



BUILDING A BRAND

Eric Sheninger (@E_Sheninger) says, “If you don’t tell your story, someone else will for you.” This is especially true in the case of a mobile device initiative. One needs to look no further than the case of LAUSD and their botched iPad initiative as a case where their story was crafted for them. While the district may have put out a press release when it started their initiative, it did little else to really “sell the why” behind what they were doing.

During this chapter, we'll look at some famous brands around the world and how we can use their models of success to help with leading a mobile device initiative. After looking at those global brands, we'll dive into how to create an effective logo or message around your initiative and explore strategies for marketing it effectively. We'll look at the importance of having a common language among staff and how best to share your story with your community. Last, we'll investigate ways to expand, grow, and evolve your brand as your initiative evolves.

Global Brands

To be a successful company, you must have a brand or image that transcends the regular marketplace. A company's ability to be known or recognized can sometimes teeter just on the name alone. While these companies all have multi-million-dollar marketing firms and we do not, we can still learn from their tactics and employ some of these same strategies in our mobile learning brand.

Apple

Apple Inc. is probably one of the best companies in the world at “selling the why.” As Simon Sinek mentions in his TED Talk on the golden circle, Apple sells you on the lifestyle and the image, not so much the technology behind it. Watching their ads and seeing their signature glowing Apple on the backs of laptops in shows and movies makes you feel like whoever uses their product is cool, efficient, and creative. Selling the “why” is an important part of your own branding.

Coca-Cola

We all know soda is bad for us, right? Have you ever poured Coke on a car battery and watched it become magically clean? Do you want to pour that into your body? Yet, somehow, we all want to drink it. Much like Apple, the Coca-Cola brand and advertising is placed just about everywhere you look, and they sell you on the coolness and hipness of drinking their product. One

other thing they seem to do really well is effectively integrate the local culture to sell their products.

McDonald's

Arguably one of the world's most recognizable symbols, McDonald's (like Coca-Cola) has succeeded despite the fact that they make unhealthy foods quickly. One thing about McDonald's and its advertisements is the fact that they are adaptable to change. Look at some of their recent ads and you'll see more and more about salads, fruit, and the lack of trans fat. While they have a stalwart of a brand, they don't rest on their laurels. They respond to their customers and adapt to make their product and brand better. This is definitely something to consider when laying out your mobile learning brand.

Nike

Home to one of the most famous motto's of all time ("Just Do it"), Nike is expensive, over-priced athletic footwear, and apparel that *everyone* must own. Wearing their shoes makes you feel not only like a hip athlete, but also like one with sole (get it?) Although Nike has received bad press about child-labor issues, the company was able to overcome all of that with a marketing campaign that never quits. It's hard to hear the whispers when Nike is shouting.

Create a Logo and Name for Your Brand

So we have seen that having a striking image (such as Nike's swoosh or Apple's bitten apple) carries a lot of weight in the world. Although we don't have multi-million-dollar marketing firms at our disposal, we can use their strategy to our advantage. Think of what symbols we commonly use around education and technology. Some of the images in Figure 5.1 are symbols I have seen schools use for mobile learning initiatives.

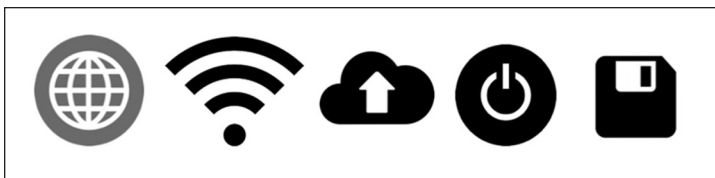


Figure 5.1 You could use these images to symbolize technology initiatives.

I threw the antiquated diskette in there just to see if you were paying attention, but you get the drift. These could represent “EmPOWERing Learning” or “Downloading Knowledge,” but the idea is having a noticeable symbol that subtly suggests that technology is a part of this, but not necessarily the main part. Remember—it’s all about the learning.

Creating a common word or phrase for everyone to get behind is an important step in launching an initiative. In our initial pilot at Westlake high school, we had the “WiFi” Pilot in which WiFi stood for Westlake Initiative For Innovation. This tagline worked well for us as a logo (Figure 5.2) because it conveyed the message of innovation and made for an easy acronym to refer to whenever discussing the pilot program. Without that, the initiative would have just become the “iPad Pilot,” which may not seem like a big deal, but I’ll go into greater detail in a minute about why that simple change in nomenclature can make a big difference down the road. When it comes to naming your initiative, try to either use a common name in your district or an acronym that will incorporate what you are doing in a clever way. We started with our WiFi program in 2011, as the program hadn’t gone districtwide yet. One of our middle schools did something similar with its C5 Initiative, which stood for “Connect, Create, Communicate, Collaborate, Cougars” (their mascot is a Cougar). Eventually we would settle on “LEAP” (Learning & Engaging through Access and Personalization) as our acronym of choice.

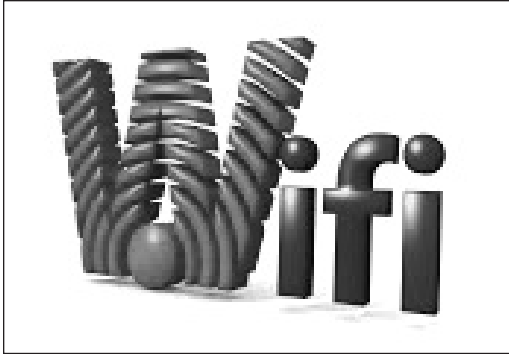


Figure 5.2 Our Westlake Initiative For Innovation logo.

Regardless of a clever name or acronym, you'll want to be careful not to tie it too closely with a device or piece of technology. I've seen some like "iLearn" or "Chromebooks for ED" that hint or directly mention a device. By putting a device in the title of your initiative's logo, you've instantly made sure that logo will become obsolete at some point. Technology changes so rapidly that including a name of a device instead of a more abstract idea closes down your options for the future. In the year or two before iPads, the netbook revolution seemed to be taking over. If you decided to take on one-to-one netbooks and gave it the brand "NetBooks & U" or "N.E.S.T." (Netbooks Engaging Students with Technology), all of a sudden you have completely committed to that single piece of hardware. When 2010 rolled around and the world of learning became more available via the tablet, initiatives that used the word *laptop* in their name felt outdated. They were essentially handcuffed to a particular tool.

Also, any educational program should be about the learning (I think I've said that a few times now, haven't I?), so centering the title around a device wouldn't really send that message. Keep students and learning as your focus and a hint of technology in your logo and the message will be clear: Learning is important, and this technology will help that.

Have a Strategy

If you’ve done all the legwork and marketing research around establishing a powerful brand, don’t waste it by failing to execute on the message. While we may not have million-dollar marketing firms, we do have access to some very creative students and staff.

Have a logo design contest and leverage the talent around you to create a memorable image. That alone also tells a good story and message about integrating student talent into your initiative.

Before you go further, you should also try and grab a few “things.” Check for the domain name around your brand and see what social media accounts are out there. While you’ll want this tied to the school district, you’ll want it also to be its own go-to source for information. The domain for “LEAP” was taken, but we did make sure that all important information was funneled through our district website page dedicated to the initiative at <http://eanesisd.net/leap>.

When we eventually launched our learning festival called iPadpalooza and our iLeap Academy, we didn’t make that same mistake and quickly grabbed both iPAdpalooza.com and iLeapAcademy.com, as well as Facebook pages, twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Google+ accounts. Even if you have no current plan for using these, it makes sense to grab them early—the potential use down the road makes it worth the 5 minutes it takes to set up an account.

Whenever you send out any messages around the initiative, be sure to always include the brand/logo and a link back to the main site. You always want to covertly push people back to your brand in order to have both consistent messaging and, as we’ll talk about in the next section, a common language.

Common Language and Procedures

In a school district you have administrators, teachers, secretaries, bus drivers, students, parents, and a bevy of other people tied to your learning community. Having all of them speak the same language is a huge step in having success

around your initiative. For example, if you have a new student enter the district and they are given this device on day one, what are the expectations for that student? How are they trained, and who will relay these expectations? Having everyone on the same page means that students, teachers, counselors, and administrators who come into contact with the new student all speak the same language and can put the student on the right path.

One area where we failed early on was having these students fall through the cracks, which in turn meant that their parents were kept in the dark. Teachers didn't have any established procedures or common language for handling new students when it came to getting them established and set up on their device. The whole system was falling apart, except for the fact that we had an educational technology point person at every campus. Without that main contact person, many of these students would be running around aimlessly.

Admittedly, having that single point person saves us in many ways when it comes to just-in-time learning, deployment strategies, app purchasing, provisioning, and so forth. Because most districts don't have those people on staff, it becomes even more important to have a common language, expectation, and procedure around your initiative.

Evolve and Share the Brand

Once the brand around your initiative has been established, it's easy to sit back and rest on your laurels as things progress. The truth is your brand should be ever evolving and expanding. Our initiative went through one major brand overhaul from "WiFi Project" to "LEAP Initiative," but we've since used the branding and success around LEAP to expand it to include more than just the initiative.

One of the best examples of this is our recent success with our iLeap Academy. (<http://tinyurl.com/olg4l4f>). The basis for the academy is having others learn from our mistakes and also see 1:1 in action. While we have had many districts come for site visits since the early going, it was hard to really teach

them all the things that they should be aware of in a mobile device initiative. Enter iLeap Academy (Figure 5.3).

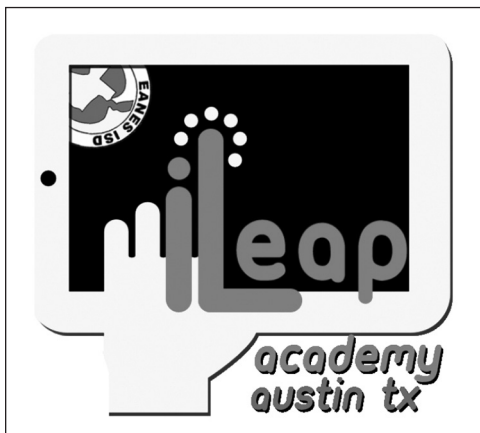


Figure 5.3 Our logo for iLeap Academy.

Having both attended and delivered professional learning for staff around mobile devices, my ed-tech team and myself started to notice a trend. Whenever you see or hear about these initiatives, it's usually at a conference where all you can really do is show videos or photos of 1:1 in action. Conversely, when people come to see your 1:1 in action in a site visit, they get to see it, but rarely learn the backstory or how to apply the same strategies we did for success. The iLeap Academy was a mashup of these two concepts, and by hosting it in our own district, we were able not only to expand the brand of LEAP and Eanes, but also to provide unique learning experiences for our attendees (Figure 5.4).

In addition to brand expansion, these academies provided revenue that was not from the taxpayers. This meant we now had additional resources for funding innovation projects and risk-taking ideas.

One other unexpected outcome came from our own teachers who participated in the academy as “iLeap Mentors.” These teachers created lesson templates, came in after school to be part of a panel, and let guests enter their classroom for three days in a row to see an technology-infused learning project in it's

various stages. As part of being a mentor, they were given a stipend for their time. Although money isn't much of a motivating factor for most in education, it was a nice way to say thanks for the dedication to improving and evolving their craft and letting others experience it. As other teachers have gotten wind of this, there is now an uptick in enthusiasm around staff wanting to be a mentor in the future.

You'll have ups and downs and moments of stagnation with your initiative. Besides the implementation dips I mentioned in Chapter 4, there will also be times where the enthusiasm has drifted and the nuance has worn off. Having an event like this to reinvigorate your staff and expand your brand is a powerful step in sustaining the program for years to come.



Figure 5.4 iLeap attendees watching our 1:1 program in action.

