

# Reviving The Soroptimist Brand



SOROPTIMIST  
Best for Women

For some time now, the concept of branding has been prevalent in the world of marketing. Once just the province of for-profit companies, the concept of branding has taken center stage for non-profits employing mission-based marketing in an extremely competitive landscape. Non-profits understand that the easier they make it for different constituents to identify them, the more likely people will be to remember them, take action on their behalf, or donate money. Additionally, a strong brand can even help an organization stave off extinction in a time of crisis.

A brand represents trust, a promise and a perceived value. According to marketing expert Larry Gulko, an organization's brand is probably the single most important asset it owns. A strong brand is critical to successful programs, member recruitment and retention, fundraising and public awareness.

A brand is the singular idea or concept that an organization owns inside the minds of the public. Disaster relief? Red Cross. Low-income housing and the elimination of homelessness? Habitat for Humanity. Retired people? AARP. Organizations with the most successful brands are those that fulfill

a unique niche. And associations that have created a strong, relevant brand will have people wanting to join because of the value being offered to them. According to Gulko, "To conquer in today's ever-changing competitive landscape and create a winning brand, you must first create a new category and separate your associ-

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ation from the rest of the pack. ... In the marketing world, the specialist wins and the generalist loses in the long term. So be known for something special—something that delivers premium value and truly differentiates you from other associations. **When you try to be all things to all people, you generally end up being nothing to many."**

## Components of a Brand

A brand is the sum total of what an organization does and what value that brings to the public served (which includes its members). This value is communicated in many ways: through pro-

grams, logo, color, tagline, mission statement, and even an organization's name.

## Programs

For non-profit organizations such as Soroptimist, their programs or signature activities—more than anything else—define their brand. The American Red Cross is known for its blood drives. AARP is known for its advocacy on preserving Social Security. The Girl Scouts are known for girl-focused programs and the annual cookie sale. Soroptimist should be known for its programs that help women and girls—particularly the Women's Opportunity Awards, Soroptimist's signature program.

- American Red Cross is known for blood drives.
- AARP is known for its advocacy on preserving Social Security.
- Girl Scouts are known for girl-focused programs and selling cookies.
- Is Soroptimist known in local communities and throughout the world for programs that improve the lives of women and girls?

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## Logo

A logo is a design or graphic representation symbolizing an organization. Logo designs originated in the 19th century when the style was detailed and ornate. The style today is toward simple yet stylish designs that are eye-catching and easier for the brain to memorize. Logos, including their colors, are very powerful and communicate a great deal about an organization.

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Companies often implement a new logo or refine an existing one when their old one no longer adequately represents their brand. A good example is the Betty Crocker logo, which has changed over the years to project a woman of today and cement the company's brand as one that continues to be relevant. A change to a logo makes the audience sit up and notice, or rethink their perceptions about the organization.

The Soroptimist International emblem, which was created in the ornate style of the early 20th century, may not project the image of today's modern women's organization. In addition, according to some Soroptimists of various cultures, the logo is not appropriate in all cultures represented by Soroptimist. Currently there is discussion about changing or updating the SI emblem. Although the emblem is much beloved by many Soroptimists—particularly those of

long standing—it's important to realize that the sentimental attachment is to the organization and its core values, which haven't changed since Soroptimist's inception.

After conducting a marketing research study that indicated, among other things, that Soroptimist needed to update its look in order to project a modern women's organization, SIA adopted a new logo. The new design projects the qualities of a contemporary and relevant organization. The warm shade of blue that SIA has used for many years was retained as the organizational color (blue is perceived to possess qualities of dependability and constancy since it is associated with sky and water). In order to foster brand unity, all SIA clubs and regions should use the new "S" logo on their materials.

## Tagline

A tagline is a phrase that leaves people with an impression about some aspect of the organization. Taglines, like the American Red Cross' "together, we can save a life" are a reflection of the organization's mission. Many are inspirational in nature, like the United Way's "what matters," and AARP's "the power to make it better." SIA's new tagline is "best for women," which is a translation of the name and communicates an uplifting message.

## Mission Statement

A mission statement is a short declaration that summarizes why an organization exists. AARP's statement is: "AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization for people age 50 and over. AARP is dedicated to enhancing quality of life for all as we age. We lead positive social change and deliver value to members through information, advocacy and service." Habitat for Humanity's is: "Habitat for Humanity International is a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian housing ministry. HFHI seeks to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness from the world, and to make decent shelter a matter of conscience and action." The Girl Scouts' mission statement reads: "The purpose of Girl Scouting is to inspire girls with the highest ideals of character, conduct, patriotism, and service that they may become happy and resourceful citizens."

SIA's mission statement, which was recently reworded to better reflect its goals, is: "Improving

the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world."

(The complete statement is:

Soroptimist is

an international volunteer service organization for business and professional women who work to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world.) SIA's

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*SIA's streamlined mission is in response to a service environment that demands focused organizations .*

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streamlined mission is in response to a service environment that demands focused organizations. This statement, as well as the new “S” logo and tagline, should be used on all materials throughout the federation.

### **Organizational Name**

Organizations—both corporate and nonprofit—often change their names to keep up with a shifting market landscape. Corporations are likely to change theirs after a merger. Nonprofits change theirs to better communicate their brand or a changing mission. It is a huge and expensive undertaking for an organization to change its name. However, those that do often reap rewards beyond their expectations. For instance, several years ago the Philadelphia-based Delaware Valley Transplant Program changed its name to Gift of Life Donor Program. The organ donation organization felt that the new name better communicated its purpose. After adopting its new name, Gift of Life Donor Program experienced a tremendous increase in both financial donations and public awareness.

Soroptimist has been the organization’s name from the beginning. Market research has shown that this can be a difficult name for the public at large. At present there are no plans to change the Soroptimist name.

### **Rebranding an Organization**

Rebranding is an activity that organizations undertake when their old brand no longer adequate-

ly represents them. The majority of organizations that embark on a rebranding campaign do so to update their out-of-date brand. When an organization’s message fails to connect with its audience, it is time to consider a change. Conditions include: a lack of recognition, an unexpected or undesirable recognition, and a market shift.

A good example of rebranding is the recent campaign of the prune industry to change the name from prunes to dried plums. Prunes had long been regarded as a food that “old” people eat to help with digestive problems, and had experienced a steady decline in sales since the early 1990s.

The rebranded dried plums are being successfully marketed to health conscious people of all ages.

SIA undertook its five-year Renaissance Campaign in response to a market research study that recommended some fundamental changes in the organization’s approach if it wanted to survive in today’s landscape. One strong recommendation was that Soroptimist revive its brand. After 80 years of marvelous service to communities around the world, Soroptimist is still not recognized by the public at large. And, unfortunately, when recognition does occur it’s often in the context of being part of a dying industry. Recently, three separate pieces appeared in major U.S. media proclaiming the death

of service organizations (*The New York Times*, *ABC News* and *USA Today*). In one of those pieces, written by David Brooks of *The New York Times*, Soroptimist was mentioned by name.

The day of the traditional service club may have passed, but there continues to be great need for, and interest in, organizations that can serve their communities and members in a new way. An effective rebrand goes a long way toward reaffirming the loyalty of members and others familiar with the organization, while helping to attract new members.

It is essential to the organization’s survival that change be embraced. Members, clubs, regions, leaders and staff must work together to reshape Soroptimist’s

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brand as a focused, relevant and progressive organization ready and able to serve the world’s women and girls. A strong brand will translate into Soroptimist’s increased ability to provide service to women and girls; an increase in membership; an increase in donated funds; and an increase in public awareness—the four components of the Renaissance Campaign.

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# Branding

## Checklist for Clubs

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- Participate in SIA programs, especially the Women's Opportunity Awards.
- Undertake local women and girl-focused projects at the club level.
- Use SIA's mission to recruit and retain members.
- Implement SIA's visual identity ("S" logo, tagline, mission statement, and Soroptimist blue) on all materials.
- Deliver on SIA's brand promise. Be who the organization says it is (business and professional women). Do what Soroptimist says it does (improving the lives of women girls in local communities and throughout the world).
- Participate in SIA's Renaissance Campaign.
- Embrace change and don't hold onto the past.

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