

Branding Changes Without Chaos

WHY BRAND

LET'S DEFINE IT FIRST

A brand is not just your logo. It's not colors, a tagline, or voice & tone guidelines.

LET'S DEFINE IT FIRST

Your brand is made up of the way others
perceive you.

LET'S DEFINE IT FIRST

Making changes to your brand is an exercise in influencing how people understand your organization.

For Fraternal Organizations, Brand Changes are Rarely “Just About Design”

“THIS ISN’T THE [INSERT YOUR ORG] THAT I JOINED!”

Brand changes can feel personal when members strongly identify with the experience that they had.

“YOU MUST NOT CARE ABOUT OUR HISTORY”

Changes can be misinterpreted as a “distancing” from the past, which in organizations that rely on tradition can be very tough to swallow.

“OUR CHAPTER DOES THINGS DIFFERENTLY”

National organizations rely on hundreds of chapters to communicate the brand consistently across campuses.

“WHO MADE THIS DECISION?”

Fraternities and sororities operate through layered leadership, volunteer influence, and constantly changing student leadership.

“COOL!” (THEN CRICKETS)

Even the supporters can often slide back into doing things the old way.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

The risk in a rebrand is not whether people like it. It's whether the organization can adopt it consistently.

It Starts Before You Design Anything

The most successful brand projects begin before any visuals are created. Early conversations with stakeholders help identify emotional friction points, operational realities, and the values people feel must be preserved throughout the process.

For your organizations, this step matters because adoption depends on trust. Members and alumni are far more likely to support change when they understand why it is happening and feel represented in the process.



The Adoption Framework

ALIGNMENT FIRST

Build understanding around why the organization is evolving before introducing creative changes.

ROLLOUT CAREFULLY

Introduce change intentionally through leadership groups, pilot audiences, and chapter communication.

BUILD SOMETHING TRUE

Find the thing that people love about the organization, and find ways to make it shine.

MAKE IT EASY

Support long-term consistency through training, governance, and centralized resources.

HOW IT WORKS

ALIGNMENT FIRST

The goal is not to get everyone to agree, or even to hear from everyone. The goal is to ensure nobody feels blindsided.

01

Listen Before You Position

Early stakeholder conversations are critical. Alumni, volunteers, staff, chapter leaders, and students often hold very different perspectives on what the organization represents and what should be preserved. Those tensions need to surface early, before they become public resistance later.

Strong alignment work identifies emotional pressure points before launch and helps build a shared understanding of why change is happening in the first place.



What Does Alignment Look Like

SHARING CONTEXT

Help stakeholders understand the organizational challenges driving the need for change. This includes helping your agency partner understand.

HAVE A CLEAR NARRATIVE

Define what is changing, why the organization is evolving now, and most importantly what this does *not* change. Give the core project stakeholders (board members, leadership staff, etc) the talking points they need to answer questions consistently.

EARLY INVOLVEMENT

Create opportunities for key audiences to feel represented before rollout begins. This is your most valuable research input, and doubles as goodwill building.

EXPECTATION MANAGEMENT

Prepare leadership for the reality that strong brands require clarity, not unanimous approval. There will be alumni who do not like something about the brand updates. That's okay. It's good even. It means you made meaningful change.

BUILD SOMETHING TRUE

The easiest brands to adopt are the ones people
already recognize as real.

02

You're Clarifying, Not Redoing

Many organizations think about rebranding as inventing a new identity. That usually creates resistance because members and alumni no longer recognize themselves in the story being told.

Even if the flashy visual elements get reimaged, the strongest brand positioning work does the opposite. It identifies the truths already present within the organization — the behaviors, values, culture, and experiences that people consistently associate with it — and expresses them with greater clarity and consistency.



True Also Has to Feel Different

Generic brands that don't stick out cause just as many adoption problems as brands that swing too big. If you don't take the time to identify a distinctive way to express the truth, you'll end up falling flat.

IT WON'T FEEL LIKE YOU

Positioning fails when it reflects aspiration without grounding itself in lived member experience. Our members don't think we're generic — a generic brand won't sit right with them.

YOU SOUND LIKE EVERYONE ELSE

Many organizations rely on interchangeable language about leadership, values, and growth. It's tough when we “sell” the same thing in so many ways. But distinction makes you memorable.

YOU LOSE SPECIFICITY TRYING TO APPEAL TO EVERYONE

Broad messaging often weakens differentiation instead of strengthening it.

YOU'RE FORCED TO CHANGE DIRECTIONS TOO OFTEN

Organizations struggle when branding decisions are driven by trends instead of strategic clarity.

How Strong Positioning Gets Built

RESEARCH

That early stakeholder listening doubles as your most valuable research tool.

SIMPLE FIRST

Don't try to start with the most creative idea. Creativity helps find unique positioning, but the focus should be clarity. Do we all clearly understand on the direction we're headed?

PATTERN RECOGNITION

Don't settle for "well every chapter is different" or "there's such a big difference in generations." Both true. But hunt for the connectivity, and you'll find it.

CREATIVE TRANSLATION

Now we get into the fun part. How do we take the simple but powerful ideas from our strategic work and bring it to life with creativity?

MAKE IT EASY

If the system feels difficult, people will create
their own shortcuts.

03

Consistency Depends on Usability

Most chapters are not struggling to implement the brand because they dislike it. They are struggling because they lack the time, tools, structure, or confidence to implement it consistently.

Organizations often assume guidelines alone will solve this problem. In reality, adoption improves when the system reduces effort instead of increasing it. Templates, centralized resources, modular websites, editable content blocks, and clear examples make consistency easier to maintain across hundreds of decentralized users.

The simpler the system feels, the more sustainable it becomes.



Systems that Work

EASY TEMPLATES IN THE TOOLS THEY USE

Provide ready-to-use assets for recruitment, events, social media, and chapter communications. Ask chapters (collegiate and alumnae) what they need.

AUDIENCE TAILORED RESOURCES

There should be a single set of ultimate brand guidelines. But how that gets presented can, and even should, vary depending on who is using them. An alumnae volunteer needs very different info than the full time design staff does.

STRUCTURED FLEXIBILITY

It sounds like an oxymoron. But we have to allow chapter expression while protecting organizational consistency. Let them know clearly where creativity is encouraged vs where standards are necessary.

ROLL IT OUT THOUGHTFULLY

A successful launch creates momentum, not
confusion.

04

Phased Approach

Brand rollout is not one announcement.

Successful organizations build familiarity before broad exposure. Leadership teams are trained early. Pilot groups help test implementation. Communication focuses on explaining why changes are happening, not just revealing what changed visually.

This phased approach creates confidence, surfaces operational challenges earlier, and gives the organization visible proof that the new system works before adoption scales broadly.



A Strong Rollout Strategy

INTERNAL PREPARATION

Before launch, staff, volunteers, and chapter-facing leaders should understand not only what is changing, but why the organization is evolving and how the new system should be implemented consistently.

PILOT ADOPTION

Early adopter chapters and leadership groups help identify operational issues, create visible examples of success, and build confidence before organization-wide rollout begins.

CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Successful launches focus as much on explaining the reasoning behind the change as they do on presenting the visual identity itself. People support what they understand.

LONG-TERM SUPPORT

Brand adoption does not end after launch week. Ongoing training, accessible resources, and reinforcement help maintain consistency as leadership transitions over time.

PUSH¹⁰

Thank You!