

## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact: Mal Schwartz, President  
MBS Associates  
Phone: 914-737-1954 x103 Fax: 914-737-8944  
[information@mbsa.info](mailto:information@mbsa.info)  
2125 Albany Post Road  
Montrose, NY 10548  
[www.MBSA.info](http://www.MBSA.info)

### **CEOs of Top Nonprofits Convene in Unique Forum to Tackle Common Issues and Changing Paradigms**

MONTROSE, NY, March 3, 2008: Chief executive officers of 32 leading nonprofits in the New York area gathered recently at the latest in an ongoing series of dinner forums to break bread, share insights, and discuss compelling issues of mutual interest. Topics included constituent engagement, recruiting and motivating a new breed of board member and brand building, all of which they believe are critical to generating support for their missions.

One CEO noted that he is invited to a dinner (sometimes two) practically every night of the year but has made the time to attend two consecutive Institute for Nonprofit Excellence CEO dinner forums because “it is a precious opportunity to share my experiences – both good and troublesome – with peers who know what it is like to walk in my shoes every day.”

One subject the group selected to discuss was branding. While every CEO had a different story to tell, the group reached consensus on the realization that it takes more than a great logo, a heap of press clippings, and a powerful website to build a brand capable of attracting and retaining donors in today’s competitive nonprofit world.

At that dinner attended by the chief executive officers from the following organizations, they agreed that branding in the nonprofit arena, though a critical marketing tool, is often overlooked, misapplied, and misunderstood:

- AmeriCares Foundation
- United Jewish Communities
- United States Fund for UNICEF
- American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
- March of Dimes
- Save the Children
- United Jewish Appeal
- Catholic Medical Mission Board
- Hadassah
- Covenant House
- American Civil Liberties Union Foundation
- FJC – A Foundation of Philanthropic Funds
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation
- ASPCA
- Kids in Distressed Situations
- Jewish National Fund

-More-

Everyone agreed that “a brand is more than what you call yourself” and that with nearly 1.5 million U.S. nonprofits competing for the same dollars, engaging potential constituents (donors, volunteers, and other interested parties) is an emerging “must do.”

Several of the CEOs admitted they have encountered formidable issues while moving their organizations through a process of rebranding in order to remain competitive. Among these hurdles are:

- Trouble securing internal buy-in, specifically, overcoming the feeling by staff that branding is “too corporate.”
- Resistance from departments that had already built strong “sub-brands” – similar to the Procter & Gamble system – where each area of the business had its own brand, themes, colors, logos, and key messages.
- A disconnect among core competencies – with the good news being that the participants all felt the underlying competencies were strong.
- A brand image that was tainted by perceptions that do not reflect reality. One CEO commented that branding must address the difference between “what people think we are vs. what we are.” This often requires that the organization take strong measures to “undo the myth.”
- Fragmentation among subsidiary units. Too many state and local offices calling themselves “Iowa XYZ” or “Maine XYZ” – creating a federation of brands...rather than a single brand.
- A need to close the gap between very high name awareness and modest mission awareness. One organization’s research showed it enjoys a 90% name awareness, and still 45% of the people it surveyed are unsure what it does.
- Resources. “In the nonprofit sector, we won’t and can’t spend the same percentage of revenues typical of for-profit sector branding. Yet, when the overall emphasis of the brand had been established, it resonated,” one participant commented.

One CEO noted that it took his organization five years to get through a branding process that was “pushed” by high competency in the Communications and Fundraising/Development leadership teams, which drove other departments to cooperate.

Another CEO asked, “It’s a new world – there are 10,000 new blogs created every hour – how do you develop a brand in that context of needing to achieve engagement in the midst of a communications revolution? Fifteen years ago, people just wanted to write checks and not be bothered,” she added. “Now they want to be engaged.”

The discussion then turned to the how-to’s of approaching a branding process. Among the suggestions were:

- Conduct regular research studies and use the data from them to understand your position in the marketplace and then drive necessary branding change.
- Make branding a key element in the strategic planning and strategy development process.
- Examine the brand internally first, then externally.

- Understand that a key strategy should be ENGAGEMENT. “It is a time when donors want to be ‘stock pickers.’ In our organization, every department now has to set an ‘engagement’ goal – how they will connect with their constituencies,” another CEO added.
- Keep in mind that everything you do that people see and hear impacts your brand.
- Large nonprofits need to spend more time developing the grassroots constituencies – not just for the money but for the social impact of the attention the brand receives.
- “Notwithstanding the success of all our large organizations, it is a challenge to engage with people,” added another CEO. Some of the organizations use a different marketing strategy for each audience but build the brand around key messages or the organization’s “promise,” according to another of the attendees.

In another CEO Forum held at the Princeton Club, CEOs from the following nonprofits discussed the role of the board of directors in organizational success:

- AFS-USA, Inc
- American Associates – Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
- Brooklyn Bureau of Community Service
- Children’s Health Fund
- Fortune Society
- Gay Men’s Health Crisis, Inc.
- Institute Homecare Services, Inc.
- Intrepid Museum Foundation, Inc.
- National Council on Economic Education
- National Interfaith Cable Coalition
- Northside Center for Child Development, Inc.
- NYC Leadership Academy, Inc.
- Sponsors for Educational Opportunity, Inc.
- Theatreworks USA Corporation
- Transitional Services for New York, Inc
- WNYC Radio

In discussing the role of the board in organizational success, several of the participants indicated the importance of and difficulties around engaging the board in the raising of money for the organization.

One of the CEOs said her organization had great success in reenergizing the board through a major initiative. “We used a capital campaign to be the driver of reenergizing the board and restructuring for a new purpose and future. In this way, we were able to challenge and reengage the board,” she explained.

Several of the attendees indicated a desire for their board to be engaged more fully in raising money for the organization. They want to find ways to better balance with the need for boards to be diverse and staffed by people who have knowledge and passion for the cause, but might not have the personal resources or skills to be major fundraisers.

The Nonprofit CEO Forums, which are ongoing gatherings of leading nonprofit CEOs, are facilitated by the Institute for Nonprofit Excellence (INPEX). The “Branding Forum” was hosted on January 14<sup>th</sup> at the United States Fund for UNICEF’s new corporate headquarters on Maiden Lane in Manhattan. In welcoming the group, Caryl Stern, CEO of the United States Fund for UNICEF, shared a short presentation on UNICEF’s new TAP program which raises money and awareness for the cause of providing safe drinking water in Third World communities.

The Board Development Forum was hosted by the Institute for Nonprofit Excellence at the Princeton Club on January 29, 2008.

Mal Brett. Schwartz, president of MBS Associates, who moderated the discussions, explained that his company partnered with the Institute for Nonprofit Excellence in the spring of 2007 to convene large New York-area nonprofit CEOs at the behest of a client who was lamenting that he didn't have such an opportunity to network and share experiences with his peers. Many CEOs who have attended dinner forums have echoed that sentiment, essentially saying, "It can be lonely at the top."

CEOs of nonprofits with budgets above \$10 million annually are invited to contact Schwartz at MBS Associates via e-mail at [information@MBSA.info](mailto:information@MBSA.info), if they are interested in an invitation to a future CEO Forum.

Schwartz explained that the two organizations have dedicated their businesses to building nonprofit capacity and supporting nonprofit excellence for two decades. INPEX has provided free training to more than 25,000 leaders from upward of 5,500 nonprofits worldwide since 1989, and focuses on capacity building through "best practices" in board development, strategic planning, and fundraising. MBS Associates, a cause-marketing agency, has specialized since 1981 in helping large nonprofits benefit from strategic planning and ongoing management by objective disciplines while also linking large commercial companies with nonprofits in mutually beneficial cause-related grassroots marketing program relationships.

- End -