

Religious Nonprofits are Rebranding to Attract Wider Audiences

As nonprofits continue to reconsider their strategies in the face of difficult economic conditions, many organizations are changing their names and rebranding to remove religious connotations, allowing them to appeal to a broader audience. The underlying reasons for the name change vary, since various types of nonprofit organizations face different issues according to their religious affiliation, audiences, or community they serve.

International Organizations

When international aid organization **Christian Children's Fund** changed its name to **ChildFund International**, the goal was to position the 70-year-old organization for future success. They reacted to both internal and external factors, such as new constituent needs, adapting to local markets to be more effective in executing their mission, and clarifying the relationship with their funding organization, ChildFund Alliance, a network of 12 charities from which the group receives a third of its budget. Also, removing the word Christian from their name helps to reach a wider donor base.

The name change is part of a larger shift in strategy. Anne Goddard, the charity's president, said the group will tailor programs to children and place a greater emphasis on the relationship between poverty and children's well being. Also, it will enable the charity to work in countries not predominantly Christian, such as Afghanistan. There are some challenges, however, with the name change. ChildFund International will lose some donors who believed they were supporting a religious organization, Ms. Goddard said. Yet the charity's new name allows it to pursue grants from corporations and foundations, which had not supported the group in the past.

As organizations consider changing their name, it's critical to earn internal support for the brand. ChildFund International engaged employees and donors in the process. The charity conducted focus groups with donors, contacted people who received help from the charity overseas, and discussed the idea with board and staff members. When trustees voted to change the organization's name, ChildFund International sent mailings to supporters explaining the decision and welcoming questions. Also, staff members participated in a contest choosing the name of the child's figure in the group's new logo.

National Organizations

On a national level, associations that represent religious organizations hold a particular responsibility in representing and promoting their members' wide-ranging needs when considering changing names.

In the Jewish world, **The Solomon Schechter Day School Association**, an umbrella organization of 49 schools in the Conservative movement, has rebranded itself as the **Schechter Day School Network**, with a new marketing strategy and logo. The change was in response to issues of shrinking enrollment and competition from newer community day schools as well as Hebrew charter schools.

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Their challenge was highlighted in the findings of a 2008 UJA-Federation study called "To Go Or Not To Go," revealing that many liberal Jews in New York area were unaware of the differences between Orthodox day schools and non-Orthodox ones, perceiving both as "insular" and weak in secular subjects.

As a result, Schechter unveiled a new tagline: "Engage The World," that positions them in a more secular way, as well a bright red "rose compass" as a logo meant to evoke a Star of David to keep some reference to Judaism. The new branding helps to emphasize that Schechter schools are open to Modern Orthodox, Reform and secular families as well — and the differences between them and community schools are not always especially noticeable.

Local Organizations

Local organizations face similar issues. In Greenwich, Connecticut, the **Westchester Fairfield Hebrew Academy** rebranded itself as the **Carmel Academy**. In this case the name change references the Carmel Mountain range in northern Israel, to highlight the school's connection to the country. "Westchester Fairfield Hebrew Academy really talked a lot more about location than the vision and the character of the school," Head of School Nora Anderson said. The new name shifts the emphasis from the specific

focus on the Hebrew language to a more general approach of teaching Jewish values, which appeals to a larger potential audience for the school. Instead of changing their organizational name, some nonprofits are addressing the religious connotations of their name in other ways.

For **Incarnation Camp**, the oldest camp in America which is funded in part by the Episcopal Church, changing the name of the camp was not a viable option. Instead, they emphasized division names like **Pequot and Sherwood**, which have the cachet of a traditional overnight camp.

The organization's logo still appears on the camp's marketing materials, but in a less prominent way. This is part of a longer term plan to transition to using Pequot and Sherwood more predominantly to attract new campers, while keeping the identity of the camp recognizable for alumni.

Regardless of the type of change, effectively communicating the organization's strategy and receiving input from staff and donors is important in getting buy in and ensuring the success of the initiative. Understanding people's changing opinions about religion and the role of nonprofits in society is essential if individual nonprofits and the sector as a whole are to remain relevant.

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