



BUSINESS FOR DIPLOMATIC ACTION
Building New Bridges to The World

Brand Foundations

BDA Recommended Strategic Concept for Communications & Messaging

On behalf of the United States

Background & Context

Experts in the private sector who establish strong and enduring brands understand that, first of all, a “brand” is not what you say, but rather what you do, how you do it, and why. Thus, before any “messaging” can be considered, it is necessary to establish very specific and agreed upon “brand foundations” from which all future messaging will proceed.

While it may seem trivial to liken the image of the United States to a “brand”, it is nonetheless useful to apply proven brand building techniques used by experts in the private sector. The first of these is the construction of the “brand foundations” for the United States of America in today’s world. Arriving at these “brand foundations” is a two step process. The first step is a *discovery* step in which experts from the “brand’s” key stakeholder groups are brought together in a facilitated session which can be likened to an archeological dig into the “brand’s” origins and values. At least two days must be devoted to this part of the process in which participants work to form answers to the following questions. It is useful to answer these questions as if the brand is a person. *Thus the first question is:*

- **Where do I come from?** Every “brand” has a unique asset that cannot be copied—its own past. This is certainly true of the “brand” America. Understanding and re-interpreting what made a brand successful in the past can be a powerful source of inspiration for the future. Values can remain relevant even when the world appears to have changed beyond recognition.

Other questions to be answered by the “brand” are:

- **What do I do?** In the commercial world, answers to this question define the territory that the brand is going to operate in (and, importantly, what it won’t do). Answering this question for the United States will involve detailing the country’s present and future ambitions and importantly, how it sees its role in the world.
- **What makes me different?** Often, the answer to the question above will provide a point of difference from other brands, or in this case, other nations. It’s important, however, that the “brand’s” point of difference be based on some tangible and genuine qualities and values that can be observed and appreciated by all who experience the “brand”.
- **Who am I for?** In considering commercial brands, the person the brand most wants to have a relationship with is described and agreed upon. If the “brand” is to have broad appeal and be for many people, a particular need is identified. **For example,** McDonald’s answer to this question is: “*For the kid inside everyone*”. America’s answer might be: “*For all who want freedom and justice.*”



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- **What am I like as a person?** Brand builders in the private sector know that success depends on *how* a brand behaves and how it communicates. In business, as in diplomacy, style is often substance. In answering this question on behalf the U.S. participants think of the country as if it were human, backed by examples or analogies that will help direct all brand communications. It is also useful to determine what the brand is *not* like as a person.
- **What do I fight for?** In the private sector, a sense of specific mission and purpose can be the single most powerful element that creates a strong brand. By this we do not mean a competitive goal but a very particular statement of how this brand wants to make a difference in the world. The power of this question is that it forces us to look far into the future to consider the “brand’s” impact on society, on the environment, on culture and on individuals’ lives.
- **What do I value?** This question is closely connected to “The fight”. It usually provides the reason a brand fights for what it fights for. In commercial terms, it is the “reason why”—the word that would appear on the brand’s banner as it goes into battle, the reason our fight is important to us.

Once all the questions are answered to the satisfaction of all participants, the “brand foundations” can serve as a platform for all messaging. But it is useful to take a second step which is the *distillation* of the brand foundation into a tight succinct “strategic concept” One way to digest the Brand Foundations into a shorter, more memorable concept is to use the Three P’s. What is the brand’s **Point of View? Promise? Personality?** Thus, after a thorough Brand Foundations discovery process, the brand Jazz at Lincoln Center for example now embraces the following strategic concept:

Point of View:	Jazz can make the world a better place
Promise:	We will lift you
Personality:	Swingin’

A *positioning concept* can be expressed as the right combination of the Three Ps as described above.



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Executing the Five-Part Communications Strategy

Once a positioning statement is agreed upon, then and only then do you begin to build a comprehensive communications plan. For this process we have several additional tools at our disposal for identifying, communicating, and evaluating each audience we plan to reach out to. Attached is an example of one of those tools, what we would call a **Multi-Audience Grid** which clearly outlines *Desired Action*, *Barriers to Action*, *Reward for Action*, *Support for Reward*, and *Media Communications* for each distinct audience. All communications would flow from the original positioning concept and agreed upon objectives.

Were BDA given the task of crafting an action proposal in response to the public diplomacy challenges that we now face as country, we would evoke the strategy-development process described above and guide key message stakeholders in the federal government, NGO community, and private sector through a rigorous brand foundations applied to the United States. Arriving at an agreed upon Strategic Concept for the United States would go far towards bringing both coherence and appeal to the many voices who speak on behalf of our country.