
To Mimic Another Nonprofit's Name?

Doctors Without Borders is a successful name. But what about other organizations that copy the name like Lawyers without Borders or Engineers without Borders? Is that a smart strategy? This article provides an answer.

Names Provide a Shorthand for Understanding

Since many nonprofits missions are complex, the name of the organization can act as shorthand in helping people understand what they do. The name Doctors Without Borders does this very well. You get a clear picture of doctors personally helping other people regardless of nationality, politics or religion.

So it is understandable that other organizations, such as Lawyers Without Borders, Engineers Without Borders, and other organizations using that naming formula, would want to capitalize on that same shorthand to explain their mission. After all, why go through a lengthy description what you do, if there is already a frame work that people are familiar with?

A Strong Name Is Essential for Recognition

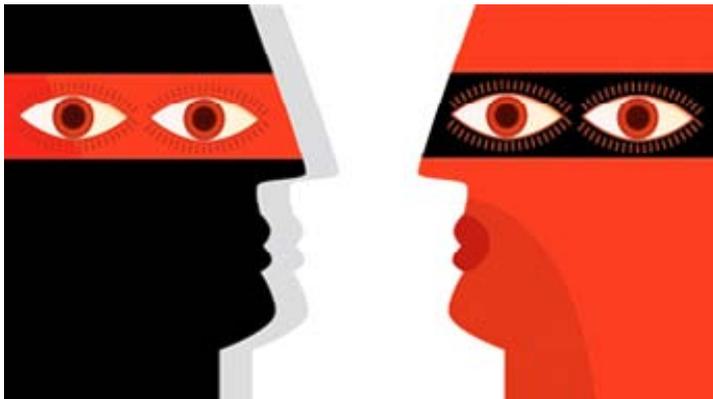
It's a very busy world, and there is a lot of competition – with about a million nonprofits registered in the United States, the public has a difficult time distinguishing between groups with similar missions or similar names. Nonprofits need to do everything they can to stand out. Lacking large marketing budgets for advertising or online promotion, an organization's name plays an important role in catching people's attention, distinguishing the organization, and conveying its mission.

A Memorable Name

What makes Doctors Without Borders a strong brand, is that its model was innovative and compelling when it was founded nearly 40 years ago. The concept of flying doctors into another country to help people in need captured people's imaginations. It exemplified the best of humanity and selflessness. And with its uniqueness and memorability, it is no surprise that it became a very strong brand.

The Problem of Copying a Unique Name

The problem with other organizations that borrow the nomenclature, is that they are not the first group to use that approach, and so they can't really capitalize on that uniqueness. Being the first organization to create a new model for service counts for something. People like to donate to leaders. So while organizations that copy that model gain the advantage of easily conveying their mission, they lose the ability to claim uniqueness and a leadership role. And as a result their fundraising appeal is not going to be as strong.



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Part of the fundraising appeal is the relevance of your mission. Times have changed since Doctors Without Borders was created. The concept of helping people across borders is no longer unique. The internet allows people to assess and help people in other countries directly. Emphasize the organizations impact

An organization founded more recently should take this into consideration. People like to know what impact their donations have, so a better naming strategy would be to emphasize the impact that the organization achieves (for example, emphasizing how the lawyers and engineers are changing people's lives).

Search Engine Considerations

Another consideration these days, is how names appear in search engines. Using part of the name of another organization limits the unique words that are searchable. For example, searching for "without borders, non-profit" in Google, delivers pages of results, all vying for attention, and the one that started it all (Doctors Without Borders) is lost in the mix.

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