

Science as a brand

II. STRATEGY
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Science locations, research institutions and even individuals (i.e. researchers) can be viewed and analysed as brands from a marketing perspective. Silicon Valley, Harvard University or Stephen Hawking are brands with reach and appeal. For many people, it is a goal to come into contact with these places and people and to connect with these brands. Simply making the casual remark at a conference reception about being a Harvard graduate can greatly enhance someone's reputation, even if nothing else is known about them. After all, anyone who has made it into Stephen Hawking's research group can't be that bad!



When building a brand, the procedure of “branding” is important. That is why logos, acronyms and slogans are designed to be memorable and therefore recognisable. A brand only works if it “brands” itself into the memory. So be careful and don’t cobble together a flimsy logo in your do-it-yourself workshop. Instead, take a professional approach from the outset. Brands are a promise of quality. They provide a cognitive shortcut that makes life easier: If it says MIT on it, it must be high-quality. But developing an established brand and being perceived as an attractive brand by key stakeholders requires a good image, and this requires long-term work. Modern science communication often includes essential aspects of branding, as the brand carries the reputation of an institution, research group or individual researcher out into the world.

The core aspect of building a good science brand, which is often underestimated by management, is the time factor. Continuous high quality must first get around. Because publicly funded research tends not to have large advertising budgets compared to those of soft drinks companies or sportswear manufacturers, the business of brand development in the field of science tends to be arduous. Yet the trust aspect is of paramount importance. Few things are as fragile as trust. It can take years to build, and it can be destroyed in an instant. If you try to build your brand on half-truths, you might just get away with it in the energy drinks business. In science, the consequences can be catastrophic and the damage to your reputation might be permanent. The scientific system is extremely unforgiving in this respect – which may well be recognised as a sign of quality.

But establishing a brand with a built-in promise of quality and reputation is precisely what can put a region, an institution or an individual researcher on the road to success: namely, a self-reinforcing mechanism. Good brands recruit better staff and attract more funding. And better staff attract even better staff and even more funding.

Recommended reads:

- ◆ Keller et al. (2012), *Strategic Brand Management. A European Perspective*. ISBN: 978-0273737872
- ◆ Merten W. & Knoll Th. (2019), *Handbuch Wissenschaftsmarketing*. Springer Gabler. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-25353-0>

