

The Power of Strong Organizational Identity

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As an organization, the most crucial step of strategic communication is creating an identity. Merriam-Webster defines identity as, “the distinguishing character or personality of an individual” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). We can extend this definition to include “the distinguishing character or personality of,” an organization! An organization’s identity is what helps it to stand out as unique. However, living in a liquid-modern world, setting up an identity is simply not enough; identity *maintenance* is equally as important. I believe that both curating *and* preserving a strong sense of identity are essential to successful strategic communications.

Many organizations will begin structuring their identity by asking questions such as ‘who are we?’ and ‘who are we not?’ Rauch, Stanske, and Canado discuss these as anti-identity and identity reservoirs (Rauch, Stanske, & Canado, 2020). Organizations will also likely generate a mission statement and/or a vision statement in order to define the focus of their organization and what they aim to achieve. In this ‘digital age’, it is essential for organizations to have a strong sense of identity as they navigate the ever-changing environment of the world. Conboy and Doyle discuss the concept of ‘liquid-modernity’ as a state of the world where, “Uncertainty, rather than being dominated or controlled... must now be absorbed, lived with and even manipulated” (2020, p.3).

YEG Cycle Spin Studio is a company that I work for and I believe that they did an excellent job of identity creation and continue to do an excellent job of identity maintenance. From my first day of working there, they made it clear what they stood for as a company, and that all communications needed to align with their mission statement. As their social media intern for Edmonton, I help to curate content for stories and interact with our audience in the form of direct messages, story reposts, and replies. The entirety of the guidance that I have been given surrounding how to reply to people, what to repost to our public stories, and what to curate

to put up on our platforms has been focused on maintaining brand identity and promoting health, happiness, positivity, and community.

An identity reservoir is defined by Rauch, Stanske, and Canado as, “a socially constructed cognitive understanding from which organizational members draw claims and attributes to describe their organization” (2020, p. 139). Essentially, an identity reservoir is what organizational members will describe their organization as. At YEG Cycle, “We are in the business of happiness” (YEG Cycle, n.d.). We aim to encourage and push our riders to do things that are good for their bodies and minds and take time for themselves. Across all social platforms, we keep our language positive and promote an ‘I can’ attitude of gratitude. We bolster up our community to focus on the good. These things are all parts of our identity reservoir which we revisit with every online communication and within every team meeting.

On the other hand, an anti-identity reservoir is “... the set of claims and substantiating formal and symbolic attributes from which members draw flexibly to express who they are not and who they do not want to become” (Rauch, Stanske, Canado, 2020, p. 139). Curating and revisiting this concept of who and what your organization *is not* and does not want to become distinguishes an organization as unique and unparalleled. On their website, YEG Cycle states, “We are not in the business of spin classes. We are in the business of happiness” (YEG Cycle, n.d.). As this statement demonstrates, YEG Cycle relies strongly on not only an identity reservoir, but also on an anti-identity reservoir. Ever since I started taking spin classes at YEG Cycle, I noticed the lack of judgement that the organization promoted. When I took on the position as the social media intern, the team communicated to me that as an organization we are not elitist, judgemental, or discriminatory. This anti-identity reservoir has become a poignant

aspect of how many of the employees and customers of YEG Cycle view the organization; I feel confident in telling new riders not to worry because there is **no** judgement in the studios.

Mission and vision statements are another crucial element of identity building for many organizations. Effective mission and vision statements must be specifically aligned with what the organization aims to achieve and must be reiterated regularly within internal communication. On their website, YEG Cycle defines their mission as follows: “To help our family and Bikergang live happier and healthier lives, while creating a positive impact on the communities that surround us” (YEG Cycle, n.d.). According to Allison’s research, “...mission statements are definitely related to organization performance” (Allison, 2019, p. 10) . Not only does YEG Cycle’s online presence align with this mission statement, the staff and instructors at the studio continuously promote health, happiness, positivity, and community as well. As I have begun navigating YEG Cycle’s Twitter account as part of my internship, I have discovered that many of the trends that get a lot of engagement on this platform are sarcastic and/or somewhat negative. I have curated sarcastic tweets to put up on the platform to align with these trends but have been reminded by my team that we aim to put out happy, encouraging, positive pieces of content and that the sarcastic nature of the tweets does not align with our mission. Clearly, YEG Cycle as an organization coordinates all of their communications with their mission statement and revisits it often internally.

“Uncertainty is generated and required in liquid modernity” (Conboy & Doyle, 2020, p. 2). The Covid-19 pandemic, if nothing else, has brought uncertainty into the world like never before. As the climate of our world rapidly changes and grows and as we adjust to the challenges that this pandemic brings into our lives, having a powerful identity to rely on is more important than ever and will help organizations to be able to weather the unexpected. As cases have

continued to rise, the team at YEG Cycle has expressed to the interns and other social media employees the importance of emphasizing our safety measures and protocols. As a brand who continuously promotes the health of our customers, we were able to create and post content highlighting our safety protocols quickly and effectively; despite living in a liquid-modern, uncertain world, we were able to find certainty in the stability and strength of our identity.

Constructing and then conserving a resolute, focused identity will greatly aid organizations in their internal and external pursuits; key internal stakeholders and customers/consumers will be sure of what the organization stands for. YEG Cycle Spin Studio has done an exceptional job of this identity constructing and conserving. They utilize identity and anti-identity reservoirs to maintain a sense of who they are and who they are not. Their mission statement is directly reflected in both internal and external communications and is revisited regularly by internal stakeholders. Having this steadfast sense of identity has helped them to be able to adjust to and navigate their role in this liquid-modern, ever-changing world. Overall, their success as an organization can be at least partially attributed to their identity creation and maintenance.

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