a stronger emphasis on critical thinking and analytical skills." BCPS realized early on that in order to address such a massive transformation, communication was critical. School system leaders developed what they refer to as their "Eight Conversions: A Strategic Framework for Transformation" ([www.bcps.org/academics/stat/STAT-Flyer.pdf](http://www.bcps.org/academics/stat/STAT-Flyer.pdf)), one of the eight essential elements being communication. By highlighting communication, the system has put a focus on clear messaging around the initiative.

BCPS has communicated the STAT message through a comprehensive multimedia campaign. STAT's Web presence allows for anyone to learn more about the transformation of teaching and learning. For example, the STAT page on the BCPS website ([www.bcps.org/academics/stat/](http://www.bcps.org/academics/stat/)) serves as a place to get news and information on the overall program; the Lighthouse site ([lighthouse.bcps.org](http://lighthouse.bcps.org)) specifically targets those interested in the

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“pilot” schools that are the first schools to launch the program. Imbriale says, “The Lighthouse site is unique in that it serves multiple purposes as a professional development tool and as a storytelling site.” Both of these websites rely heavily on social media, using Twitter and blog posts as the foundation for sharing information “from the ground.” The Lighthouse site, specifically, is populated with blog posts from students, parents, and educators. In addition, the STAT website has news stories from local media, and videos that have been produced both in-house and by external partners.

One important aspect of BCPS’s communication approach is its acceptance—and endorsement—of social media. According to Imbriale, “The system does not shy away from Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, or Instagram, but rather encourages school faculty to tell their own stories and share classroom successes via social media.” These posts demonstrate a key understanding: that social media has become vital for daily interactions. Meeting stakeholders where they are and sharing the district message are critical to success. To help document the story of BCPS’s transformation, the hashtags #BCPSLH and #BCPSSTAT are heavily used to pull together and connect all of the schools’ journeys. Many times, these small social media snippets are expanded on through posts from stakeholders on the BCPS blog *Deliberate Excellence* ([deliberateexcellence.wordpress.com](http://deliberateexcellence.wordpress.com)).

To best meet the unique needs of all families, BCPS developed an innovative Parent University program to offer workshops—both in person and online—on such topics as technology, special education services, behavior management, and financial planning for postsecondary educational opportunities ([www.bcps.org/parentu](http://www.bcps.org/parentu)). By interacting with the community in multiple venues, BCPS reaches more stakeholders, engages those stakeholders continually, and gains their confidence. The outcomes help establish that BCPS is a trusted partner.

## **BRANDED SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: CULTURE, PERFORMANCE, AND RESOURCING**

Innovative student performance, both academic and nonacademic, takes the stage every day when schools share their brand's inspiring content. Defining the success of a school community and reporting the value of daily student performance are linked to a passion for education. Storytelling expands the definition of performance beyond a test evaluation. The Baltimore story proves this point.

Telling stories and showcasing student work create brand awareness in a community and thus engages fans. Your brand's strength depends on the authentic content you share with your stakeholders. Showcasing brings return on investment (ROI). In business, ROI is about the bucks, the net return divided by the cost of the effort (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015). The ROI for schools is not about money. It is focused on achieving the well-being of a school community through the connecting, defining message of brand. What makes the effort worthwhile for educators isn't dividing profits but more meaningful "shares"—sharing their content with the community in a way that builds relationships that in turn improve school culture, performance, and resourcing.

### **THE BRANDED STORYTELLER-IN-CHIEF**

One of the foundations for branded leadership in the digital age is to become the storyteller-in-chief (Sheninger, 2014). Take control of the narrative of your school with a branded stance. As you advance to a strategic plan, understand the value of presenting clear, compelling content in your role as an educational leader. The wealth of content at a school's fingertips, once identified, curated, and shared, will power your brand movement forward.

One strategy to harness these powerful narratives comes from communication consultant Carmine Gallo (2016). Gallo, Steve Jobs's speaking coach, reminds us that stories are free, priceless content that can educate and bring desired results. He presents six ways that

storytelling creates value for an audience: it can (a) inspire, (b) motivate, (c) educate, (d) build brand, (e) launch movements, and (f) change lives. Looking at those powerful categories of content, brandedED leaders can see the range of possibilities in getting the word out about their schools. Using the framework of Gallo's six types of story content can be a step to identifying content that promotes what's right about your school. Find content on your own and through your stakeholders.

Educators are among the strongest communicators on the planet. Becoming the storyteller-in-chief may be a new stance, but it isn't a sales job you are taking on. Think of it more as *persuading*. According to Daniel Pink (2012), persuasion is nonsales selling. With brandedED thinking, we message through our telling. It's a form of persuading. Our stories help build support and grow relationships with stakeholders; those relationships bring mutual trust. This is a business-as-unusual stance that helps you promote value as a storyteller-in-chief.

A storyteller-in-chief forms a collective team that is focused on communicating content—original and curated stories—that can reach many different publics so as to sustain the brand. Guided by the range of stories that Gallo's model presents, your diverse, talented, passionate team of stakeholders can find and curate the narratives of the school for messaging. The storyteller-in-chief sees the development of narrative content as a part of the school improvement plan. As you have started to survey your community landscape, it's not too early to begin to enlist a team, your brandedED collective for shared brand leadership. Your collaborative team of teachers, staff, administrators, kids, parents, and other key community members works to identify the brand's image, what it will promise, and the goals and result of the effort. Part of the job of the collective is collecting and curating stories, narratives, and conversations that show what is worth reporting to the community about the school brand in daily action. Keeping emotion and connection in mind, these are the stories of feeling that show kids learning in unique and meaningful ways. The genuine stories that schools craft for various publics promote who we are as educators. We can win grassroots support through our narratives. We can open up the world to others beyond

our borders to educate our students. We can even improve on our school's resources through our storytelling capacity.

## **THE MACRONARRATIVE AND MICRONARRATIVE FOR CREATING STORIES**

As leaders journey from brand to brandED, they adapt brand information to their school situation. One common thread that brand and brandED share is the power of story. Leaders commit to the never-ending narrative of promoting and sustaining school brand. Just as the iconic brands have shown, telling stories of the relatable day-to-day moments connects a tribe. A common thread of experience shared through crafted brand content makes people happy. It also informs and engages a community. In the stories of a school, audiences see the consistent, tangible result of their investment in their school community. As with the legacy business brands, our stakeholders can admire and appreciate the school brand value as an anchor to building a core tradition, a legacy. BrandED's reason for being is to improve the long-term development of schools. Developing a legacy attitude with a brand commitment will enlist support for what the school brand is promising and delivering every day.

In the lead of the brandED strategy, the storyteller-in-chief personally models the value of brand as a tool for communication in the digital age, and leads the call to action, promoting the school's value on websites and across other school-sanctioned platforms. Narratives both large and small are valued as tangible evidence of the school's worth. Stories come in different sizes and hold different purposes, but simply said, they keep the engagement going. Sharing through big ideas, called macronarratives, may convey important information related to issues and policies and help the brand navigate in a "frictionless" way. For example, a school's new homework policy is an example of a needed macronarrative for the community to embrace. Smaller stories, micronarratives, found in both text and video, mix with the macronarrative across channels. Micronarratives come from every edge of the school

community and are told in the engaging voices of the community in digital and social exchange. The mix of messages and stories creates even more brand value. This is a public commitment, demonstrating the school's transparent effort to engage with a community on many interesting levels. The power of storytelling is essential to brand development of a school community where the remarkable ideas and actions of that community can define success in new, exciting ways.

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## Conversation 1 Tips

- **Check out** brands in the marketplace that resonate. Find the brands that have your loyalty and examine the influence of brand feeling on your own choices.
  - **Create** a short brand history slideshow of your favorite legacy and new brands. Include global brands. What do they have in common with a potential school brand you develop? Keep this presentation for your first public meeting.
  - **Assess** your school's current website through a quick "brand walk-through." Does it have a unifying message; a unique brand value (UBV); and a feeling, something emotional that tells the story of a unique brand?
  - **Challenge** yourself to draft your school's image, promise, and result on the back of an envelope or on a napkin, and share with a colleague.
  - **Explain** the difference between brand and brandED to a colleague and how defining a school brand is important in today's digital world.
  - **Identify** a value of servant leadership that could connect to a professional brand you will build.
  - **Adopt** a business-as-unusual stance for your development of brand by examining the range of stories that your school can present to the community.
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## Conversation 1 Reflections

Before holding public conversation around why business brand tenets inform educational leadership, think about these questions:

- How is digital transparency breaking down the barriers to sharing for school leaders, and will it help deliver results?
  - How can the big idea of business brand inform my own professional leadership growth?
  - How have I shown loyalty and trust with the brands I value? How do I engage with them in ways that I want my stakeholder community to engage with my school's brand?
  - Do I understand my role in a "nonsales" sales effort as an educator? Can I use persuasion related to my personal professional brand and my school's brand as a vehicle to create stakeholder relationships?
  - Do I have a sense of what my school's UBV may be? Have I thought about my own UBV?
  - Can I find the brand ambassadors who can share the storytelling vehicles for brandED?
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