

3 Step Branding

— Process & Workshop —
For Progressive Churches



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This is about branding. So it's not about you.

A brand is not simply a name or logo. It's a promise. So it's not about your church. It's about your members, prospective members and local community, and what your church can be and do for them.

Branding is the task of locating your church's unique promise and personality, and it involves three basic steps:

1. **Discover** the needs and attitudes of all constituencies.
2. **Define** the brand essence: its rational and emotional value.
3. **Develop** a differentiating positioning statement, plus a brand style that reflects it.

Identifying what your true (and meaningful) brand is requires objectivity and unflinching honesty within the branding process. That need for fearless truth-telling may be best served by hiring an independent consultant or branding firm (says the experienced consultant writing this). But even if you decide to pursue branding or rebranding internally, with a volunteer leader, this booklet will help you discover, define and develop the essential elements of a strong, meaningful, well-differentiated church brand.



(It's about them).

STEP 1

Discover

The quickest route to ineffective church branding is for a pastor or leadership team to assume that they already thoroughly understand and can articulate exactly what their members and prospective members want and need. There's a temptation to simply jump to creating branding statements and guidelines. This can be done, but risks formalizing preconceived notions and reinforcing long-held biases.



Useful insight requires in-depth listening and learning, fresh perspectives, and, as emphasized before, complete honesty. Whomever is leading your branding effort should be expected (and allowed) to:

- **Review** your current strategic plans and communication materials.
- **Explore** available research on attitudes toward churches (e.g., The Pew Religious Landscape Study; your denomination may have its own research).
- **Interview** the senior pastor and at least one other key staff member (see Leadership Discussion Guide in the Addendum, which should be completed before the interview).
- **Prepare** for a Brand Workshop with the church's leadership team, by having each member of that team fill out the Pre-Workshop Questionnaire (see the Addendum).

STEP 2

Define

Schedule at least a two-hour session during which the consultant can guide your staff and lay leadership through a discussion of their pre-workshop input. The Workshop Outline in the Addendum describes how the session should proceed — and one element deserves particular attention.

Explore your church’s brand personality

Given that branding is about the people you serve, it’s helpful to literally picture them. That’s why the workshop includes a photo sort, to help create a composite image of what your church looks like now and what you hope it will in the future. Here’s how it works:

- **Assemble a wide range of portraits**

The objective is to compile a deck of two dozen or so photos of many different types of people. On the one hand, you should be mindful of personality types that represent known qualities, or aspirations, of your organization. On the other hand, it’s wise to throw in a few wild cards, simply to see what reactions they spark. Stock images are fine, so long as you find photos that look like regular people rather than models.

- **Divide your workshop group into teams**

Provide a complete deck of 5x7 photos for teams of 3-4 workshop participants each (ideally a total of 3 teams).

- **Challenge the teams to identity your personality**

Ask each team to collaboratively select six photos of people that represent your church now. These should then be placed on a poster-size Post-it, each labeled with an adjective or two (“Young family,” “Committed to Social

Action,” etcetera.) Have each team take turns presenting and explaining their choices.

Then collect all the photos and repeat the process, but with photos representing what you want the church to be in five years. (Note: be sure to photograph each of these Post-Its before starting the next round, as teams will need to re-use them with new photos.)

After the groups have presented, the project leader should guide the group in creating unified sets of present and future photos. These will represent a composite of your brand personality traits.



STEP 3

Develop

This is the step where your brand positioning comes together – or not. It is deceptively simple: a one sentence Brand Positioning Statement, followed by a Brand Style Guideline.

Brand Positioning Statement

Simplicity, brevity and specificity rule in creating a brand positioning statement, which should take the following form:

To (prospective member descriptor), (church name) is the (1-3 adjectives) church that provides (this key benefit).

The statement should be phrased to be as competitively unique as possible. And it should be used to gauge whether communications (or even programs) are on brand.

For instance:

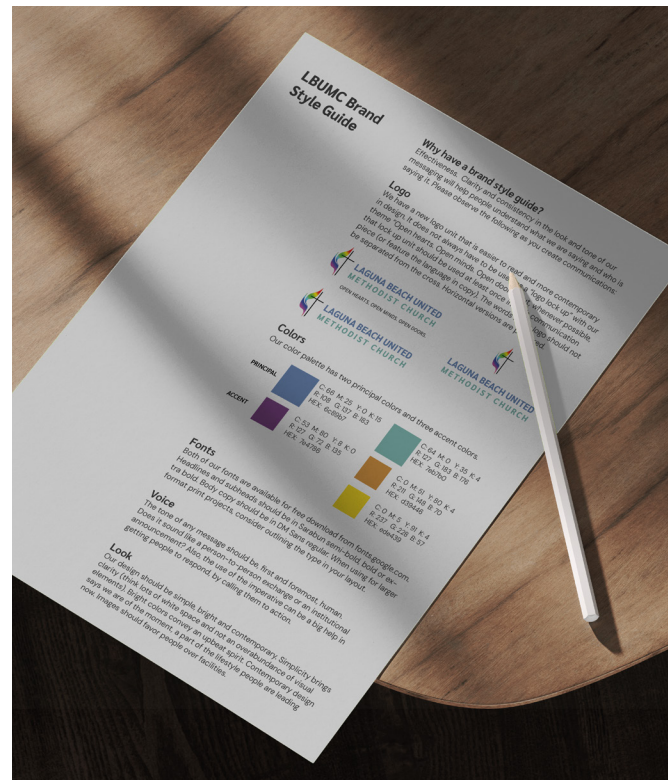
To well-educated young and middle-aged parents, St. Everybody's UCC is the accepting, socially involved and fun church that provides families with an open-minded Christian community.

Brand Style Guideline

If you've ever seen a corporate brand book, you know how long, detailed and sometimes unwieldy they can be. A small church is better served by an easily read and digested one-page guide, covering:

- Why have a brand style guide?
- Logo, and its variations
- Colors
- Fonts
- Brand Voice
- Brand Look

As you can tell, we are now proceeding from the strategic to the creative realm, and you will need to involve a graphic designer and writer to help develop the above, using the brand positioning statement and brand personality work as their principal guides.



First Products

You could stop at this point and proceed directly to creating communications based on your branding work, distributing the brand guidelines to whatever volunteers, freelancers or others are doing your writing and design.

It is strongly recommended, however, that you first develop key examples that make your desired messaging, voice and look unmistakable — through example. Have your project leader work directly with a writer and designer to create samples of several

key communications, such as bulletin covers, social media posts, worship slides or posters. This will help keep others on track and on brand, no matter who is doing the work.



How wide can you open your heart?

We believe that God can open our hearts wide enough to love everyone. Embrace everyone. Learn from anyone. And to fully include and cherish each and every one of God's glorious children. So, no matter who you are, where you are on life's journey (or where you've been), you are welcome here.

Laguna Beach United Methodist Church is part of the Reconciling Ministries Network, a growing group of United Methodist Churches and other organizations dedicated to celebrating the diversity of humankind, and to advocating for the full participation of LGBTQ+ persons in the church, the church throughout the world. We invite you as we open up our hearts, minds, and doors to each other with love. [lbumc.org](#)

LAGUNA BEACH UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
OPEN HEARTS, OPEN MINDS, OPEN DOORS.

FAQs ABOUT JESUS, THE BIBLE, AND LGBTQ+ PEOPLE.

Sunday October 19, 2025

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The Sell-In

You've done the hard work of brand positioning. You've started to bring it to life with the first communications expressing promise and personality. Everybody's onboard and it's full speed ahead, right? Well, not quite.

Sing it, Dance it, Sell it!

It's easy to fall into the trap of simply launching into new brand communications without first getting buy-in from the entire organization. Yes, if you've followed this process you have at least involved your staff and lay leadership team. But there is a cadre of make-or-break brand stewards out there – that is to say, the entire church community – that needs to get informed and excited about what the new branding means to them. Minimally, leadership needs to make a presentation to the congregation – and no, an email or blurb in the worship bulletin won't do.

One simple solution is to have a Sunday coffee hour presentation showcasing:

- The process
- The brand style guide
- First products

You can even consider having some newly branded "church merch" on hand, such as t-shirts, caps and car magnets, for people to buy so they can immediately join in getting the word out.



How to Get Started

The first step is to select a project leader who understands branding and also church dynamics. There may well be someone in your congregation who fits that description and would be willing to take it on as a volunteer.

If your budget allows, you should also consider working with an experienced brand strategist from outside your congregation. This will provide you with both the expertise and objectivity required.

Our recommendation, needless to say, would be to contact Creative on Call, and our brand strategist, Chuck Kent, who brings a wealth of experience in branding and communications, as well as a heart shaped by a lifetime in the church.

Whatever your choice, we wish you well – this world needs small, progressive churches to make a bigger impact.

Call, text, or email Chuck Kent

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Addendum

TEMPLATES

Leadership Interview Guide
Pre-Workshop Questionnaire
Workshop Outline

Leadership Interview

Prior to the workshop, your project leader should sit down for individual, in-person interviews with your Senior Pastor and at least one other professional staff member. Give them this discussion guide a week ahead of time. The purpose is not to create an accurate census of the congregation, but to discern how your leaders see your congregation.

We recommend recording and transcribing the interview so that it can be a good conversation uninterrupted by taking notes.

Your Church

- In one sentence, as briefly as possible, describe the most important need(s) your church meets.
- What are your near-term goals for the church?
- Long-term goals?
- What is your church's greatest strength?
- Greatest weakness?

Your Current Members and Attendees **Please describe your congregants by:**

- Age
- Gender identification
- Education
- Household makeup
- Household income
- Proximity to church
- Media habits
- Top reasons they choose to attend your church

Your Future Members and Attendees **Please describe what you hope your congregation will look like in five years, by:**

- Age
- Gender identification
- Education
- Household makeup
- Household income
- Proximity to church
- Media habits
- Current and/or future reasons they should choose to attend your church

Community Dynamics **Please describe the locality in which you serve, including:**

- Why do people want to live here?
- What are the biggest competitors for their attention and time?
- What are the biggest challenges the community faces?
- What is the spiritual community like, and how does your church fit in (and stand out)?

Pre- Workshop

Prior to the workshop, send this questionnaire to the lay leaders who will participate. Provide it to them far enough in advance that your project leader can receive their answers a week ahead of your group session. This will allow time to synthesize their input.

Note: You may want to offer this online, via one of the free DIY survey services such as Typeform or Survey Monkey.

Your Church

- In one sentence, as briefly as possible, describe the most important need(s) your church meets.
- What is your church's greatest strength?
- Greatest weakness?

Your Church's Current Offering to the Community

- What three current church activities or programs are most important to you? (For example: worship, feeding the unhoused, youth groups, etc.)

Your Future Offering

- What current church activity or program is most in need of improvement or greater support?
- What church activity or program not currently offered do you feel would be most attractive to potential members or most beneficial to your community?

Your "Elevator Pitch" for Your Church

- In a single sentence, describe this church and why it matters to you and your community.

For example:

"My church is a fun, exceptionally friendly, love-all-thy-neighbors kind of congregation that is as committed to service all week as it is to worship on Sunday."

Workshop Outline

A lively two-hour workshop will help gather necessary insights and invest your leaders in the success of your branding and communications efforts. Make sure you have an ample, distraction-free space, comfortable chairs and basic beverages and snacks.

What is a brand, and why does our church need one?

Your project leader should give a brief description of branding and its potential for better identification, communication and differentiation of your specific church within your local spiritual “marketplace.”

Who are we?

The project leader should present their synthesized findings about your current congregation from the pre-workshop input, and then invite the participants to challenge, confirm or refine those observations and definitions. Following this discussion, work to agree on three most important key descriptors of your church.

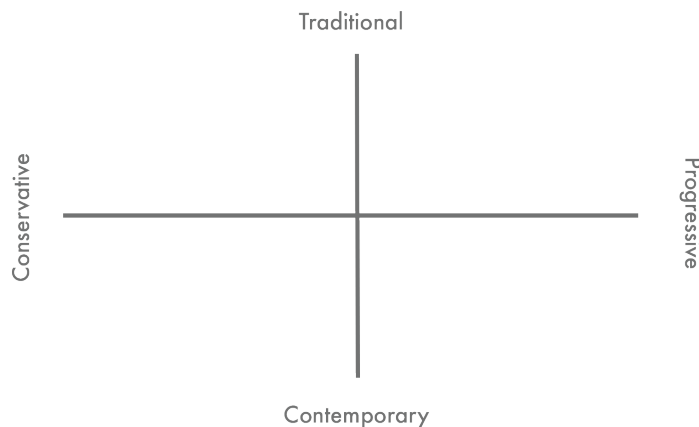
Who do we want to be?

Repeat the above, but focused on the hoped-for vision of your congregation in five years. Again, try to agree on three key descriptors.

Who is our competition?

Discuss the secular competition for the time and attention of your members and prospective members. Identify the top three sources.

Next, examine the “competitive” religious options in your area. If time allows, map those (and your church) on a differentiation matrix, as below (differentiators will vary according to your discussion):



What is our unique brand personality?

One way to see your church’s brand personality is to look at it as a composite of member personalities. Using the process outlined on page five, have each team create and present their photos selects for:

- Your church personality at present
- The church personality to which you aspire

Next steps

Following the workshop, your project leader should create a brand positioning statement and brand style guide (as described on page six). Once approved, you can proceed to creating First Products (page seven).

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