Building the
Wastewater Utility Brand

Practical Advice for Increasing Trust,
Support, and Investment

Acknowledgements

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This chapter covers the basic principles of branding and the challenges wastewater utilities face related to branding and securing more investment.

Chapter 1

Why Branding for Wastewater Utilities?

Wastewater utilities need to improve how they communicate about the value they provide. Why do they need to improve? Because they face a series of challenges that will require more investment from their communities, and the money will be increasingly difficult to get. These challenges include the following:

- Tighter regulations and increasing public expectations related to the environment
- Increasing construction and labor costs
- Increasing competition for dollars from both the private and public sectors
- The changing roles of wastewater utilities
- Negative branding of waste, wastewater utilities, and their products
- Relationships with policy makers and the politics of investment
- Communication practices that may not be very effective given the difficulty in reaching people and making an impression

These issues put pressure on utilities to improve their ability to communicate about the roles, services, and value they provide. This manual provides solutions that are based on principles of marketing and branding. Applying these principles will help wastewater utilities be extremely clear about the value they offer to their communities. It addresses how to build a strong brand, which will increase trust, support, and investment. The practical advice in this manual is helpful whether the utility is trying to combat negative branding and low trust, attempting to be more visible to their community, proposing higher rates, or just striving to improve its decision making and communications.

This chapter covers the basic principles of branding and the challenges wastewater utilities face related to branding and securing more investment. Chapter 2 defines the specific elements of the wastewater utility brand. Chapter 3 outlines tactics for building the utility brand in the community, and Chapter 4 covers branding of the utility's products such as biosolids and recycled water. Following Chapter 4 is a branding checklist and appendices that outline processes for defining the brand of the utility and managing conflict.

REVIEW OF BRANDING PRINCIPLES

It is helpful to start with a review of marketing and branding principles. This baseline knowledge will provide a context for the challenges facing wastewater utilities outlined in this chapter.

A MARKETING STRATEGY — Why does "marketing" apply to wastewater utilities and why should they have a marketing strategy? After all, they are for all practical purposes a monopoly and don't have competitors. To answer this question, it is best to start with the definitions of strategy and marketing. Strategy is developing a plan to create an advantageous position. Marketing relates to markets, which deal with the exchange of value for money or other compensation. Marketing typically focuses on creating and communicating about value. Marketing applies to utilities because they exist to provide vital services, and they are competing for investment dollars in the form of rates or other fees. This competition consists of all the ways people spend their money, including meeting their personal needs and paying taxes that fund government and other civic needs. If wastewater utilities do not understand how to compete for dollars, it will foster or continue a pattern of under-investment, putting future quality of life at risk.

MARKETING AND BRANDING — Securing investment after the community is experiencing sewer overflows or other symptoms of failing infrastructure is clearly not acceptable. In order to secure investment even when things are going well, utilities need to communicate about the value they provide and must show they can be trusted. Through many years of trial and error, marketers have discovered that the most effective way to communicate value and build trust is through the process of branding. This means that good marketing is branding. However, utility managers can conjure up very different ideas when they hear the word "brand," or when they are told that they need to consider a "branding" program. Therefore, this manual covers basic branding principles and addresses how branding applies to wastewater utilities.

BRANDED – When you are branded, it means that someone has formed perceptions, made judgments, or developed expectations of you. Being negatively branded can be devastating, often leading to damaged reputations, management shake-ups, and business failures. If you are not effectively defining yourself, others will define you. A wastewater utility that has a negative brand won't be trusted and won't secure the investment necessary to ensure future quality of life for its community.

BRANDING – Branding is simply making sure that your potential customers or your important audiences know what they can "count on" from your products or organization. Branding programs employ activities designed to communicate value. These programs encourage people to accept or adopt specific perceptions about companies or products. For example, if Volvo wants to be known for building "safe cars," they implement a branding program designed to promote this perception. Brands are built when people interact directly with a product or an organization, and through publicity and advertising. Advertising is not always the most effective way to build a brand. Publicity, or "buzz," and direct experience are often more effective. Starbucks does very little advertising, yet they have a strong brand.

THE BRAND – The term "brand" is the name we give to the list of perceptions or attributes that define what you can expect from a company, person or product. It also refers to the asset that is created when people have positive feelings about a product or organization. A widely recognized brand is an extremely valuable asset --- the most important asset a business has. As of 2008, the Coca-Cola brand is estimated to be worth approximately $70 billion. A good brand attracts and retains customers and is the basis for trust. Negative brands are a liability and result from harmful events, poor product performance, or poor brand management. If utility managers are struggling with justifying the need to employ branding, they should ask a simple question: Can people's perceptions of the utility and its staff impact investment decisions and future qual-

ity of life in the community? The answer to this question is undeniably "yes."

NOT JUST A SLOGAN, LOGO, OR SINGLE IDEA – Developing a slogan or designing a logo does not mean you have created a brand. Even though Volvo's "safe cars" brand is a single and powerful idea, most brands, including Volvo's, involve multiple ideas. This is especially true for service-oriented brands. Loyal Starbucks customers have a list of things they expect when they enter a Starbucks store. Although the Avis slogan is, "We Try Harder," customers will only believe it if the Avis brand fulfills many expectations that people have about renting a car. This includes price, the rental process, bus service, the cleanliness and reliability of the car, and the process of returning it. One negative experience can cause a customer to change companies. A strong brand will cause them to think twice before changing.

EXAMPLES OF BRANDS – It is useful to look at a few examples of familiar brands to help solidify our understanding of how brands work and how powerful they can be. First, it is important to recognize that there are brands like Nike which stimulate an emotional response that reflects how the brand makes a person feel. Other brands create an emotional response combined with expectations about specific features. Golfers may choose Titleist golf balls or clubs because of the way the equipment performs, but also because of the way the Titleist brand makes them feel about their game or themselves.

The brand of a wastewater agency should be based on specific knowledge or the meaningful things a person can count on from the agency and its staff. It probably does not stimulate an emotional response. This is because the relationship between the utility and the consumer will not be personal enough to arouse strong emotions unless the toilets are backed up (which is not a good emotional branding strategy). Consequently, the two examples on the right deal with specific features or "qualities" of each brand. These qualities did not come from the companies. They are based on comments made during branding workshops where customers talked about products they like and why they like them.

BRANDS AND PRICE – People regularly pay more for a specific brand because they value the features and consistency it provides. A great example of how brands affect price can be seen in the price of Coke in convenience stores. It is not uncommon for the price to be the same no matter what store you go to within a specific region. Variances in price tend to be higher than the average price, and almost never lower. This demonstrates that Coke has set clear price standards and that Coke executives understand the power of their brand. People are not choosing Coke because of its price, but because they want the

taste or the feeling they get when they drink Coke. Companies with the strongest brands do not have to respond to pricing pressure from competitors that do not have the same brand loyalty. It is pretty typical for a leading brand not to participate in all of the "sales" that trailing brands offer in order to maintain market share and increase short-term sales. This and other examples demonstrate that the price people are willing to pay is heavily influenced by the brand. Companies with the strongest brands have a lot of power in controlling the price of their products. This relationship between price

Nordstrom
- Has my size - Shoes and shirts
- High quality products that are long lasting
- Has brands I like, Nordstrom brands
- Won't have to ask for help or service
- No hassle returns
- I will feel important, rich
- Pleasant environment - music, restrooms…
- Worth the higher prices

Oakley Sunglasses
- Good optics
- UV protection is really there
- Lenses and frames are shatter resistant which is important since they are near the eyes
- Functionality is thought through
- Nose piece does not allow glasses to slip off
- Oakley will replace them anytime
- Worth the higher price

These examples demonstrate that brands are defined by specific qualities or expectations. This directly applies to wastewater utilities because they serve several needs for their communities.

and brand brings up an interesting question. How difficult is it for a wastewater utility to secure appropriate investment from its community (i.e. set the right price for its services) if it does not have a strong brand, or if it makes "low rates" its brand?

PUBLICITY BUILDS BRAND AWARENESS – Many people might think that a branding program is synonymous with an advertising program. This is a common misconception. Although advertising is a useful tool for maintaining a brand, great brands are built through publicity. Have you ever seen a You Tube commercial? This brand was built on publicity. Publicity is generated by word of mouth or news reports that are constant or persistent over a period of time. In the age of the Internet, publicity or buzz can increase rapidly if the topic is interesting to a wide range of people. Publicity relates heavily to the compelling attributes of a product or the actions of an organization. Branding problems for water and wastewater agencies occur because of negative publicity that happens over time, whether related to sewer overflows, pharmaceuticals in water, or the health and safety of lakes and beaches.

BRANDING IS POWERFUL – Branding is powerful because it understands and embraces human nature. It recognizes that simple perceptions drive people's decisions. People, products, and organizations are constantly being branded whether they realize it or not, and whether they have a branding strategy or not. These brands or judgments have profound impacts on people's behavior. If a person wants to drive the safest car on the planet, they typically put Volvo high on their list of prospects. If they want reliability and economy, they may pick Toyota over Volvo. When a loyal customer of Starbucks walks into a store, they know what to expect, including a variety of premium coffee drinks, coffee paraphernalia, and a pleasant atmosphere. Branding clarifies. It gets people's attention, attracts the dollars, determines price, and drives corporate success.

Branding clarifies. It gets people's attention, attracts the dollars, determines price, and drives corporate success.

BRANDING DEFINES A RELATIONSHIP – It is important to recognize that branding is all about relationships. These relationships can be between two individuals, an individual and a product, or an individual and a company or organization. These relationships and the decisions that are made as a result of them are based on positive or negative judgments or brands. Relationships are formed through a variety of mechanisms. They may be formed by personal experience with a product or service, direct interactions between individual people, formal communications by an organization, or decisions made by an organization. For the wastewater utility, branding is about establishing a trusting relationship with policy makers, customers, and community members. This relationship is based on the value the utility is committed to provide.

People know that protecting the public's health and the environment are essential to their quality of life and their future. But what can customers count on from their local wastewater utility, and what price should they pay for this value and service in their region? Branding can provide the answers. The expected result of a branding program is not that people will be thinking about the wastewater agency every day. If this is occurring, the community is most likely experiencing problems with its wastewater infrastructure. The objective is to help community members be "prepared to trust" the organization when the community faces important decisions. ●

IMPORTANT CHALLENGES FACING WASTEWATER UTILITIES

The key issues that shape people's perceptions of wastewater utilities and the need for branding are summarized in the following paragraphs. The issues covered below are not restricted to public perception or communication issues. They include many of the major challenges facing wastewater utilities. These issues relate to branding because the brand defines the core functions of an organization and the value that it provides. The remaining chapters in this manual will illustrate how implementing branding principles can help address these important issues.

THE NEED FOR LOCAL INVESTMENT IN WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE AND WASTEWATER UTILITIES – Much of the initial investment in wastewater infrastructure happened in the 1970s and 1980s and occurred because of passage of the Clean Water Act (CWA). Many local communities received significant federal support during this initial investment phase, which in many cases covered more than 80% of capital costs. Due to population growth, new regulations, higher expectations from the public related to the environment, and aging of the original infrastructure, wastewater agencies now need more investment. How big is the need for investment in water resources and infrastructure in the United States? The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates have ranged between $150 billion and $270 billion over the next 20 years and the Water Infrastructure Network (WIN) has estimated these investment needs to be over $450 billion. While these numbers do not always agree and change with time, they consistently convey the magnitude of the needed investment.

Although there may be some federal support, it seems clear that the majority of funding for wastewater systems will need to come from increasing local rates and fees. In California, wastewater utilities realize they cannot rely heavily on state revolving funds or other state resources. Securing more local funding will require that people know more about the compelling value that wastewater utilities provide, and they will need to trust that their money is being spent wisely. What is of great concern is that utilities are not the only ones that need additional funding.

INCREASING COMPETITION FOR DOLLARS – Cities are feeling pressure to invest in transportation, social services, urban renewal,

and public employee pension funds. Along with estimates for wastewater investment, there are similar reports recommending investment in energy, transportation, schools, solid waste, and other services. In the next 10-15 years the investment needed to address global climate change could exceed $500 billion in the U.S. alone. Security and planning for natural disasters are significant issues in some communities. Will past under-investment in civic projects and the environment strain people's wallets to the point where they are less willing to accept higher rates for water and wastewater infrastructure?

In addition to investment in public projects, wastewater utility managers need to recognize, accept, and be unapologetic about the fact they are competing with all the ways people spend money. Over the past 15 years, completely new types of products and services have been capturing consumers' dollars. People spend a lot more money on coffee (Starbucks), cable TV, cell phones, computers, Internet access, and dining out. Spending on these new products can easily exceed $400 or $500 per month. Whether utility managers realized it or not, this money was "available" and could have been used to increase rates and investment in water, public health, and the environment. How many dollars did wastewater infrastructure attract in this same period? Not enough. How many dollars will it

need to attract over the next 15 years? Much more. In the meantime, private company brands will only get better at encouraging customers to buy ever more enticing products.

SPECIFIC INVESTMENT CHALLENGES FOR WASTE-WATER UTILITIES – In addition to the basic need to upgrade aging infrastructure, there are a variety of specific challenges that will continue to put pressure on wastewater utilities to increase investment and rates. These challenges include the following:

- Increasing acceptance of climate change and the need to reduce the utility's carbon footprint. In California this includes compliance with AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act.
- Stricter regulation on wastewater discharge into the environment.
- The changing nature of "sewage." The concentration of contaminants is increasing because of increasing conservation and increased use of recycled water. These changes may accelerate the need to upgrade wastewater treatment facilities.
- Our increasing ability to detect contaminants in water, including minute quantities of pharmaceuticals and other "emerging" contaminants.
- Addressing the growing problem of salt build-up in the water and waste stream.
- Limited or less reliable energy supply. Power generation will increasingly be a significant part of the wastewater agency's roles.
- Increasing government regulations and the need to minimize sanitary sewer overflows (SSO).
- Coastal agencies dealing with rising sea levels and the potential for coastal sewer overflows.

These represent some of the most pressing challenges and reveal at least in part why wastewater utilities need to become more adept at securing investment.

The majority of new funding for wastewater systems will need to come from increasing local rates and fees.

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PHARMACEUTICALS AND EMERGING CONTAMINANTS – Although many of the issues above warrant more discussion, the issue of pharmaceuticals and other contaminants in both our water and wastewater deserves special consideration. Water is the universal solvent which is one of its most valuable attributes but also causes one of its greatest liabilities. The perception is that good water should be pure. Pure water has emerged as the healthy thing to drink. This perception is fueled by bottled water companies and home water treatment companies. In reality, ultra-pure water is needed for certain industrial applications but is not necessarily the best quality for the drinking-water supply.

All tap water contains "contaminants" and our ability to test for these contaminants is decades ahead of our ability to understand the public health effects, if we ever completely understand them. What is understood is that tap water does not cause acute health problems. Some wastewater utilities have supported drug dumps (a place to dispose of unused drugs) so people will not flush the drugs down the toilet. This is a good thing and a good branding tactic. However, flushed drugs are only a small percentage of the problem. Most drugs or other contaminants in the water are due to people's use of the drugs (excreting them into the toilet) or the use of personal care products like shampoo. This issue of drugs and other contaminants in the water represents a significant branding challenge for wastewater agencies. The issue made the national news in 2008, which will periodically continue to happen. Combine this with often misleading messages from bottle water and home water treatment companies and we could see a climate of increasing distrust in municipal water and utilities.

THE "LOW RATES" BRAND – One of the most disturbing practices in the water and wastewater industry is when utilities compare their rates with other utilities in the region. The rate comparisons are invariably used to point out that a utility's rates are lower than similar utilities in the region. The practice is counterproductive for many reasons. First, rate comparisons suggest that "lowest rates" are best. Why? Because the rankings do not provide information that shows whether rates account for all the costs and needed investment in infrastructure. Second, this practice is designed to convey that rates are low because the utility is financially savvy or extremely efficient. This may not be the case if the utility is systematically under-investing. Third, local or regional geography or other challenges mean that the appropriate rates for services can be significantly different for different areas. This means that rate comparisons between utilities are like comparing apples with oranges. A strong brand for a utility should be designed to convey that "lowest is not always best" and that investment should reflect what is necessary to ensure future quality of life. Utilities that focus on the low-rates brand are encouraging under-investment and aren't helping the industry do the right thing.

WHAT PEOPLE KNOW AND DESIRE TO KNOW
Wastewater utilities that have conducted customer surveys will likely tell you that people know very little about the utility and its roles. When asked, people will often say they do not want to know more about wastewater issues. In part, this lack of knowledge or desire to know more is because people define the "wastewater job" in very limited ways. They think it is all about "making the waste go away." What the public should but does not know is that wastewater utilities are leaders in protecting public health and the environment and implement processes that get the most out of our local resources. Wastewater utilities recycle water, organic materials, and food waste to create valuable water, soil amendment, and energy products. People are also not aware of their role as investors in the infrastructure that provides this value to the community. Unfortunately, this lack of understanding often extends to elected officials and even water utility managers, especially if the water and wastewater utilities are separate organizations.

THE CHANGING ROLES OF WASTEWATER UTILITIES
Wastewater utilities have historically been "waste management" organizations and so it is not surprising that the general public and even policy makers still define them in this limited way. With heightened awareness about the environment and the need to get the most out of our natural resources, the roles of wastewater utilities have changed. In-

which can be dedicated to "reaching" the public. It can be pretty daunting for the utility managers to think about competing with Nike, Starbucks, or Ford for a piece of people's wallets. The good news is that utilities may only need to reach a subset of the public to ensure appropriate investment. Also, there are effective ways to increase the positive publicity the utility receives. These methods will be addressed in detail in Chapter 3.

There are other challenges that relate to industry structure. Brands always equate an identity with a perception or set of perceptions, similar to the equation Volvo = Safe Cars. The "identity" in this example is the Volvo Corporation and the cars it manufactures. Wastewater departments within cities are often not separate organizations. Consequently their branding efforts are tied to the city government, or effectively buried. Also, any situation where the jurisdiction or service area is confusing makes the process of building a strong brand more difficult. People want to know who they are trusting to protect their health or ensure that their money is being spent wisely.

City water or wastewater departments in many cases have an added burden when compared with specific service districts. Often, they must deal with city council members or other city staff in a politically charged environment. Even though the utility is supported by user fees or wastewater rates, investment in infrastructure can be tied to the financial fortunes of the city. It is hard to compete with the police chief when he has just been refused money to hire more police officers. These points bring to light another important fact. City council members or other city officials have a lot on their plates. This means wastewater staff members need to be even better at communicating about value and need for investment.

THE ESSENTIAL NATURE AND "VISIBILITY" OF WASTEWATER UTILITY SERVICES – A failing sewer line rapidly makes a home or office uninhabitable. When this occurs, it usually impacts a single home or a limited number of people. Wastewater

creasing the beneficial reuse of water, biosolids, and other resources traditionally defined as waste, are now key objectives for many utilities. A general manager of a leading wastewater agency said it this way: "It is all about recovery of the resources." Environmental sustainability is not the only reason the utility's objectives have changed. They have evolved because most communities need more water, have soil sustainability issues, and need renewable energy. Wastewater utilities need to communicate these new roles to their communities.

SUCCESSION PLANNING – Water and wastewater industry professionals are well aware of the need to recruit more talent. Many people entered the industry at the time the Clean Water Act was passed. The employees in the industry are aging and succession planning has become a major issue for most utilities. However, recruiting new talent can be hindered by perceptions of the industry and what it means to work in a wastewater treatment plant. Most people do not appreciate the level of science and automation that go into the management of the wastewater system. People may even think that utility employees are somehow manually handling the waste. These issues boil down to people's perceptions of "wastewater management" and the brand of wastewater utilities. This can impact the ability to attract new people into the industry.

INDUSTRY STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION TYPES – A key problem related to both water and wastewater is that the industry is fragmented. This means an individual utility has limited resources

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agencies, in part because of the essential nature of the service, have done a good job keeping the system working. This is much different from other "more visible" issues like traffic congestion. The problem of congestion, because it is not catastrophic, slowly gets worse until it reaches a point where it significantly impacts the quality of life of a large number of people. This makes the problem and need for investment pretty obvious. People's sensitivity to police and fire services is fueled by news reports and fundamental fears related to losing life, limb, or property. Invisibility is a key reason for the public's lack of knowledge about "wastewater issues" and the activities and value provided by wastewater utilities. Allowing problems to get worse is not acceptable, which means utilities need more effective programs for building the reputation of the utility. It is time for wastewater utilities to discard "invisibility" as a goal. However, improved visibility should absolutely not be achieved by allowing problems to occur.

NEGATIVE BRANDING OF THE UTILITY AND ITS PRODUCTS – One of the most frustrating things for wastewater utility executives is that their organizations are sometimes branded as "polluters" because they are discharging a "waste" into the environment. This is ironic because in many cases the wastewater agency is treating its water, whether for discharge or for reuse, with more aggressive techniques than the average drinking-water utility. Many wastewater utility executives and employees think of their organization as the "clean water" utility while most elements of the public think the opposite. Again, the fundamental problem here is the perception by people that these utilities manage a waste, and the job of the utility is to make it go away.

There is also a branding problem that comes with being perceived as a "government" organization. This label can lead to several negative perceptions about an organization. These perceptions include being inefficient, not businesslike, and having employees that are of lower quality. Some think government employees "have it made" because they get great benefits and don't have to perform at a high level to keep their jobs. Add to this people's perceptions of a sewer worker and wastewater utility mangers and employees can find themselves regularly defending their standing and competence. This relates to another simple branding idea. People want to get a "good deal," which begs the question whether they get a good deal from a government organization. This is why efficiency and financial competencies need to be essential elements of the utility brand.

Negative publicity and branding come into play in the wastewater utilities relationship with the media. Whether we believe the "media" looks for controversies or negative events, it is hard to argue that a crisis sells. It's even harder to overcome this when the objective of the utility is to be invisible. When a wastewater spill happens, that's what people will remember unless there is a positive brand to offset the negative. Utilities should not blame the media for the fact that they have no brand or branding strategy. Utility managers need to understand that negative events are not only bad because the public wasn't served, but because they tarnish the reputation of their organization.

These perceptions of wastewater utilities affect reuse of biosolids as a soil amendment. It doesn't matter how much science is shared demonstrating product safety. The public believes the mission of the wastewater utility is not soil health, but to "make the waste go away" for the least possible cost. These perceptions that relate to waste and cost profoundly impact people's perceptions of the utility and the quality of its products. This is a very important point. The success and price stability of strong brands is proof that people connect price with value. Many people will not buy the cheapest brand of gasoline because they feel it must be inferior and not good for their car. If people believe that the investment has been minimized (least possible cost), they will be concerned about the quality and safety of the product.

Negative branding of recycled water presents a different challenge. People associate water quality with where the water came from. Water from a mountain spring is great and water from the toilet is toxic, except if the spring water is contaminated with cryptosporidium. Also, people will understandably feel that water products should come from the water utility and not a waste manager. We will talk later in this manual about the strategy of branding recycled water as a manufactured product, and about the utility becoming "the source of water quality."

AN AGREED UPON RESTING PLACE FOR CONTAMINANTS
There is an important technical and public policy issue that will continue to put wastewater utilities at risk for negative branding. We can treat recycled water or discharge water to ever higher standards, but the issue of where to put salts and

other harmful contaminants remains. Without clear agreement on this issue within the community, the wastewater utility can be viewed as playing a "shell game" with contaminants. This encourages the "polluters" brand, especially by environmental groups. Leading a productive dialogue about this issue in the community can have a positive branding effect.

THE POLITICS OF INVESTMENT AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH POLICY MAKERS – In most cases, rates and fees (the level of investment) are set by elected boards or city councils. This brings up an important question. How do the utility staff and decision makers work together to guarantee that the community invests appropriately? Unfortunately, elected officials are not likely to vote for rate increases or fees that they believe put their political career at risk. In the absence of credible data on the public's willingness to support investment, policy makers will likely vote for rates that they think are "politically palatable." Because many utilities do not have data on people's willingness to invest, policy makers often respond to the "squeaky wheels," or simply the people they know. Consequently, politically palatable rate setting is a common practice. Utility staff members would be well served by focusing on understanding and meeting the needs of board members or other elected officials.

Why does the relationship between policy makers and staff relate to branding? It relates to branding because the relationship is fraught with perceptions that policy makers and staff have of each other. These brands and the quality of the relationship between the staff and policy makers have a profound impact on policy decisions and the quality of life in the community. Staff may brand the policy makers as looking out for their own political careers, or unwilling to vote for appropriate investment. Policy makers may brand staff members as unclear, uncooperative, arrogant, or untrustworthy in terms of efficiency or finances. Newly elected policy makers will be even more likely to carry stereotypical views of the staff and the utility which might not be flattering.

Given this state of affairs, it is all too easy for staff members to "throw up their hands" because they believe they have little power over these political issues. Worse yet, they decide they must become experts in understanding and playing politics. Both of these approaches can lead to undesirable outcomes. The first because it makes staff members feel powerless, which ultimately leads to under-investment and a greater risk for wastewater system failures. The good news is that staff members can have a significant amount of influence in setting the boundaries of political maneuvering, and without becoming political experts. Wielding this power is not about winning, but about leading a dialogue with policy makers that precipitates good decisions and a high quality of life for the community. This important skill will be addressed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

Thinking that the public needs to be "educated" often leads utilities to share too many details or share information without the proper context of value.

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

Many wastewater agencies would say they need to improve the public's awareness of their organization and the value they provide. But how does this desire translate into specific publicity or communication programs? Public education or public outreach programs are often not very specific on objectives or results and may not appreciate the difficulty in connecting with people and making an impression. Thinking that the public needs to be "educated" often leads utilities to share too many details or share information without the proper context of value. Utility managers often debate about who they really need to reach with information and why. They may wonder if a single utility has the resources to actually elevate the awareness of the general public. Ironically, board members or elected officials often question the value of public outreach expenditures, the need for a public information officer (PIO), or the need for a wastewater agency to build a strong brand.

What the issues in this section illustrate is that there is still quite a bit of debate on how to manage the reputation of the utility, how to communicate with the community, and how to ensure appropriate investment. A branding approach clarifies this debate. It strives to reach a specific group of people with meaningful information about the value of the organization and its products. •

THE BENEFITS OF BUILDING A UTILITY BRAND

Refining and building a strong brand does the following:

- **Increases Trust, Support, and Investment** because the value is meaningful and the community knows what it can count on from the utility.
- **Clarifies the Scope of Important Value Issues** by defining the roles of the utility and capturing the issues that should frame the community dialogue. This is especially important for wastewater utilities because of their new roles and the limited view people have of these roles.
- **Provides Clarity** by removing ambiguity about value and return on investment. The brand defines what you can expect from the utility regarding the important issues.
- **Improves Corporate Performance and Efficiency** by providing clear standards on which to base investment decisions and set organizational priorities.
- **Improves Communications** by defining the key messages of the utility and describing what should be communicated and what should be left out.
- **Increases Credibility** by helping the utility "get credit" for activities and investments. It's hard for people to give you credit if you are not known for making it happen.
- **Reduces Politics** through increased clarity and focus on value. Building a strong brand encourages alignment between management, staff members, and policy makers.
- **Reduces Micromanagement** by Governing Bodies because good branding increases the trust that elected officials have in the utility staff.
- **Reduces Negative Branding** in the wake of negative events. The event is viewed as "out of character" instead of defining the character of the utility. Minimizing the impact of negative events helps to protect bond ratings.
- **Helps in Recruiting Talent** because people do not want to work for organizations that are not respected and keeping up with the pace of change. It makes the utility a preferred employer.

What does all this mean? It means that organizations with strong brands have a high level of integrity. They are focused, efficient, lauded for their actions, trusted, and are able to maintain higher prices or secure more investment. With these benefits in mind, we are ready to discuss the elements of the wastewater utility brand in more detail. •

Organizations with strong brands are focused, efficient, lauded for their actions, trusted, and are able to secure more investment.

This chapter defines the elements of the wastewater utility brand.

Chapter 2

Defining the Wastewater Utility Brand

In this chapter we define the elements of the wastewater utility brand. This list of elements is more inclusive than exclusive. Because of a given utility's specific roles, its size, and the unique issues it faces, the utility's management team may not adopt all of the branding elements listed in this chapter. Or, they may adopt elements that are not covered. The important thing is that wastewater utilities define and build their brands.

The branding points in this chapter outline the nature of the wastewater utility brand and ways to demonstrate credibility with respect to the brand. In order to add meaning and address credibility, this chapter covers some basic activities and tactics, because actions are what make the brand real. Brand-building tactics will be covered in more detail in Chapter 3.

The process of defining a brand that best suits a specific utility involves serious collaboration among senior staff members. Appendix A provides guidance on processes for defining the brand.

BRANDING OBJECTIVES AND RELATIONSHIPS

As we discuss the elements of the brand, it is important to recall the objective of implementing branding principles. The objective is not for people to think about wastewater and the wastewater agency every day. However, the goal is for policy makers, involved community members, and to the extent possible, the general public, to be "prepared to trust" the utility when important decisions arise. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this can be a challenge due to negative publicity, people's limited knowledge about wastewater utilities, and preconceived notions about "government" and "sewer" workers.

It is important to remember that branding focuses on developing relationships, whether a personal relationship or a relationship based solely on perceptions someone has of a product or organization. The brand elements outlined in this chapter define what people should expect, or count on, from the utility and its staff. They provide an unambiguous and tangible basis for building trust.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? – Over the last several years the "wastewater industry" has been attempting to re-brand itself, and for legitimate reasons. Wastewater professionals have come to realize that they are more aggressively treating water resources than many water utilities. They also know that the roles of their organizations go well beyond that of managing the sewer system. They see themselves as environmentalists, even though some in the community brand them as polluters. In part, this re-branding effort has resulted in national organizations and some individual enterprises taking on the "clean water" identity. Some have made "clean water" the primary idea in their name. There are several challenges associated with this effort.

First, adopting the "clean water" identity can create confusion because people have been taught that wastewater should be kept separate from drinking water. Water utilities are typically perceived as the clean water guys. This potential confusion has resulted in some wastewater departments backing away from the "clean water enterprise" moniker. Second, although changing a confusing name is usually a good idea, a new name rarely communicates all the elements of the brand. However, names or slogans can clarify. A slogan like "Water, Public Health, and Environmental Leadership" is a simple statement that communicates basic organizational roles. So what is the answer here? The answer is to change the utility's name if it is confusing, but remember that building trust and a strong brand won't be accomplished with a name change.

THE BRAND ELEMENTS – CHARACTER AND COMMITMENTS

It is important to recognize that the utility and its staff are inseparable, so the brand of the utility is tied to the personal brand of the general manager and, to varying degrees, every employee of the utility. Because of this, the elements of the brand fall into two general categories. These categories define the characteristics of the staff (their character), and specific organizational commitments that address important issues like public health, the environment, and sound financial management. Each of these categories includes several essentials:

Staff Characteristics
- Being Honest, Open
- Having Integrity
- Being Clear
- Collaborative
- Innovative Leaders
- Being Professional
- Proactive Problem Solvers

Organizational Commitments
- Sound Planning and Appropriate Investment
- Protection of Public Health
- Protection of Natural and Local Environments
- Stewards of Important Resources
- Sound Financial Management
- Increasing Efficiency
- Excellent Customer and Community Service
- Trusted Source of Information

Both the characteristics of the staff and the organizational commitments are important for building a strong utility brand. Each category supports the other. The organizational commitments provide structure (clarity of value and purpose) and therefore are a critical tool for demonstrating integrity. They define the playing field for discussions and decisions about investment and serving customers. The staff's character traits define how things get done, including methods, behaviors, and the energy level of the staff. Not surprisingly, these character traits have a big impact on the actual and perceived integrity of the organization. It is useful to think of the staff characteristics as the mindset or culture of the organization. When applied in concert, these two categories of the brand are a powerful tool for building trust and increasing support and investment. •

Character is an important part of the brand. A staff that has character problems has a severe handicap when attempting to build trust and secure investment from the community.

STAFF CHARACTER TRAITS

The staff's character traits are a critical component of the brand, and are interesting because they do not necessarily show up in any plan or document of the utility. Some utilities do publish a set of values that often include honesty, integrity, and other standards for basic behaviors. However, publishing these types of values has little or no impact on the reputation of the utility. Stating that you have integrity is not very effective in building trust. People intuitively know that integrity and honesty are demonstrated qualities. Chapter 3 covers how these characteristics and culture come into play when developing important relationships within the community. This section provides important insights into these character traits.

BEING HONEST, OPEN – Although these two ideas are different, it makes sense to combine them because they are related. Honesty obviously means telling the truth, especially when asked a direct question. However, people often brand someone as dishonest if they believe that person has withheld important information. Openness is most important when dealing with information about finances and major decisions. Decisions almost always impact finances and the value delivered to the community, which are arguably the most important issues. However, being open or transparent presents a challenge. Openness does not mean sharing everything, especially technical information which is difficult for people to understand. Being open requires a strong sense of what information people need to know. Also, openness by itself does not build trust. If it exposes problems with the integrity of the organization, it is more damaging than helpful. This is not an excuse for being secretive. The utility must first resolve its integrity issues.

HAVING INTEGRITY – People often define integrity as consistency of actions and words. A "family values" politician caught cheating on his wife or her husband has just created a serious integrity problem. At least part of their brand becomes "no integrity," or they are branded as a hypocrite. It is interesting to note that the word integrity is directly related to the word "integrated." Does the utility have a highly integrated approach? What do the utility's actions reveal about its values? Often, utility communications do not clearly articulate what the utility is committed to. Without understanding why the utility has made a certain decision or why it's spending time on certain activities, people can become confused about the utility's values or priorities. Confusion often leads to conflict. This is why it is important to have organizational commitments that clarify the utility's motivations.

BEING CLEAR – The previous paragraph begins to address the issue of clarity. Water professionals sometimes talk about the need to "dumb down" communications so they will work for the general public. This is dangerous thinking because it assumes that the relevant and most important issues are technical or complicated. Being clear and producing communications that are meaningful involves making good choices about what to communicate, and what to leave out. Typically, the most meaningful issues relate to value and price. Clear communications and meaningful dialogue answer the question, "What I am getting and what is it going to cost me?" Being clear is important in all relationships but especially important when dealing with policy makers. As an example, utility decisions about investment should always be expressed in terms of rate impacts. This is how the average person and policy makers think about the price of water and public health, and the effect it will have on their lives.

PROACTIVE PROBLEM SOLVERS – Organizations often fall into bureaucratic patterns where what is done follows what has always been done. Bureaucracies are perceived as slow moving and inefficient. Organizations which are proactive and solve problems are more trusted and generally provide greater value to their customers. Being proactive is also tied to planning. A proficient long-term plan-

ning process identifies problems and the need for investment well before quality of life is affected. This is why the ideas of planning and appropriate investment should be fundamental organizational commitments. Problem-solving organizations also think less about replacing or upgrading an asset and more about different ways to provide the value associated with the asset. This value-centric thinking often leads to innovative and more cost-effective solutions.

Being proactive can include getting ahead of government regulations. Exceeding current regulations or anticipating future regulations can brand the utility in many positive ways, including the following:

- Early on it brands the utility has having its own ethics, that go beyond regulations.
- Later on it brands the utility as smart or ahead of the game because it "predicted" the future.
- It helps the utility build a stronger financial brand because implementing regulations early provides more financial control, which saves money.
- It allows the community to be in control of its own destiny, which most community members, especially community leaders, view as positive.

These are important branding opportunities that require building close and collaborative relationships with local regulators.

COLLABORATIVE – People who appear to be very smart are often great collaborators. They tap into the knowledge and experience of many people. Proactive, problem-solving utilities need to be, and often are, very collaborative. This is because the organization will likely be asking policy makers to approve non-traditional methods. Collaborating with the board of directors or policy makers by laying out investment options can be very effective. Reviewing options increases the knowledge of policy makers, makes them feel more involved in decisions, and increases their respect for the utility staff.

Two traits that define collaborative people are that they listen and that they respond to points made by others. Responding does not imply agreement. It does require demonstrating an understanding of the other person's point of view and providing feedback that addresses their position. Non-collaborative people tend to think they are the experts and that others do not have meaningful opinions. Or, they simply fear the changes that might occur by considering other points of view. A non-collaborative approach is the fast track to conflict. Just try holding a community meeting with no intention of considering the input of the audience. People probably did not come to the meeting just to be

educated. They won't respect or trust staff members who don't welcome others' opinions.

INNOVATIVE LEADERS – Almost all of the characteristics noted above lead to innovation and leadership. However, there is reason for some caution here. The charter of utilities is to create the best value for their communities, not the most innovative value. Although it may be great for the careers of the staff to earn leadership awards, policy makers are correct when they question the reasons for innovation. Leadership and innovation must be tied to the needs and problems facing the community. The utility staff should propose a novel approach when it creates the best risk-managed value for the community. Proposing "risk-managed value" is important because innovative approaches may carry more risk. New ideas should be adopted only when they solve a difficult problem for the utility, or when the financial benefits greatly outweigh the risks.

BEING PROFESSIONAL – This is an important characteristic for any organization but it is especially important for wastewater utilities. Employees of wastewater utilities can be viewed in negative ways because of people's limited view of the function of the organization and the level of science and technology involved. It would not be a stretch to say that people sometimes think poorly of government or sewage workers. Exhibiting the characteristics outlined in this section will go a long way in fostering perceptions of professionalism. •

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENTS

The following organizational commitments complement the staff characteristics by providing a clear picture of the value promised to the community. It is pretty difficult to challenge the integrity of an organization that has strong character traits and connects all of its decisions and activities to the commitments in its brand. Without this clarity, it is all too easy for policy makers and the public to come to erroneous conclusions about the motivations of the utility.

THE FORM OF THE UTILITY BRAND – We use the term commitment to define what the utility is promising to its customers. It is important to understand that being committed to something does not require

perfect execution. Toyota cars are known for being very reliable even though they occasionally break down. The idea that you need to be perfect can be a barrier to adopting commitments that have high standards. Utility staff members must not get hung up on the "need to be perfect." However, saying you are committed to something does require you to demonstrate sincerity through your actions, decisions, and priorities.

The organizational elements of the brand typically take the form of commitment statements that are backed up with additional information that adds meaning or clarity. For example:

**Metro Water is committed to:
Long-term planning and appropriate investment in water reliability**

This means that Metro water will perform long-range water supply planning and be an advocate for investing in new supplies <u>in time</u> to meet future needs.

This is obviously an example from a water utility, but it illustrates a common form of branding statement. The "This means" statement starts to define the activities or strategic initiatives that make the commitment statement real. Each of the headlines for the following paragraphs should be thought of as an organizational commitment and element of the wastewater utility brand. Each paragraph defines what the commitment means and how a utility can demonstrate credibility with respect to the commitment.

SOUND PLANNING AND APPROPRIATE INVESTMENT

What is Means – It is important to be very clear about an overarching element of the brand that relates to the unique relationship that utilities have with their communities. Most utilities are monopolies. This means customers cannot change to a different service provider. Thus, they live with the decisions made by utility staff and policy makers, which can have a significant impact on their quality of life. Because of this unique relationship, the customer, for all practical purposes, is an investor and owner of the utility and its infrastructure. This should encourage utilities to commit to the principle of "sound planning and appropriate investment." This simple standard is the context for everything. Without sound planning and investment, service levels drop, failures occur, and future improvements cost more than they should.

The ideas of planning and investment are especially important in an age where taxes are considered

bad, government has been branded as inefficient and wasteful, and people have trouble differentiating between wasteful spending and investing in the future. The concepts of planning and investment should be the cornerstone of the relationship between utility staff and policymakers. Why? Because policy decisions impact the value provided to the community and the rates necessary to deliver that value.

Demonstrating Credibility – It is difficult for utility staff members to be credible with respect to this commitment if they are not proactive problem solvers. This commitment requires utility staff to become very good at identifying both short and long-term issues and to make compelling cases for investment in resources and infrastructure. In some cases it means that the staff must resist the bureaucratic tendencies of the organization and do things differently. It certainly means that the utility should not be promoting the "low rates" brand. The standard for rate setting should be "appropriate investment."

PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH

What it Means – Protecting public health certainly means investing in a well-maintained sewer system that keeps untreated sewage away from people and the environment. However, with increased use of recycled water and products derived from biosolids, protecting public health takes on new meaning for wastewater utilities. Still, public health is pretty easy to define: People who use or come in contact with the utility's products should not develop acute illnesses or chronic health problems. Proving the safety of the products is not so easy.

Demonstrating Credibility – Due to increasing information related to emerging contaminants (including pharmaceuticals in water), building the "public health" brand has never been more challenging. Generating credible health studies on hundreds of different contaminants is not possible. Given the difficulty with health studies, the next best thing is to ensure that our water resources are not being degraded. To what degree are "new" contaminants systematically degrading water resources, impacting tap water, and ending up in recycled water and biosolids-based products? Utilities should understand the issues and communicate the answers to these questions to the public.

The idea of degradation is extremely important. Since most people cannot understand the science, they trust or doubt the quality of water, based on their direct experience with the product and im-

pressions about the agency managing the water. If they believe water quality is degrading, their past experience (not getting sick) is no longer valid. Trust is gone and it becomes difficult to quickly regain it. If the wastewater utility officials are being defensive or acting as if they are not interested in learning more about what's in the water, then they make the problem worse. Utility managers may complain about those who advocate for anti-degradation policies, but not allowing water or the environment to deteriorate is a common sense approach to a complex problem. This is why it can be a good branding strategy.

On the surface it appears that our ability to measure ever more minute concentrations of contaminants has created a problem. Some of these "emerging" contaminants have likely been present for quite awhile. However, if there are new contaminants entering our water resources, it is better to know about them well before they pose a significant health risk. Also, given the limited data on health effects, a conservative approach is prudent. This means the utility must constantly be willing to increase its knowledge even though it may be difficult to develop a response that is cost effective. Putting the blinders on may appear to work in the short run but leads to more challenging problems down the road.

PROTECTING NATURAL AND LOCAL ENVIRONMENTS

What it Means – The word environment is a pretty general term so we need to be clear on what "protecting the environment" means. The wastewater utility needs to protect nature as well as the natural environment's role in serving humans. Protecting the environment also involves being sensitive to people's local environment, including the impact of the utility's operations. This includes odor, visual aesthetics, and traffic. Another factor is that the public is becoming more interested in being "green" or pro-environment. This means they may expect more from utilities related to environmental stewardship. The challenge for utilities is to define the appropriate level of environmental commitment and demonstrate credibility with respect to that commitment.

Demonstrating Credibility – Many wastewater utility staff members think of themselves as environmentalists. However, it is important to remember that compliance with an environmental regulation does demonstrate an environmental ethic because the utility has no option but to comply. Ethics are exposed by choices. So, what does it mean to be committed to the environment? Environments are local, so demonstrating commitment begins with being very knowledgeable about the specific environment that you are impacting. Without this knowledge, people will justifiably question the utility's dedication.

For example, if you are discharging treated effluent into a lake, river, or ocean, then it follows that you should be gathering, sponsoring, or at least advocating for collection of information on the characteristics and health of that environment. It also means you err on the conservative side if adequate information is not available. Given typical financial pressures, it can be difficult to adhere to these standards. Many environmentalists have a hard time trusting that wastewater utilities are environmental advocates because they know agency officials are pressured to address the "waste issue" for the least possible cost. Because of these pressures, utility professionals often find themselves in the middle, trying to balance costs with protecting the environment. Balance can be a good thing, but it is difficult to have it both ways. Committed environmental advocates seek the investment necessary to actually preserve the specific environment.

Given these credibility issues, becoming known for environmental stewardship often requires that the utility expand its thinking. Utility managers should advocate for investment in the environment that goes beyond regulations and beyond the traditional waste management function. Fighting regulations, even if their value is "questionable," is not the best way to build the "protectors of the environment" brand. On the positive side, many wastewater agencies are already investing hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars in treatment and processes designed to protect the environment. This is a fact that cannot be disputed and should be communicated to the community.

Knowledge of the specific environment and local issues is also the key when working with residents

Assuming you already understand what locals want with respect to their environment does not demonstrate credibility and is a recipe for conflict.

that may be impacted by the utility's facilities or operations. Collaborating with the community about the best ways to minimize impact or enhance the aesthetics of local facilities is an effective brand-building technique. Assuming you already understand what locals want with respect to their environment does not demonstrate credibility and is a recipe for conflict. It also misses an opportunity to build important relationships. Facilities that have been developed without collaborating with the local community, or have poor aesthetics, will brand the utility in negative ways. Aesthetics brand people, places, products, and organizations. True or not, it is hard to imagine that learning happens in a dirty or poorly maintained school.

STEWARDS OF IMPORTANT RESOURCES – CONSERVATIONISTS

What it Means – A major change in the roles of wastewater utilities has come with increasing reuse of water and organic materials such as biosolids and food waste. Communities are increasingly realizing they cannot waste these resources. In a sense, this makes the wastewater utility a conservationist organization. This is an extremely interesting area that most people know little or nothing about. There are many examples where policy makers and community leaders have said, "I had no idea" after taking a tour and getting a better understanding of the resource recovery efforts of a wastewater agency. This resource recovery role also means the utility is an investor in markets for products derived from these resources. For example, contracting relationships with private sector partners in soil amendment markets are by default an investment in market assets. These assets include customers, brands, operational capabilities, and sales channels. Wastewater utilities would do well to better understand the value of these assets and more proactively protect and nurture them.

Demonstrating Credibility – The good news here is that the products and results speak for themselves if people are informed. Simply making sure that policy makers and community leaders know more will help to build the brand. What is happening in resource recovery is interesting and often innovative and therefore can be used to build the brand of the utility. This credibility will come in handy when it comes time to ask for rate increases. It is important to remember that

the value of resource recovery efforts stems from the growing need for these resources. Describing how using these resources can enhance quality of life should preface any dialogue about resource recovery programs. Don't assume people already understand this important context.

SOUND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT, INCREASING EFFICIENCY

What it Means – This is a very important element of the brand. Public or government agencies are often branded as inefficient because they do not operate in a competitive business environment. Elected officials or board members often see themselves as the ones who will ensure that inefficiencies are eliminated. Unfortunately, this often manifests itself as refusing to vote for rate increases that are necessary to maintain and improve infrastructure. Policy makers are very sensitive about financial issues and rates. This is understandable. Most policy makers would just as soon avoid anything to do with rate increases. However, sound financial management means investing in maintenance and future needs, advocating for full-cost pricing, and implementing ongoing programs that increase efficiency. It is important to recognize that perceptions related to financial management are tied to value. In the end, people want to feel they are getting a "good deal," which encompasses both value and price.

Demonstrating Credibility – The staff characteristics of openness and being collaborative are important when dealing with financial issues. Leading a collaborative dialogue with policy makers about the rate impacts of different decisions helps to build financial credibility. An ongoing efficiency improvement program discourages policy makers from thinking they can avoid a rate increase simply by pushing the utility to do more with less. On the other hand, utility officials need to be sensitive to requests to sharpen their pencils and see if they can minimize rate impacts. These types of exercises with policy makers often lead to innovative solutions and a better understanding of the relationship between assets, value, investment levels, and risks. Asset management programs can also help to increase financial credibility. However, the focus should not be entirely on the condition of the asset, but on the value the asset provides. Sometimes utilities find more cost-effective or financially-sound courses of action when they focus on value.

Utility managers who are being scrutinized because of negative events or about a request for large rate increases may get asked to benchmark efficiency. Rate comparisons are not a good way to measure efficiency. This situation brings to the forefront some important points that relate to science and branding. If people believe and can see direct evidence that the utility is committed to constantly increasing efficiency (a core value of the organization) then they will be less likely to demand "scientific" proof. This is true because the commitment will have spawned past efficiency improvements and will continue to cause efficiency to improve in the future. Efficiency is part of the on-going plan. If non-scientists are asking for scientific proof or benchmarking, a branding problem exists that is difficult to solve with technical benchmarking. A better solution is to work on demonstrating the organization's commitment to efficiency by describing past and current efforts to improve it. This brings to light another important idea. Efficiency is difficult to analyze or prove as an absolute state, but better understood and demonstrated as a culture of constant improvement.

EXCELLENT CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

What it Means – Although wastewater organizations do not always deliver a product similar to water utilities, customer service is still a significant branding issue and opportunity. Every interaction between the utility's operations and work crews with community members is a branding moment. In many cases customer service involves solving a problem. We often find that doing a good job of solving a problem creates a stronger relationship with the customer than if the problem never occurred. Excellent customer service is an attitude more than anything else. It strives to treat customers like we all would like to be treated.

Demonstrating Credibility – Demonstrating credibility always involves actions, but this is especially true with customer service. Some simple standards and opportunities are:

- Make it easy for customer and community members to deal with the organization
- Show up when you told them you would
- Don't hand off or strand a customer when they call in with a problem
- Be willing to be creative in order to solve a difficult problem for a customer
- Minimize the disruption associated with construction or maintenance work
- Run an excellent operation
- Develop procedures for construction and maintenance crews that positively brand the utility

Probably one of the most powerful ideas that relates to customer service is "making it easy" for the customer. This can be practiced in responding to problems, paying bills, or learning about where and how to recycle. Just make it easy. Don't make customers travel a long distance or wait a long time. Excellent customer service is also about responsiveness. It is a willingness to take the problems of customers seriously and go the extra mile to solve the problem. Putting this into practice is not difficult if the utility's commitment is strong.

TRUSTED SOURCE OF INFORMATION

What it Means – The goal here is for the media and important individuals to come to the utility when they need important information about water or wastewater. Typically, this role involves developing ongoing relationships with reporters and other important individuals and groups, including policy makers. These relationships are based on providing reliable information that relates to the roles of the organization, or its brand. For the wastewater utility defined in this manual, this could include information about the following:

- Problems and investment needs facing the community (upcoming rate increases)
- Recycled water quality and safety
- Product quality issues and the safety of products derived from biosolids
- Condition or health of local water bodies
- Resource recovery and its relationship to meeting the needs of the community

The information above addresses planning and investment, public health issues, the condition of the local environment, local resource needs, and important financial issues. Becoming the trusted source of information related to the elements of the brand serves the community and also builds the utility's brand. It exhibits honesty and openness and is especially useful in developing relationships with the media. These relationships pay off during trying times.

Demonstrating Credibility – Becoming the trusted source of information can be a challenge. It is almost the opposite of "public relations." It requires that the utility share information even when that information may not put the utility in the best light. It means telling the truth when the truth hurts. Sometimes it means sharing information with the media or policy makers that forces the utility to take action that is difficult or involves significant risk. Interestingly, this is the dilemma that utilities face regarding knowledge about emerging contaminants. When the utility does not proactively share information, it puts the control of the situation in the hands of others. People should hear the news from the utility first, especially if it is bad news. •

HOW BRANDING APPLIES TO DIFFERENT AGENCIES

The previous paragraphs outline the most common elements of the wastewater utility brand. However, each agency will likely have aspects of the brand that are unique. The final elements of the brand will depend on the roles of the utility and the distinctive aspects of the community the utility serves. For example, a wastewater utility that serves a small affluent community in the mountains with a pristine watershed will need to have a different brand than the city of Chicago. The smaller utility in the mountains will likely need to have very strong values related to preventing sewer overflows and ensuring that water discharged into the river is high quality. A sewer overflow in Chicago may be viewed differently than in one in Vail, Colorado. These unique qualities and roles must be considered when defining the brand.

BRANDING IN SMALL UTILITIES – Some may argue that a small utility cannot implement branding because they do not have the financial resources to fund a large outreach program or to even have a full-time communications person. It pays to remember that branding is not just about what you say, but who you are. Utilities, big and small, are being branded due their customer service, policy decisions, and the way they interact with their communities. This is true whether or not the utility is "advertising" and independent of how many communication people are on staff.

Utilities that serve small communities are not exempt from the challenge of building trust and securing appropriate investment. In fact, branding may be more applicable in small communities because of the intimate nature of the relationships. Sewer spills can make the front page of the newspaper. A person can call and ask for the general manager of the utility and actually get to talk with him or her. Because of this intimacy, the brand (especially the personal characteristics of the staff) becomes very important in a small community environment.

UTILITIES WITH A NARROW FOCUS – A utility that handles only the collection system might argue that its roles are too narrow for branding to be necessary. Again, branding applies to any organization looking for support and investment. Interestingly, what many marketing professionals have come to realize is that extremely focused brands are the strongest. Would you rather have a specialist perform your surgery or a "jack-of-all-trades?" A collection system agency can be focused on a single purpose: keeping the sewage in the pipes. A well-run organization with a narrow focus will often provide better service than an organization with a wide range of responsibilities. This focus is a significant branding advantage and opportunity. ●

THE SPECIAL BRANDING RELATIONSHIP WITH POLICY MAKERS

Policy makers are among the most important individuals in the community. Their decisions determine the level of investment and the community's quality of life. This means the relationship between staff members and policy makers is critical. This relationship is enhanced when staff members exhibit the character traits defined earlier in this chapter. However, staff members need to understand that policy makers have special needs. They are very visible in the community, their decisions attract public scrutiny, and their reputations or personal brands are constantly at risk. Building a strong utility brand requires understanding and meeting the needs of policy makers, which involves doing the following:

- Helping them look good
- Understanding their constituents' needs
- Giving them clear and meaningful information (options and rate impacts) to make decisions
- Being able to manage and diffuse conflict – keep them out of trouble
- Being financially competent and delivering good return on investment to the community
- Being efficient and allowing them to have some of the credit for increasing efficiency
- Making sure that they are not blindsided or surprised by an issue or problem

These are examples of things policy makers want from the utility, and they will judge (brand) the utility staff based on whether or not these needs are being met. In general, this adds another layer of branding that has a major impact on policy decisions. Meeting policy makers' needs should be integrated into the utility's branding strategy and strategy for securing appropriate investment.

It may be a challenge for staff to think about meeting the needs of policy makers. It is all too easy to brand board or city council members as self-centered and out to advance their own careers. However, most policy makers take their duties seriously and are legitimately concerned about the ramifications of their decisions. Board members or elected officials want to trust the utility and its staff. It is a hassle when they feel they cannot. Utility staff members should not blame policy makers for what they perceive as poor policy decisions. They should strive to become more proficient at leading a dialogue that results in good decisions and superior value for the community. Policy makers cannot lead this dialogue. It is not their job or within their expertise to provide the type of information necessary for making good policy decisions. The leadership must come from utility staff members. •

When integrated together, the character traits and organizational commitments described in this chapter are a powerful tool for building a brand and increasing trust, support, and investment. Chapter 3 will provide more details and examples of tactics for building the brand.

Chapter 3

Tactics for Building the Brand

Simply stated, every inter-action the utility has with policy makers and the public is an opportunity to build trust and cred-ibility, or lose it. Every utility, no matter its size or roles, has the need and the opportunity to build its brand.

Applying time and energy to building the brand is a legitimate and necessary function of the utility. This is because trust is vital if the utility is going to secure investment (necessary rate increases) from the community. Applying branding principles also makes communications more effective because the objective is crystal clear: build trust. Those who say that branding is not for public utilities are mistaken, not only because branding is a great strategy, but because the utility and its employees are already being branded. The need for branding should be well understood by senior managers, employees, and policy makers. However, in order to successfully build a brand, utility managers must be aware of the challenges in implementing a branding program.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING A BRANDING PROGRAM

A COMMITMENT TO BRANDING – Building a strong utility brand does not require an announcement that the utility is launching a new brand. Brand building can merely involve clarifying the value the utility delivers, and being more focused in managing the utility's behavior, decision making, and communications. Positive branding is already occurring in some utilities, as evidenced by the case studies in this manual. Consciously building the brand makes the utility's efforts much more organized and more successful.

Often the most difficult challenge is helping utility staff appreciate the profound impacts of building a strong brand. It is all too easy to assume that the perceptions of community members and policy makers are not affected by the behavior of the utility, but this is not the case. Utility managers have a lot more power to influence trust, support, and investment than they often think. They set the stage and provide the context for decision making. How clear and meaningful this context is has a significant impact on policy makers and policy decisions. The framework for this important context is the brand. Building a brand starts by creating a culture of branding within the organization, which requires the following:

- Understanding the power and impact of brands and a good branding program
- Recognizing the brand as an important asset that deserves attention and investment
- Considering the brand when making important decisions
- Being proactive and supportive of staff members in connecting all actions, activities, and communication to the brand
- Never categorizing branding as a communications issue." The brand represents the essence of the organization, not just what is said about it.

Creating a culture of branding is not complicated. Success in branding will depend more on motivation and commitment than on specific knowledge or expertise. However, creating an organization that is focused on building a strong brand requires that the utility have leaders who are willing and able to make some significant changes.

ACTUALLY REACHING PEOPLE AND MAKING AN IMPRESSION – Building a brand requires that the organization connect with people and make a positive impression. The nature of the wastewater utility brand, or the desired impression, was defined in Chapter 2. All of these impressions will not happen in a single interaction or connection. Which brand elements are in play in a given situation will depend on the goals of the utility and the interests of the people involved.

Utilities connect with people in a variety of ways including customer service, publicity, a website, and community outreach efforts. It is important to address the difficulty in making connections with the general public. It is nearly impossible if one does not understand the nature of the challenge. People are busy, they are barraged with information and advertising messages, and they have access to hundreds of cable channels with shows designed to grab their time and attention. Nike and Ford have to work hard to capture the public's interest. How on earth can a wastewater utility, with limited resources and not the most exciting product, actually reach people and make an impression? The answer is straightforward. Make an impression when people are paying attention.

Policy makers are paid to pay attention and make important decisions so they are always a priority. When a person's street is being torn up to install a new sewer main, they are interested and likely concerned about the impact on their life. Environmental advocates or other special interest groups may be paying attention to specific decisions. When customers have a problem, they are definitely focused on the wastewater utility. Making a positive impression when people are paying attention is a fundamental concept of branding. It should be the cornerstone for planning branding activities. A single impression can last a long time, which is great news if the experience is positive, and a liability if the experience is negative. •

BRAND BUILDING ACTIVITIES THAT WORK

Because of the difficulty in reaching the general public, it is very easy to spend money on "outreach" efforts that are fruitless in building trust with the community. Planning an expensive public meeting that ends up attracting a small audience is a waste of money. The utility's policy makers, if they are doing their jobs, will likely point this out. This leads to an important point. Utilities need to develop communications that have a clear purpose and actually have an impact. This means engaging in activities that build trust and a strong brand. The brand of the utility is built and impacted through the following means or communications channels:

- Managing the Relationship with Policy Makers
- Strategic Plans, Business Plans, or Other Planning Processes
- Developing Relationships with Specific Individuals
- Reaching People When They are Paying Attention
- Brochures, Websites, Newsletters, and Other Traditional Communications

These important communication channels are the framework for the brand building tactics outlined in this chapter. It is important to understand that the brand should be prominent in every venue and interaction with the community. It should also be the standard for making decisions about the utility's plans and activities. The brand articulates why the utility exists and represents what people can count on from the utility and its employees. What better context is there for planning, decision making, and communicating?

PUBLICITY AND ADVERTISING — Publicity is simply the means by which knowledge or perceptions are spread through events, using a product, and word of mouth. This is different from advertising which refers to professionally developed content that is disseminated through radio, television, billboards, newspapers, magazines or other means. Good publicity comes from a good product and good planning. Publicity is relatively cheap while advertising is

expensive. Most of the activities outlined in this manual are designed to generate publicity for the wastewater utility. The focus is on publicity because it is the most cost-effective way to build a brand. In fact, many branding professionals now recognize that advertising does not build brands; publicity builds brands. This is good news for wastewater utilities because few, if any, can afford a large advertising budget.

MAKING COMMUNICATIONS MORE MEANINGFUL — Publicity programs, relationship development efforts, public outreach programs, and advertising are all forms of communications. Water and wastewater utilities have a tendency to communicate about technologies, activities, and events without reminding the audience why these things are significant. Making communications more meaningful is an important outcome of a good branding program. The principal rule is to never communicate about an activity, decision, investment, or milestone without connecting it to the motivation. The motivation is typically one or more elements of the brand as defined in the organizational commitments. This is illustrated in the following examples:

"The North Fork Reservoir project plan has been approved by the City Council, which is a critical milestone in improving water reliability and drought resiliency in the region. This project will allow our region to weather multi-year droughts with little or no cutback in service."

"Completion of the water quality laboratory will allow Metro Water to meet its goal to improve water quality and increase its knowledge of water quality issues."

This may seem like Communications 101, but these examples make clear the motivations of the utility and address meaningful value. Being able to "weather a multi-year drought with little or no cutback in service" is a clear statement of value and motivation. Conflict often occurs because there is a misunderstanding about the reasons behind an activity or decision. Utility managers should not make customers and community members guess at the utility's motivations. Connecting decisions and activities to the commitments articulated in the brand makes things clear and reduces the likelihood of both confusion and conflict.

Employing good writing practices also helps make communications more meaningful and effective. Avoid long sentences, jargon, and overly technical information. Technical information should be used only to demonstrate a point about value or motivations. Simplifying the language does not make it "simplistic." It makes it more understandable and relevant to the public and policy makers. Poorly written communications lose the audience and erode trust.

The following sections provide descriptions and case studies of tactics for building the utility brand. This manual can't possibly describe all available brand building tactics. However, the descriptions and case studies in this manual are designed to illustrate principles and practices that can be applied specifically to all utility activities and communications. Note that the activities outlined in this chapter describe a highly integrated approach to managing the wastewater utility that is based on the brand. This integrated approach, by its nature, demonstrates integrity and builds trust.

It is important to understand that the brand should be prominent in every venue and interaction with the community. It should also be the standard for making decisions about the utility's plans and activities.

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH POLICY MAKERS

The brand of the utility begins with its most important audience --- those who make the policy decisions and ultimately determine rates. Branding applies to this relationship because branding applies to every relationship. Utility staff members and policy makers brand each other, and sometimes in negative ways. This branding can have a significant impact on investment decisions and the future quality of life in the community. The following case study covers some important aspects of the relationship between a utility staff and its governing body.

CASE STUDY 1
ORANGE COUNTY SANITATION DISTRICT (OCSD)
Improving the Relationship with Policy Makers

OCSD Investment Needs – OCSD was in the middle of a significant rate increase period due to the need for upgrading major capital assets. OCSD had just been through 5 straight years of double-digit rate increases and needed 5 more years of the same in order to fund necessary capital improvements. It was imperative that the staff's interactions with the board result in continued support for investment. Unfortunately, the relationship between the staff and the board had deteriorated over time and was hindering the dialogue about needed rated increases.

Historical Issues with Staff/Board Relationship – The relationship problems started with the staff's view that they were the experts on wastewater management. This was, for the most part, true. However, this feeling by the OCSD staff caused them to underrate opinions by the board. The staff expected a rubber stamp without much inquiry or collaboration. Not surprisingly, this behavior was viewed by at least some board members as egotistical or even arrogant. This state of affairs eventually led to a seriously strained relationship. Board members felt the need to closely oversee the activities of the district, which was perceived by the staff as micro-management. This was no fun for anyone and certainly reduced the efficiency of the organization. Board members felt compelled

to spend more time focused on the affairs of the district and staff members felt they had someone constantly looking over their shoulders.

A New Approach – During this time, the OCSD board hired a new general manager. He decided the relationship between staff and the board needed to be improved in order to secure the remaining capital investment. Consequently, he implemented a more "board-centric" approach to planning and decision making. This process began with the staff accepting and becoming less agitated with the idea that the board has the final say. Ultimately, the staff came to recognize that the board has valid input on important issues, such as community benefits, finances, and the political landscape.

Increased Collaboration – The foundation for the new approach by the OCSD staff was a more open and collaborative style. OCSD managers presented to the board different scenarios or service levels in four strategic areas that included environmental stewardship, business principles, wastewater management, and workplace environment. Within these areas, staff members and the board discussed service levels related to maintenance, infrastructure upgrades and odor control, to name a few. Each scenario or option included an estimated impact on rates. This review of options also included a discussion of the risks of not investing or investing at a lower level. The key point is that the staff left the decision to the decision makers and built a reputation (or brand) of providing more meaningful information in a collaborative format.

Finances and Efficiency – At one point in the process the proposed rate increase hovered around 15%, which was viewed by the board as unpalatable. The board asked the staff members to sharpen their pencils. Staff responded by trading some capital investment for an increased level of maintenance in some cases and in other cases by slightly deferring the investment. The staff's growing reputation related to finances and efficiency was further enhanced when the management team took the initiative to identify additional opportunities to improve efficiency. This resulted in a savings of $10 million in operating expenses. Improvements in financial management and efficiency are strong branding points, especially with policy makers.

Sometimes utility staff members feel like victims of politics and policy makers.

Benefits of the New Approach and Improved Relationship – It is easy to see how the improved relationship could result in better decisions. The bottom line is that the needed investment was approved. The collaborative approach left board members better informed and enhanced the reputation of the staff. It encouraged the staff to focus more on the value of capital investments and to strive to find less expensive ways to provide the desired level of service. Besides better decisions, the improved relationship made the organization more efficient and made life easier for both staff and policy makers. "Micro-management" by the board decreased, as exemplified by the fact that the number of oversight committees was reduced from eight to three. Two-to-three-inch board packets were reduced to a half an inch. The board benefited by spending less time overseeing and more time addressing the important issues.

This process of being more collaborative and respecting boundaries worked so well that OCSD has formally made this approach a part of the strategic planning process. ●

The OCSD case study illustrates some key points about branding and leadership. First, the brand of the utility starts with the relationship between the staff and policy makers. The character traits of the staff are key components of the brand and have a profound impact on the quality of policy decisions. Some of these staff character traits, as defined in Chapter 2, are being clear, collaborative, open, responsive, and proactive in problem solving.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CLEAR – Clarity is a key to building trust, which is why it is so important that the utility develop a set of commitments that make it clear what people can count on from the organization. It is pretty easy to trust an organization that has clearly defined organizational commitments and a staff that has strong character traits. In contrast, secretive or bureaucratic organizations will not have a positive brand, will not be trusted, and will have difficulty building support and capturing investment. The communities such utilities serve will unfortunately pay the price in reduced quality of life, and in the long run, higher rates. With the increased worldwide demand for construction materials, delayed capital improvements will cause rates to be higher.

THE POLITICS – The OCSD cases study illustrates another important point. It is dangerous to think that the decisions of policy makers are all about the politics. This thinking can lead to senior staff deciding that it is important to focus on the politics when presenting issues to the governing body. This strategy is ill-advised for the following reasons. First, the likelihood that staff members can fully grasp the politics is small. Second, in the proper relationship between staff and policy makers, the staff should be branded as the water or wastewater experts. If staff members focus on the politics, it may be perceived by policy makers as inappropriately crossing the lines of responsibility. OCSD's new approach of presenting the technical and service options and then "stepping back," demonstrated a respect for appropriate roles and boundaries.

THE POWER OF STAFF MEMBERS TO LEAD – This case study illustrates one more important point. Sometimes utility staff members feel like victims of politics and policy makers. The new approach by OCSD illustrates the power of the staff to impact the perceptions and behavior of policy makers, and the quality of their decisions. Utility staffs that understand this power are able to limit political maneuvering and lead their communities to better decisions. Interestingly, one way to accomplish this is by not becoming embroiled in the politics. Putting this power to work is not about winning. It is about ensuring that the community enjoys the quality of life that the utility is responsible for providing.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POLICY MAKERS UNDERSTANDING OUTREACH AND BRANDING – It is not unusual for policy makers to be divided on the need to invest in outreach efforts and even less clear on the need for branding. Public information officers (PIOs) are sometimes categorized as spokespeople or "public relations" people. Utility staff members should be careful to stay away from the term public relations. People often view public relations as disingenuous or "spinning" the facts to put the organization in the best light. Policy makers need to understand that branding is not public relations, not public education, and that the utility brand is an important asset. The PIO should ensure that communication programs are cost effective in building the brand asset, and take advantage of connections that are already being made. This focus on cost effectiveness will be viewed positively by policy makers. ●

INTEGRATING THE BRAND INTO FORMAL PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING

This is an appropriate time to re-emphasize that branding is not just a communications issue. The utility's managers must be committed to delivering the value embodied in the brand. The utility will be branded more by its decisions, customer service, and actions than its communications.

CONSISTENCY OF ACTIONS AND WORDS

Integrity and trust demand consistency of actions and words. So, if the utility produces a strategic plan or business plan, the framework should be the organizational commitment statements. The staff's character traits do not show up as a part of this framework, but do show up in how the staff interacts (and collaborates) with policy makers and the community. Therefore, planning processes and communications about these processes should connect the organization's commitment statements to specific plans and activities. This discipline removes ambiguity, reduces confusion, and demonstrates integrity.

LINK POLICY DECISIONS TO THE BRAND

The organizational commitments should also be the foundation for policy decisions. As with the strategic plan, agenda items for the board of directors or other policy makers should be linked to the organizational commitments. This ensures that policy makers understand the relevant context for the specific topic and decision. Staff members should not assume that this linkage is already clear. When this method is employed, the brand acts as a rudder and encourages policy makers to make decisions that are consistent with the brand. Without this rudder, it can take considerable time and energy to eliminate confusion and reverse the ensuing politics. •

The utility will be branded more by its decisions, customer service, and actions than its communications.

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH SPECIFIC INDIVIDUALS

In the next section we will discuss reaching customers or members of the public when they have a reason to pay attention. This is perhaps the only way to affordably reach the "general public" which will not be inclined to pay attention to the wastewater utility. However, there are specific individuals that the utility will want to develop relationships. These individuals are active in the community and may have the influence to impact policy decisions.

THE AUTHORIZING PUBLIC

One way to label this group is the "authorizing public." It is useful to refer to them in this way because it articulates the purpose of developing these relationships, which is to ensure that appropriate rates and investment are "authorized." Obviously board members, city council members, or other types of policy makers fall into this category. They are so important and so easy to identify that they were covered in an earlier section of this manual. The rest can be summarized as follows:

- The Media
- Active Community Members
- Business Leaders
- Ethnic Group Leaders
- Environmental Group Leaders
- Local Regulators
- Trusted Technical or Medical Community Leaders
- Any Group that is Active or Influential
- Well-Networked People

These people will form the foundation of support or be the nucleus of opposition to rate increases, an important project, or provocative products like recycled water. An ideal member of this "authorizing public" is a decision maker or someone who represents a larger portion of the community than him or herself, thereby providing an opportunity for the fanning out of information. A person may be even more important if he or she has a strong political agenda or has been involved in conflict within the community.

NO GROUP RELATIONSHIPS – It is important to remember that relationships are always formed with individuals. Utility staff members may say they want to develop a better relationship with the Sierra Club, but what that really means is developing a better relationship with Sierra Club leaders. The wastewater utility should develop a database of key individuals and develop the means to initiate and maintain some sort of connection with them. This might involve inviting them to a class (or plant tours) or sending them brief email updates that address important issues. These people are busy, so communications should be brief, to the point, and preferably relate to investment issues and important decisions. Providing too much information will cause them to stop paying attention. The utility should make it a priority to diligently pursue these relationships. It is well worth the investment in time for the utility to develop a connection with the fifty most important individuals in the community.

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MEDIA – Chapter 2 covered the idea of "becoming the trusted source of information." This is a concept that applies to many of the individual relationships outlined above. However, it is especially important when developing relationships with the media. It is easy to become wary of the media. The culture in the media has changed significantly over the last 30 years. Most of what we see or hear in our local television and radio is "infotainment." There is still a fair amount of hard news, but people tend to gravitate toward celebrity-news-type publications. People spend a fair amount of time in their cars, so radio talk shows are easy to listen to. They typically address important issues but exercise little regard for balanced reporting. In fact, most of these programs have a specific bias or agenda.

Many of these radio shows admit that they are not "news" but a "show." Despite these challenges, developing relationships with the media is important and involves the following:

- Developing an ongoing relationship with the reporters and editors of local publications. Don't just approach them when you need support for your current endeavor.
- Understanding and meeting their needs, which includes responding in a timely manner (they are usually on a deadline).
- Being a reliable resource that provides information for their research and stories.

Reporters regard with suspicion managers who don't respond to phone calls. This does not demonstrate transparency, suggests that there is no real relationship, and may indicate that something negative is being covered up. The big take away here is that the utility needs to develop a positive relationship with the media that includes meeting their need for interesting stories and relevant information. Contacting members of the media only when you need support for a project or rate increase is not a true relationship and won't yield positive results.

INCREASING THE NETWORK OF THE UTILITY'S STAFF
Elected officials and policy makers are often present at community meetings or are involved in community groups many years before they are elected. Utility senior staff members can increase their relationship network by showing up at community meetings or being involved in these organizations. These relationships may have little to do with the wastewater function. However, they can pay off later when an acquaintance becomes the mayor, city manager, or other important official. Without a good network, senior utility managers can be at a disadvantage because they work with elected officials and city managers who have strong community networks. Lower level utility managers would be wise to build similar networks to prepare for the general manager role or other senior positions. Unfortunately, industry associations currently focus more on helping young professionals build networks within the industry. ●

Reporters regard with suspicion managers who don't respond to phone calls.

REACHING PEOPLE WHEN THEY ARE PAYING ATTENTION

Reaching members of the "general public" when they are paying attention may be one of the most important branding concepts covered in this manual. This is not because the general public is the most important group or audience. It is important because it is easy to waste time and money on programs that aspire to educate the public but do not make a lasting impression. This drains utility resources that could be used for more productive efforts.

BRANDING ADVANTAGES FOR UTILITIES

At first glance, the challenge of connecting with the public and forming an impression seems enormous. However, on closer inspection, wastewater utilities have some advantages when it comes to connecting with people. These advantages include the following:

- The utility won't go out of business next quarter if it doesn't build a brand, so it has time to implement a long-term branding strategy. Private companies have a lot more time pressure.
- Due to its jurisdiction, roles and programs, the utility has multiple opportunities to connect with people in the community when they are paying attention. Private companies would pay large sums for this access and potential publicity.
- Positive or negative impressions last a long time, which is good news if the utility is proactively building its brand.

So, when the utility embarks on a long-term branding program, it needs to capitalize on these advantages. The following sections cover in more detail some of these branding opportunities. •

IN THE CONSTRUCTION BUSINESS

Due to the fact that the wastewater utility is responsible for building significant infrastructure, it is in the construction business. People will be interested when they hear a new pump station is going in down the street or when work crews are in the neighborhood replacing a sewer main. The following case study covers in more detail this opportunity to connect with people and make an impression.

CASE STUDY 11
SOUTH TAHOE PUBLIC UTILITIES DISTRICT
Collaborating with the Community on Projects

The South Tahoe Public Utilities District near Lake Tahoe in Northern California has embraced the brand - building opportunities that come with being in the construction business. The utility has seen the benefits of collaborating with the public on construction projects. When construction is going to impact a specific community -- for example the installation of a new pump station -- South Tahoe PUD makes sure all of the impacted community members are informed. Also, because South Lake Tahoe includes a high percentage of vacation homes, the utility goes out of its way to contact the owner of record. Some of these owners have made special trips to be a part of meetings covering proposed construction.

When a new facility is being proposed in a given community, the utility works with community members to form an advisory group. The advisory group is chartered with providing input on key architectural and environmental decisions. This includes architectural style, colors, noise control, and other aesthetics. South Tahoe PUD has found that by consulting with community members, they end up with better projects and shorter completion times. The positive impressions formed by community members about the utility (namely its listening and collaborative style) last a long time. This is not only because of the collaborative experience, but because of the aesthetics of the new facility. South Tahoe PUD has found it does not cost much more to take this approach. Rather, it may save money because projects are completed in less time. If we look at it from a branding perspective, it is not a cost at all, but an investment in a tangible and important asset -- the utility's brand. •

DOOR HANGERS - LOGISTICS AND VALUES

Utilities often use door hangers to inform people of pending construction in the community. These door hangers or similar communications should not just describe the time, place, and duration of the construction. They should also be used to answer why the construction is occurring. For example, a door hanger could communicate that the sewer maintenance will decrease the likelihood of failures and is part of the utility's commitment to protecting public health and the environment. The door hanger could also communicate that proactive sewer maintenance is less disruptive to the community and less expensive than allowing pipes to deteriorate and fail. This demonstrates a concern for people's quality of life and their wallet. Not communicating "why" is a missed branding opportunity. What should come through loud and clear is why the construction is valuable and how it relates to the utility's commitments.

The city of Phoenix Water Services Department uses door hangers to inform people in neighborhoods about planned construction projects. This is not unusual. What is more unique is the city's focus on making sure the door hangers build the reputation and brand of the department. In addition to providing maps and basic information about the time, place, and duration of the construction, the city provides information on the motivations for the construction and the commitments of the department. Excerpts from a recent door hanger are shown in the boxes below.

The information below makes clear the long-term value and benefits of the project and clearly articulates the commitments of the Department of Water Services. It ensures there are no surprises by describing what people should expect during the construction. The commitment statements on the right (or very similar ones depending on the type of construction) appear in all the door hangers. The information is also offered on audio tapes or in Braille, which demonstrates a commitment to reach everyone. This is a good example of making an impression and building the brand when people are interested or concerned. •

What should I expect to see and hear?

- You will see trucks and equipment in the street 24 hours a day. The nature of this work requires 24-hour operations to install the new sewer line.
- This sewer project will utilize temporary bypass pumps to divert wastewater through temporary above-ground black pipes around the sewer mains being replaced. The bypass pumps, which operate 24 hours a day, have a low humming sound. They will remain in place for the duration of the project.
- You may also hear beeping alarms from trucks when they are backing up during work operations, this is an OSHA required safety feature and cannot be disarmed.

Committed to Protecting Public Health

The Department is in the process of implementing a city-wide sanitary sewer master planning effort to fulfill our commitment of protecting and enhancing community health and the environment. The Department modeled the sewer system for existing and future wastewater flow and the model showed the need to enhance the capacity of the sewer system to meet the growing need city-wide. The Sanitary Sewer Relief and Replacement Program is a top priority for the Department.

We are committed to proactive planning for the needs of our community.

We are committed to protecting and enhancing community health and the environment with a sound, safe sewer infrastructure with sufficient capacity to meet the future needs of the City of Phoenix.

We are committed to effectively managing improvement projects and as much as possible minimize the major community disruption that can be caused by sewer line failures. Proactive maintenance and replacement programs minimize disruption and improve quality of life for Phoenix residents.

We appreciate your support and realize that this project may be of some inconvenience in the short term, but will provide long-term sewer service benefits for you and your neighbors.

It is easy to waste time and money on programs that aspire to educate the public but do not make a lasting impression.

BILLING

People are paying attention when they are paying their bills. It is not atypical for utilities to provide additional information with the bill. However, it is unusual for these bill inserts to be part of a proactive branding program. The following case study from Butler County Department of Environmental Services (BCDES), near Cincinnati, Ohio, is an example of a bill insert program designed to communicate specific branding points.

CASE STUDY IV
BUTLER COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
Using Bill Inserts to Build the Brand

Butler County Department of Environmental Service (BCDES) wanted to improve the effectiveness of its communications and clarify its identity. One problem was that the name and slogan of the department did not clearly identify its roles, which included providing water, sanitation services, and recycling services. Butler County executives felt that defining the brand of the organization was the starting point for clarifying its identity and improving communications. Given this, the management team developed a series of branding statements intended to characterize what you could count on from the Department of Environmental Services. These commitment statements covered a range of ideas, including making it easier to deal with the department, and commitments to water reliability, water quality, the environment,

and appropriate investment. The following bill insert is one of several designed to integrate the branding statements into BCDES's activities and communications.

The bill insert format provides an opportunity to communicate several branding points in a brief and meaningful communication piece. Employing a series of bill inserts allows BCDES to do this consistently over a period of time. Repeating a communication style and content to reinforce specific ideas is a proven brand-building tactic.

Features of the Recycling Bill Insert
— The primary message in bill insert shown below is that Butler County is "making it easy" for people to recycle. Making things painless for the customer is a simple yet powerful practice that should be part of any customer service effort. BCDES has created web-based recycling "wizards" to help make it easy for people to find out where they can recycle specific items. This is important because different types of materials are recycled at different locations and people want to find the recycling location closest to where they live or work. The other important message is Butler County's commitment to the environment, which is reinforced by the word "environment" just below the headline. The simple act of providing information on recycling, and making it easier to recycle, demonstrates this commitment, which is reinforced in other bill inserts and communication pieces. Also, the slogan "Water, Public Health, and Environmental Leadership" was developed to ensure that the roles of the department are very clear in all communication materials. •

CUSTOMER SERVICE, RESOLVING PROBLEMS

Customer service can be defined broadly as any time the utility is interacting with a person as a customer. The BCDES case study above falls into this category. Chapter 2 covered the most important aspects of customer service. It suffices to say that the utility should have a plan to make a positive impression during each customer interaction. Make it easy, don't make them wait, communicate what you are doing and why, and solve their problem.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS THAT ENGAGE THE PUBLIC – Special circumstances where the utility needs to engage with the public can be a branding opportunity. Hazardous waste dumps, recycling centers, or dumps for pharmaceuticals are a few examples. The key to using these special programs to build the brand are not surprising.

- Make sure customers know who they are dealing with. This is where an organizational logo is valuable because it clearly identifies the organization.
- Don't make people wait in long lines. A quick and easy process is a very strong branding moment. Unfortunately, a long and difficult process makes an even stronger impression.
- Make sure employees are friendly and trained in serving the public.

It is not complicated or costly to make sure these interactions create lasting positive impressions. However, it requires recognizing the branding opportunity and making it a priority.

This special program branding can also apply to unique or innovative projects. A prime example of this is the Bufferlands project developed by Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District (SRCSD), described in the following case study.

SACRAMENTO REGIONAL COUNTY SANITATION DISTRICT
Developing an Environmental Asset and Public Resource

SRCSD needed to make a decision about how to manage the areas surrounding its major wastewater treatment plant. Recognizing that issues can arise if the public is close to a large plant, SRCSD decided to purchase over 2,500 acres surrounding the facility. The dilemma then became what to do with this land that would still allow for the operations and maintenance of the treatment plant. Although several options were considered, a key driver for the final decision was the fact that part of the land bordered a national wildlife refuge. SRCSD decided to extend this refuge into the land surrounding the treatment plant. That resulted in a series of wildlife and habitat projects that eventually became known as the Bufferlands. SRCSD brought in permanent staff to manage the Bufferlands, which ultimately became an educational resource to the community and an environmental asset.

Habitat Restoration – With a varied mix of upland and wetland habitats, the Bufferlands is an important wildlife area, supporting over 200 species of birds, 20 species of native mammals and several native fish, amphibians and reptiles. The Bufferlands is also home to more than 20 species of rare plants and animals, including several threatened and endangered species. Beginning in 1989, SRCSD teamed with the National Audubon Society, the Sacramento Job Corps Training Center, and other groups in an ambitious effort to restore wildlife habitat near the bustling Interstate 5. With SRCSD resource management experts taking the lead, this unique coalition has planted more than 10,000 native riparian trees and shrubs and restored over 300 acres of wetland habitats. This area now provides habitat for many species of waterfowl and other wetland birds and mammals.

Habitat restoration and enhancement efforts on the Bufferlands are ongoing. Through these efforts, the size of the riparian forests in the Bufferlands has more than doubled, and native perennial grasses are now an integral part of the landscape. The SRCSD staff continues to work with resident farmers to better tailor the Bufferlands agricultural operations to benefit wildlife. For example, cattle grazing operations enhance the habitat for the western burrowing owl. This is because vegetation would otherwise become too thick for the owls to hunt.

A Branding Asset – The Bufferlands is also a source of both local and international publicity. It has been featured in print and video media as far away as Japan and has hosted visiting natural resource managers from around the world. In addition, the Bufferlands maintains an educational outreach program including tours for all ages, field trips for schools and other nature-related activities. The annual "Walk on the Wildside" event draws 1,200 or more visitors each year and the Bufferlands is featured on the news at least once a year during the Christmas Bird Count.

The Bufferlands is an important branding asset because it gives people a reason to pay attention and applaud SRCSD. It is a valuable resource to the community, demonstrates a commitment to the environment, and generates positive publicity. ●

FORMAL OR TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

This section addresses what can be referred to as the normal or traditional communications for utilities including websites, presentations, brochures, newsletters and communications designed to reach employees.

EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES – We should start with the relationships with employees because the brand is not just what you say, it is who you are. The brand helps employees clearly understand the reasons for their work, which increases morale and motivation. It also allows them to be "brand builders" because they can convey the values of the organization in their interactions with friends, the community, and customers. Informing employees about the brand and demonstrating commitment are important activities. When communicating important decisions, always connect the decision to the appropriate elements of the brand. This demonstrates management's commitment, which encourages employees to buy-in to the branding process. Also, utility senior managers need to make sure basic communications like the website, press releases, and brochures clearly reflect the brand. These communications are read by employees, as well as the public.

One form of empowering employees is illustrated by the following case study from West Basin Municipal Water District in Los Angeles, California.

CASE STUDY VI
WEST BASIN MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT
Communicating the Brand to Employees

West Basin was already an innovative industry leader due to its implementation of multiple grades of recycled water and early development of seawater desalination. However, the staff wanted to make sure the community was clear on the motivations behind this innovative culture and leadership. Consequently, they decided to further clarify and enhance their brand by developing a set of organizational commitment statements. These statements were ultimately reviewed and approved by West Basin's board of directors and integrated into the board's decision-making processes. However, West Basin's management knew they needed to communicate the importance of these commitment statements to employees. One way they did this was to develop a commitment statements mouse pad, as illustrated below:

This is one straightforward and attractive method for communicating a brand to employees. However, it needs to be supported with efforts by senior management to "walk the talk" through other communications, activities, and key decisions. One way West Basin has done this is by connecting each agenda item brought before the board of directors with the appropriate commitment statement or statements. West Basin staff also provides board members with a wallet-size card that lists key talking points, including the elements of the brand. These simple practices have a considerable impact on the consistency and clarity of West Basin's communications.

WEBSITES, PRESENTATIONS, BROCHURES AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

When discussing more formal or traditional communication practices, it pays to review the purpose of communicating. "Educating" the general public is beyond the budget capabilities of most utilities. However, there are times when the public will be interested or paying attention to the utility, as outlined previously in this chapter. Having a website or newsletter is useful for communicating with people who are looking for more information. This information can be divided into two simple categories. The first involves helping the customer do something they would like to do. That might be paying their bill, reporting a problem, or finding a recycling center. The second type of information relates to informing them about important issues including construction activities in their community, needed investments, and what they can expect from the utility with respect to important issues.

This brings us to a simple conclusion. Information that does not relate to helping customers "do things" should be oriented toward building trust, reputation, and brand. So, the parts of the newsletter or website that are not related to customer service should be focused on making an impression that relates to the elements of the brand. This is different than public education because the objective is different. Public education attempts to educate, and a branding program builds trust. Branding has an objective that is achievable and contributes to good policy decisions. Public education programs often have no clear standards for suitable content and are arguably trying to do something the public does not necessarily want.

The utility's organizational commitments can and should provide the structure for the website, the newsletter, or presentations that cover the roles and activities of the utility. For example, a water utility might choose to highlight a website tab or link that says "water reliability" instead of one that says "water resources." This is because water reliability describes value. Water resources are important assets, but they are only meaningful within the context of providing a reliable water supply. Also, having water resources does not guarantee water reliability. Water reliability is achieved by the planning and investment of the utility. It follows that emphasizing water reliability also emphasizes the utility's brand, or its competency and values. Note that "wastewater treatment" is not an element of the brand described in Chapter 2. However, it is an activity that has meaning when put in the context of public and environmental health.

SLOGANS – Many utilities use a slogan to complement their name. Although a slogan generally cannot fully articulate the brand, it can be useful in communicating key points. For example, Butler County Department of Environmental Services (BCDES) used the slogan "Water, Public Health, and Environmental Leadership" on its bill inserts to summarize the roles of the organization. This was especially helpful because BCDES's name did not readily communicate that the utility is a water purveyor. Another good example of a slogan is the one developed by San Diego Gas and Electric®. That utility adopted the slogan, "Serving you today. Planning for tomorrow.®" This slogan conveys several meaningful ideas. "Serving you today" emphasizes the customer service role. "Planning for tomorrow" addresses the fact that customers are linked to the future of the organization. This "planning for the future" message provides a good context for more specific messages about investment and future quality of life. It also expresses the need for sound long-term planning, which is a critical role for utilities. This slogan is one of the best at conveying the nature of the relationship between the utility, customers, and members of the community.

MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF BRAND-BUILDING PROGRAMS

It is with caution that we address how to measure the effectiveness of a brand-building program. Consumer surveys are only as good as the questions that are asked. If the questions are not very specific, the results will be unreliable.

LOOK FOR IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONSHIPS
One of the ways to measure the success of brand building is to look for improvement in the dialogue with policy makers or in the strategic planning process. Look for reduced conflict in

meetings with the general public. Ultimately, the branding process should ensure that policy makers do not vote for rate increases that are smaller than what is needed. Look for evidence of improved relationships with policy makers and better policy decisions.

USE THE BRAND TO ASK SPECIFIC QUESTIONS – The good news is that the brand provides very specific information about what you want policy makers, key audiences, and the public to know about the utility. This gives the utility the means to create surveys or other assessment tools that ask very precise questions, as opposed to questions like, "Do you trust the utility?" Responses to general questions are not a reliable indicator of future support for specific programs or investments. Any survey or assessment tool should ask precise questions that address specific elements of the brand. For example "Do you believe your utility is efficient and uses your money wisely" is a question that is more specific and relates to the brand. •

BRAND BUILDING IS FREE

Given that many companies spend large sums on public relations and advertising, one might think that building a brand must be expensive. Unfortunately, utilities that have spent significant sums of money on communications can still have poor trust with the community.

AFFORDABILITY OF BRANDING

If you do not know what your brand is, arguably no amount of money will ensure branding success. Some utility managers might still ask the question, "Can we afford to implement a branding program?" Given the issues facing wastewater utilities and the competition for investment dollars, can they afford not to? These "cost" questions may not be very relevant because the cost of building a brand can be virtually free. This is because brand building does not necessarily require additional decision-making processes or communication efforts. It does require clarity of brand and diligence. Brand building is affordable because it can be accomplished by diligently using current access to policy makers and the public to make positive impressions. In fact, brand building is better than free. It builds an invaluable asset -- trust with the community.

In closing, Chapter 3 can be summarized very easily. Every decision, every communication piece, and every interaction with the community is a branding moment and a branding opportunity. Utilities should focus on making a positive impression when people are paying attention, lead a clear and productive dialogue with policy makers, and diligently reach out to specific individuals who can influence policy decisions. This results in an organization that has integrity and is proficient at increasing trust, support, and investment. •

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This chapter will address the branding of the wastewater utility's resources and products.

Chapter 4

Branding of the Utility's Products

The products of wastewater utilities start out with a branding liability because they come from organizations that are often perceived as "waste managers." This chapter will provide insights related to the nature of this liability and outline branding strategies designed to improve perceptions. Chapter 1 proposed that anything can be branded, including people, products, and organizations. Chapters 2 and 3 addressed defining and building the utility or organizational brand. This included the changing roles of wastewater utilities and the fact that these utilities are now stewards of important resources. This new role involves turning resources into useful products and managing the brands of those products. This is important because how the customer brands a product determines if it is accepted and what price they are willing to pay. Remember, brand = price.

Product branding is important because how the customer brands a product determines if it is accepted and what price they are willing to pay. Remember, brand = price.

PRODUCT BRANDING CHALLENGES FOR WASTEWATER UTILITIES

Anyone who has been involved in the management of recycled water or the beneficial reuse of biosolids already knows there can be public perception problems. It typically requires a strong public outreach program to overcome initial negative reactions. This is because when first proposed, these new products will likely cause people to formulate negative perceptions of both the utility and the products. Given this, wastewater utility senior staff members face several challenges, including the following:

- Recognizing that their resources and products have a brand that needs to be managed
- Addressing negative branding of products because the raw materials have traditionally been viewed as a waste
- Managing the brand of the products given the perceived roles of wastewater utilities or perceptions of the specific utility that produced them
- Ensuring that the actions and communications of the utility do not create or contribute to branding problems

THE NEED TO MANAGE PRODUCT BRANDS — It is easy to criticize wastewater utility managers for the public acceptance problems. In their defense, there was no reason to expect that managers would have been prepared to successfully manage the brand of their products and organizations. In the past, they have prided themselves on being the "silent service." If no one knew about them, they were doing their job. Because of this desire to be low profile, it was not a priority to define and manage the brand of the utility. However, branding is becoming more important as wastewater utilities advocate for more local investment and as their resources become more valuable to the community. There already has been a movement by utilities to increase and improve public outreach. However, these efforts are just beginning to incorporate branding. This state of affairs has left wastewater utilities generally ill-equipped to deal with the branding issues associated with proposing the use of recycled water and beneficial reuse of biosolids. Even after many years of suc-

cessful water recycling projects, improving public acceptance of recycled water is still a strategic priority of the national WateReuse Association and a challenge for individual utilities.

BRANDING OF WASTES AND THE PHYSICAL SOURCE/QUALITY CONNECTION — There is a general tendency to brand things based on where they came from, similar to products that are branded based on their manufacturer. Water is definitely branded based on its source. For the most part, the public believes mountain spring water is healthy and tap water is not. Toilet water is usually thought of as toxic. Certainly the sources for both biosolids and recycled water have traditionally been branded as wastes. Although this may seem obvious, toxic by-products are branded as wastes for two reasons. They need to be kept separate from the public because of their toxicity, and the community does not currently view them as valuable. Consequently, they are considered dangerous, and discarded. However, many communities already understand that "toxic" no longer means unusable if the basic resource has become highly valuable.

The value of recycled water has grown rapidly as more communities identify the need to increase their water resources and come to grips with the expense of developing new water supplies. Although the use of recycled water has become more mainstream, public perceptions and branding are still challenges, if only because it is a new and provocative practice when first proposed. The reuse of solids is a little different. Utilities and the industry are still developing a clear understanding of the value of biosolids and organic materials. In Southern California, the soil has very low organic content and is starving for organic material, which causes plants to need much more water. Despite this fact, biosolids are being hauled to Central California to be applied on selected farm lands. Retaining organic materials in Southern California and applying it to landscapes could save millions of gallons of water in this water-starved region.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL AND PRODUCT BRANDS — It is not wise to call an electrician to get a leaky faucet fixed. This illustrates a fundamental principle of branding. People formu-

People formulate negative judgments about the value of something if its price is low.

late perceptions of a product based on who is producing it. This is where the organizational and product brands are linked. Both Toyota and Ford manufacture cars, but people's perceptions of these cars are very different because of the company who makes them. If the utility is branded as a wastewater organization, then by definition the public believes the organization's role (and competency) is protecting public health through waste management. Will a wastewater utility be perceived as competent in providing a drinking water product? Not likely. This obvious branding problem was a significant factor in the failure of at least two indirect potable reuse projects in California.

What we can learn from these examples is that the organizational brand establishes credibility. This principle operates on two levels. The first level relates to what people already perceive about an organization, and the second level relates to how well the organization understands and builds its brand. For example, if a utility does not have a clearly defined brand, how are community members supposed to evaluate its credibility? They certainly will try if they have a reason to be interested, and they will likely rely on preconceived notions about wastewater organizations, government agencies, and sewer workers. This is why having a strong utility brand is an important asset for managing the brand of products.

HOW UTILITIES CONTRIBUTE TO BRANDING PROBLEMS — When utility mangers do not have a clear sense of their own brand or how their products can be branded, they will, to varying degrees, contribute to branding problems. This often starts at the beginning. For example, how does the utility answer the basic question, "What is recycled water?" Sometimes utilities define recycled water as acceptable only for non-potable uses, or they state that using recycled water

for irrigation will allow the community to save "precious potable water." Although this statement may be true in a specific situation, it is not necessarily the best definition or best overall positioning of recycled water. What happens if three years later the utility wants to implement some form of potable reuse? The utility's credibility is as risk because it previously defined recycled water as non-potable. In fact, the utility went out of its way to characterize recycled water as different from potable water. This description of the product also encourages people to think that drinkability is determined by where the water came from. This perception is already a problem, and diminishes the utility's role in producing water that is fit for drinking. The utility should not purposely or inadvertently emphasize the connection between water source and quality.

Another form of this branding problem manifests itself in warning signs related to recycled water. When the utility puts up signs that say: "Recycled Water, Do Not Drink," they are suggesting the water is not drinkable because it is recycled. It is easy to rationalize that this is not a problem if the utility never intends to implement potable reuse. However, this approach also sends more subtle messages. First, that recycled water is bad or dangerous. Second, the now familiar problem of suggesting that water quality is determined by where the water came from, and not due to the ethics and expertise of the utility.

Utilities can also contribute to branding problems by how they set the price for their products. The converse of brand = price is also true: price = brand. People formulate negative judgments about the value of something if its price is low. Some people look for the most inexpensive gas but others will not buy gas if it is too cheap, because it "must be of lower quality." When the utility gives away composted biosolids or sells its recycled water for a small percentage of the cost of "potable" water, it sends the message that the product is inferior. This is a shame. Properly designed, recycled water can be the best quality for a specific application. It can also provide greater reliability because recycled water is a drought-proof supply. Under-pricing of recycled water is an especially troubling practice because it reinforces the "inferior quality" label that arises because it is derived from a "waste."

A GENERAL CASE - LAND APPLICATIONS OF CLASS B BIOSOLIDS — Historically, it would have been a stretch for wastewater utilities to think of Class B Biosolids as a product with a brand to be protected. The Class B quality designation is based on government regulations, and biosolids are a byproduct of the wastewater treatment process. Admittedly, biosolids are not really a product designed to enhance the soil. However, wastewater utilities were and still are applying Class B biosolids

to the land, for the most part to dispose of it. At least in some regions, biosolids has taken on a negative brand, independent of the wastewater agency that produces them. This is because biosolids is a general term that defines a substance, not a branded product of a specific organization. In hindsight, it is easy to see why utilities fail to manage the brand of this substance.

What does "not managing the brand" look like? First, there were no guidelines or requirements in the contracts with private-sector haulers or other "residuals management" companies designed to protect the brand of biosolids. A brand is built on standards. These standards could have included more specific criteria on site selection or on which crops biosolids should be applied. Better standards for how much and when biosolids could be applied would also have helped. When biosolids are used by a credible soil-amendment company (see Kellogg Garden Products case study below), the company applies its own product quality and delivery standards. Because of the lack of branding standards in many residuals management contracts, wastewater agencies left the branding of "their product" to others. This is like Sony Company allowing its brand to be managed by Best Buy Electronics or Circuit City. This would never happen. The CEO of Sony would have a short tenure after implementing that strategy.

Wastewater agencies also need to accept the simple branding principle that the product will be branded based on the organization that produces it. If the "wastewater" agency is producing the product, then it will be inherently difficult for people to accept that it is healthy for the soil. No amount of science is likely to reverse this perception. This point illustrates the value of private-sector companies and the brands that enable them to sell products with biosolids as an ingredient.

Finally, shipping biosolids to another county may seem necessary due to availability of land or proximity to urban areas. However this practice creates a branding risk. The receiving community is apt to react negatively. "Why should we be the waste dump for another county? It must be bad stuff if they are willing to spend the money to truck it over 100 miles." This practice of shipping biosolids across community lines has no doubt contributed to the negative brand of biosolids in Southern California. •

MANAGING THE BRAND OF RECYCLED WATER

The following are some specific guidelines for managing the brand of recycled water. The wastewater utility is not always the final provider of recycled water. Sometimes treated effluent is transferred to the water agency for further treatment, marketing, and distribution. No matter who is selling the product, a good branding strategy makes things much easier.

MEET THE NEEDS OF CUSTOMERS – This may seem like an obvious idea, but you would be surprised how many times the needs of customers take second fiddle to the desires of the organization or corporate goals. Most of us have experienced poor customer service and wonder how the company stays in business.

START WITH A PRODUCT BRANDING STRATEGY – Any good product marketing strategy starts with a branding strategy. The branding process begins with defining the valuable benefits or features you want customers to count on from the product.

IMPLEMENT AN APPROPRIATE BRAND FOR RECYCLED WATER – The brand of recycled water involves some very simple ideas. First and foremost, recycled water is not a single product and it is not limited to non-potable applications. Recycled should be defined as multiple products specifically designed for multiple uses. These products include irrigation water, different grades of industrial water, and water designed to replenish the potable water supply. This is the way recycled water should be described in utility communications pieces and when utility managers talk about water reuse. There may be no better example of multiple recycled water products being designed for the use than West Basin Municipal Water District's "designer water." West Basin, located in Southern California, produces five different grades of recycled water with five different uses and prices. The "designed for the use" branding provides another benefit. It rightfully suggests that West Basin is the source of water quality, and not where the water came from.

> Recycled water should be defined as multiple products specifically designed for multiple uses. These products include irrigation water, different grades of industrial water, and water designed to replenish the potable water supply.

WEST BASIN MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT (WEST BASIN)
Designer Water

West Basin has developed a series of water products derived from the same wastewater source that meet the needs of specific customers. These products include the following:

Irrigation, Tertiary Water – This water is tertiary treated and is designed for irrigation, certain industrial applications, and street sweeping. This water is delivered to over 200 customers.

Cooling Tower, Nitrified Water – This water is designed for use in industrial cooling towers and is delivered to several oil company customers.

Low Pressure Boiler Feed Water – This water is treated by microfiltration, reverse osmosis, and decarbonation, and is designed for use in low pressure boilers. This product is delivered to several oil companies.

High Pressure Boiler Feed Water – This water is similar to the low pressure boiler feed water except it is passed through the reverse osmosis process twice to the meet the ultra-pure water requirements of high pressure boilers. This product is delivered to Chevron.

Seawater Barrier Injection Water – This water is used for injecting into the coastal aquifers to prevent seawater intrusion. It is similar to the low pressure boiler feed water except it is also treated with peroxide and ultra violate light to oxidize specific contaminants. Finally, it is softened to be compatible with the pipes that convey it to the injection wells. This product is delivered to the Water Replenishment District in Southern California.

All of these water products use the same source water and, when viewed as a whole, communicate that recycled water is a manufactured product - water that is adapted for the application. It also positions the utility (West Basin) as the source of quality, which is absolutely true. Each year West Basin conducts over 30,000 water quality tests and works with an independent advisory panel to ensure high water quality. Finally, these water products are priced differently. Prices range from 70-80% of potable water for irrigation water and some industrial waters, moving to double the price of potable water for water that meets the requirements of high pressure boilers. Customers will pay for value. ●

UNDERSTAND THE ISSUES WITH THE NAME "RECYCLED WATER"

Calling this valuable resource "recycled water" has two major drawbacks. It lumps many products under one name that focuses on where the water came from, not what it is used for. No wonder customers can become confused or concerned. At least the term "recycled" implies that actions are taken to make it acceptable for use, unlike the term "reclaimed" which suggests mining or recovery operations. This is not to suggest that these terms must be discarded. This may no longer be practical in some situations, and utilities can address these problems by incorporating other sound branding strategies. However, it is important to recognize the branding implications of these terms and act accordingly in your communications strategy. For example, utilities can create signs that say "Irrigation Water, Do Not Drink" instead of "Recycled Water, Do Not Drink." These signs can still refer to the fact that the product is recycled or reclaimed, which should allow the utility to comply with regulations. The following case study illustrates this point in greater detail.

Using the name recyled water lumps many products under one name that focuses on where the water came from, not what it is used for.

In 2004, the LOTT Alliance was preparing to produce reclaimed water for the first time. An interagency task force of LOTT staff and water resource representatives from its four partner jurisdictions (Lacey, Olympia, Tumwater and Thurston counties in the state of Washington) joined together to create a public communications program for reclaimed water, with positive branding of the product being a key objective. The results included a dynamic program logo, two key message themes, and interpretive signage for posting at use sites.

The Logo – The program logo features a blue water drop, emphasizing the message that the product is water, and no longer wastewater. The water drop is surrounded by two graphic swirls, symbolizing progressive action and the concept of recycling. The colors of the swirls are also symbolic, purple for reclaimed water, and green for environmental responsibility. The logo also incorporates the first of two program themes -- "The

Right Water for the Right Use." The message is that by using reclaimed water, the communities are able to stretch their water supplies by matching the type of water they use to actual needs. The second theme, which is implemented on key information materials, is "Safe, Sensible, Sustainable," which summarizes the key benefits of Class A Reclaimed Water.

The Notification Signs – One requirement of LOTT's reclaimed water permits is the posting of standard notification signs at all use sites. Rather than the traditional "Reclaimed Water–Do Not Drink" sign, or the more intimidating "Warning" sign, LOTT's task force chose to take a more value-oriented approach. The sign prominently features the reclaimed water logo and a positive interpretive message which is "We're using water wisely by irrigating with reclaimed water." The phrase "Do not drink from the irrigation system" appears at the bottom of the signs but in an unintimidating way. This phrase also suggests that the reason for not drinking the water is because it is irrigation water, rather than because it is reclaimed water. In the upper left, the signs also carry the "Safe, Sensible, Sustainable" theme. •
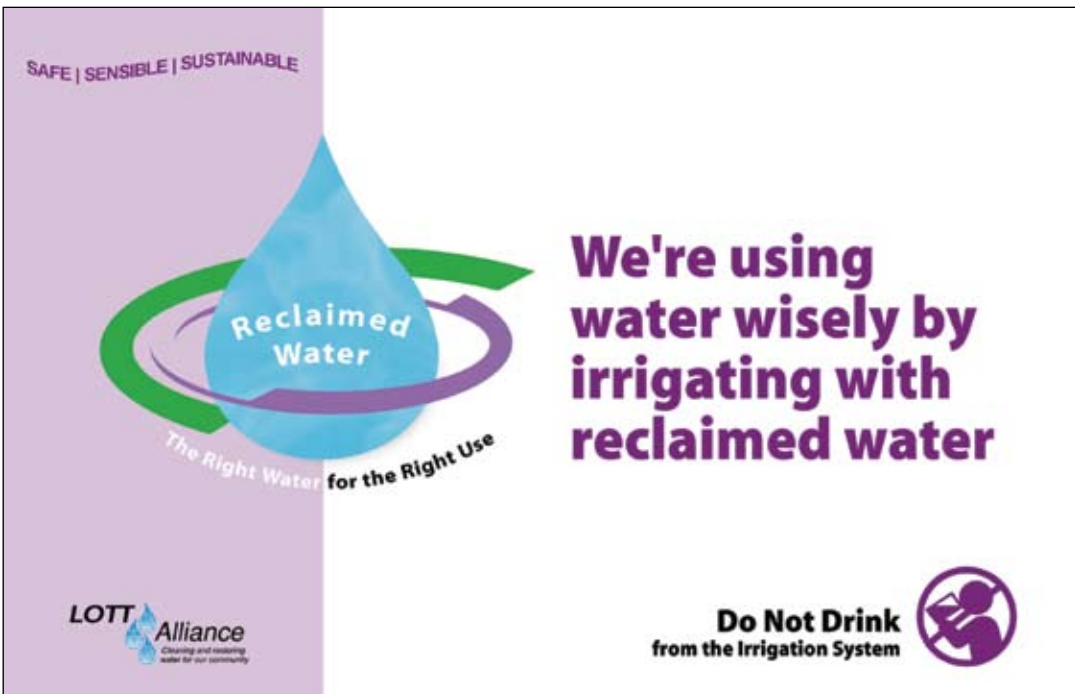
THINK OF RECYCLED WATER AS A PRODUCT – A product should actually be designed for the use, which is another way of saying that the product should meet the needs of customers. Utilities have a tendency to think that if the product meets regulations then it must be fine for customers. This is not always true. Just ask a golf course superintendant when is dealing with dying grass or having to change plants because of salty recycled water. Unlike golf courses, companies with a need for water to support a sensitive manufacturing process will not accept compromises. The utility should start by meeting regulations, but design the final product to meet customers' needs. By doing so, the product will be more readily accepted and garner a higher price.

CHOOSE THE BEST WATER PURVEYOR – The water utility is best suited for delivering recycled water to customers and building trust in the product. This is because the role of water utilities is to sell water. Despite this fact, most water utilities still have a regulatory mindset, so designing the water to meet customer needs is often still a challenge. Wastewater utilities have not historically sold water, so they do not have a water purveyor reputation. This is not to say that wastewater utilities cannot be a purveyor of recycled water, but they need to recognize the branding and customer service challenges. Recycled water designed to replenish the potable supply is a different story. The water utility or water department should always be the responsible organization when the product is ultimately used for drinking. Otherwise, the water supply replenishment project is at greater risk for negative branding. Creating more branding challenges for tap water is not a good strategy and not good for the water industry. ●

MANAGING THE BRANDS OF PRODUCTS DERIVED FROM BIOSOLIDS

Meeting the needs of customers and having a product branding strategy, as discussed in the previous section, also apply to biosolids.

UNDERSTAND THE BRAND OF BIOSOLIDS – The brand of biosolids can be positive or negative depending on the community or region. In general, building a positive brand for "biosolids" will be an uphill battle. There are cases where soil amendment bags advertise that the product has "no sewage sludge" or "no biosolids." Biosolids is a general term, so negative or positive branding of biosolids in a region will likely spill over from one agency to the next. It is probably not advisable for utilities to brand their biosolids as better than others. This will be ineffective, because it is not a branded product, and not the best strategy for maintaining the brand of the wastewater industry. It also helps to reiterate that biosolids is arguably not a product, but a substance that is produced as a result of the treatment of wastewater. Good products are designed to meet specific needs or provide compelling benefits.

CREATING PRODUCTS – Processes designed to make the product more palatable to customers or to meet specific needs help turn ingredients into a product. Composting, drying, or producing pellets are ways to actually formulate a product and create the perception that the ingredients were processed to meet specific needs. However, investing in further processing without a well defined marketing strategy is not a smart course of action.

IF YOU BAG IT, THEY WILL COME – A common misperception is that simply bagging biosolids and developing a logo or "brand" name will create positive perceptions. This can help, but it should be backed up with high standards for product quality and a good understanding of customer needs. Without high standards and a customer focus, branding problems, lackluster sales, and low prices are likely outcomes. Also, a bag and a logo do not change the fact that the product came directly from a wastewater utility.

BUILD AND INVEST IN PRIVATE SECTOR BRANDS AND ASSETS – It is very easy to underestimate or not fully appreciate the effort and assets involved in successfully marketing a product. First, the product must be designed to meet the needs of a specified set of customers, which also requires understanding the market and competitors. Understanding the brand and value of the product and setting the right price is critical and often difficult. The ability to produce and deliver the product must be put in place. Sales relationships and distribution channels must be developed and maintained, which takes quite a bit of time and resources. All of these skills and capabilities are valuable assets and typically take many years to develop. Getting started requires focus, resources, lots of persistence, and often a fair amount of luck.

For these reasons and more, it is very difficult for a wastewater agency to be successful at developing a brand and marketing its own product. It is especially difficult to be able to set and maintain a strong price for the product. This is why utilities should seek marketing partners. With the proper partnerships, a wastewater utility can capitalize on the experience and assets of private-sector companies. The following case study illustrates the value of partnerships between the public and private sector and the tremendous value of market and brand assets.

Understanding the brand and value of the product and setting the right price is critical and often difficult.

CASE STUDY III
KELLOGG GARDEN PRODUCTS
80 Years of Marketing
and Branding

In 1925, H. Clay Kellogg discovered that the solid waste from wastewater treatment processes was great for amending the soil and growing more robust and healthy plants. He developed and began selling his Nitrohumus fertilizer to farmers. Kellogg Garden Products has been selling biosolids-based fertilizers that enhance landscapes and gardens ever since.

Over the years, Kellogg has built a strong brand and business based on several key principles:
- Integrity in the Organization
- Intense Focus on Quality
- Customer Support, Customer Intimacy
- Successes and "Learning Experiences"
- Innovation

What all this boils down to is Kellogg understanding and meeting customer needs and applying its experience to developing more compelling products and improved customer service. This included soil amendments for Victory Gardens in the 1940's, professional baseball fields, the Getty Museum, and the tropical plants necessary for the Jungle Cruise ride at Disneyland.

Over the years, Kellogg has been a credible brand for selling products with biosolids as a main ingredient. Kellogg's sanitation district partners had the wisdom to let Kellogg experiment with mixing other ingredients with the biosolids, which improved the compost and the composting process. This resulted in more effective soil amendment products. These products were sold through specific markets and for specific applications, including top dressing lawns or products specifically designed for planting trees or shrubs. Biosolids became a valuable ingredient in Kellogg's plan to help the customer create a beautiful landscape or garden.

Kellogg's brand and success stem from multiple marketing activities including building strong sales channels, being known for on-time delivery, educating customers in the stores, training store employees, and other resources that provide information about the nature and health of soil. Company officials are credible soil health experts as demonstrated by their focus on quality, education programs, and the fact that they have specialized product lines. These sales and marketing skills and Kellogg's brand loyalty are valuable assets to Kellogg and its sanitation district partners.

Through the contracting relationships with Kellogg, sanitation districts have helped to invest and build these important marketing assets. However, most sanitation districts are not yet clear on their role as investors in markets and brands. •

AN INVESTOR IN MARKETS AND BRANDS – Building strong partnerships that develop brands and markets does not mean that you are leaving brand development to others. A "black box" approach, where the utility knows little about brand and market development, is risky and not the best strategy. So what do wastewater utility managers need to know and do? They need to:

- Recognize that a successful private-sector brand is a tremendous asset.
- Understand the benefits of the separation between the wastewater utility brand and the brands of soil amendment companies.
- Appreciate the value of distribution networks and understand how market channels work.
- Proactively partner with private marketers to invest in brands and market expansion.

What does all this mean? It means contracts with partners should have mechanisms for market preservation, market expansion, and development of trusted brands. Without these provisions, branding and pricing problems can and have occurred. This knowledge does not make wastewater utility managers fertilizer experts. It makes them smart investors in fertilizer markets. •

ENERGY PRODUCTION

Many wastewater agencies produce energy from their wastewater treatment digesters and from food and other types of organic waste from the community. For the most part, these operations do not present significant branding challenges. In fact, they provide branding opportunities. When people learn what is going on with respect to energy generation they tend to be pleasantly surprised and the reputation of the utility is enhanced. This means that efforts in energy production can be used to raise the overall image of the organization. This can come in handy when the organization is seeking support and investment on other fronts. The utility should promote public knowledge in this area, especially with influential members of the community, policy makers, and the media. The topic of energy is only going to become more interesting. Spreading the word can be done with regularly scheduled tours and classes. ●

CLOSING REMARKS

This manual outlines important issues facing wastewater utilities, including a variety of technical challenges, increasingly stringent regulations, rising costs, and the need for more local investment. It demonstrates that building a strong brand is a powerful technique for addressing these challenges and for increasing trust, support, and investment. The wastewater utility brand is comprised of staff character traits and organizational commitments that articulate what people can count on from the utility. This brand is an unambiguous basis for trust, and sets the stage for branding of recycled water and other products. The strategies presented in this manual describe a highly integrated approach to planning, making decisions, serving customers, and communicating with policy makers and the public. These strategies will help utility managers secure the investment necessary to sustain high quality of life for the communities they serve. ●

All that remains is to present a concise summary of branding for wastewater utilities. The following checklist provides this summary. It is a tool for ensuring that the utility is doing all it can to proficiently build its brand.

Checklist

Define and Institutionalize Your Brand

1. **DEFINE YOUR BRAND** – Gather the senior utility managers who are your leaders. Conduct a series of collaborative workshops that define what people can "count on" from the utility. This "brand" should be articulated with a series of commitment statements that cover standards of public health, environmental stewardship, efficiency, and finances.

2. **ADOPT STRONG CHARACTER TRAITS FOR THE STAFF** – Make sure the utility's staff exhibits character traits that build the reputation and brand of the utility. These traits include honesty, integrity, clarity, a collaborative style, and being proactive problem solvers. The behaviors of the staff have a big impact on the relationship with policy makers and on policy decisions.

3. **CREATE A CULTURE OF BRANDING** – Make sure senior utility managers understand the benefits and power of building a brand, are committed to the brand, and are willing to lead change within the utility. Make it the "way we do things" to integrate the brand into all decisions and communications.

4. **USE THE BRAND FOR CORPORATE DECISION MAKING** – Identify key decision-making processes and forums within the utility and make sure these processes reference the brand. When communicating decisions to employees, make sure to connect the decision to the relevant elements of the brand. This demonstrates that management is "walking the talk" and helps employees better understand the brand.

5. **BRING EMPLOYEES INTO THE PROCESS** Employees should be encouraged to provide their own insights into the brand and how to build it. Employee buy-in is heavily influenced by management's commitment to the brand and its ability to create a culture of branding.

Nurture Key Relationships

6. **TREAT CUSTOMERS AS INVESTORS** – Because most utilities are monopolies, customers are also owners or investors in the utility. Focus communications to the public on commitments to value, key assets, and needed investments. Community members are your customers and investors, not your students.

7. **BUILD A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH POLICY MAKERS** – Meet the needs of policy makers. Constantly increase efficiency and keep a close watch on financial issues. Build relationships with influential community members and manage conflict. Give policy makers the information they need to make good investment choices and the information to sell the investment to their constituents.

8. **BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH IMPORTANT IN-DIVIDUALS** – Building trust and a strong brand are accomplished by building relationships with specific people. In every interaction with policy makers or the public, use the brand (the organization's commitments and staff character traits) as the basis for the relationship.

9. **REACH PEOPLE WHEN YOU HAVE THEIR ATTENTION** – Utilities have a lot of access to the community through the customer-service relationship, construction projects, recycling centers, and other special programs. Make sure every interaction produces a positive impression. Make things easy for the customer and provide friendly service. Be creative and go out of your way to solve a difficult problem for a customer. Both positive and negative impressions last a long time.

10. **CONSTRUCTIVELY MANAGE CONFLICT** There are positives to conflict and opposition. Opponents are paying attention and may be interested in developing a deeper relationship with the utility. This can lead to committed supporters and even more investment. Embrace opponents and understand their point of view.

Be Disciplined In Building The Brand

11. **BE CLEAR, BE DILIGENT** — Building a brand requires two simple things: clarity of value and diligence. Being diligent about using the brand as a foundation for all decisions and communications demonstrates integrity. People will respect you even if they do not completely agree with you.

12. **MAKE COMMUNICATIONS MEANINGFUL** — Do not communicate utility activities or investments without relating them to the meaningful value embodied in the brand. Providing information without the motivation is boring and leads to confusion and conflict. Also, keep communications simple by avoiding jargon, long sentences, and overly technical information.

13. **IDENTIFY INITIAL BRANDING OPPORTUNITIES** Select specific communication channels for trying out the brand. Good candidates are press releases, strategic planning processes, and packets (agendas) for communicating with policy makers. These activities will create obvious improvements in the relationships with policy makers and others who are paying attention.

14. **INTEGRATE THE BRAND INTO ALL COMMUNICATIONS** — Identify all the ways the utility interacts with customers and the community. Every interaction is a "branding opportunity" that should be capitalized on.

15. **MANAGE THE BRAND OF YOUR PRODUCTS** Understand that recycled water and products derived from biosolids have brands that need to be managed. Have a branding strategy for these products. Make sure they meet customers' needs and don't just comply with regulations. For organics markets, use private partners to take advantage of credible brands. Invest in market assets and market expansion.

16. **MEASURE IMPACT** — A clearly defined brand makes it easier to measure the level of community trust and the effectiveness of communications. Use the elements of the brand for designing customer surveys and for interpreting feedback from policy makers and community members. •

Appendix A

In this appendix, we provide specific steps and practical advice related to the process of defining the wastewater utility brand. The process for defining the brand must accomplish the following:

- Include the senior utility managers who will be the guiding coalition for change
- Establish or reinforce the motivations for brand building among senior utility managers
- Give senior managers a strong appreciation for the benefits and power of branding
- Create a collaborative environment that produces branding statements that are meaningful and apply to the specific issues and roles of the utility
- Establish a high level of commitment to building the brand

A SERIES OF WORKSHOPS – A good way to establish commitment and define the brand of the utility is to conduct a series of collaborative workshops with senior staff members. These four to eight staff members will become the guiding coalition for implementing branding principles and building the utility brand. The following is a more detailed description of each of the workshops:

> The good news is that you can tap into everyone's personal experiences to foster a better understanding of the power of branding.

WORKSHOP I

- Discussion of why change is needed, including increasing competition for investment, or other specific pressures facing the utility
- Discussion of key marketing principles including why branding is so effective in increasing trust, support, and investment.
- Discussion of some of the ways that the brand can be implemented
- Discussion of the ways the utility creates value. What should we be committed to, or what can our community expect us to do?

The good news is that you can tap into everyone's personal experiences to foster a better understanding of the power of branding. A good exercise for the first workshop is to have the participants think about a product or service they are very loyal to, and share why they like the product. You can also review some of the examples from Chapter 1 that relate to familiar brands. Starbucks and the rental car examples are both effective in conveying the idea of the "experience" or what people expect or count on from well-known brands. Participants should come away with an appreciation for the simplicity and power of brands.

A good way to start defining the brand is to have the staff outline the top ten things that constitute the utility's value. You can use the sample brand from Chapter 2 as a guideline. However, focus on what really makes sense for your jurisdiction and region. Utilities will have different roles and different sets of pressing problems which will make the brands different. Don't underestimate the ability of the staff to come up with branding statements that improve on those included in this manual. Document the brand by drafting a series of commitment statements based on the input given during the workshop.

It is not unusual to have some interesting debates about what the utility is really committed to and what the community can actually count on from the utility. This illustrates a simple but profound idea: If the utility managers have to debate what the community can expect from the utility, how on earth can policy makers or other key audiences be clear on the value the utility provides? Highlighting this point helps utility managers appreciate that customers and community leaders will respond differently after the utility increases its clarity by defining and proactively implementing the brand.

WORKSHOP 2

The second workshop should focus on refining the draft commitment statements produced from the first workshop. These statements should be distributed prior to the second workshop and participants should come prepared to discuss them. The following are some useful standards for evaluating and refining the draft statements. They should:

- Be simple and straightforward
- Be meaningful to the average person, influential individuals, and policy makers
- Define what people can count on from the water utility
- Be acceptable as the framework for strategic plans, planning meetings, presentations, or any communications that are intended to convey the value provided by the utility
- Define the scope of important issues that need to be part of the community dialogue
- Be developed with an eye to how governing boards or city councils might react. Will they be surprised? Will they think the brand helps the dialogue be more clear and meaningful?

Asking if the draft statements meet these standards will help the staff refine them. A great test is to ask staff members if they are comfortable with making these statements the framework for the strategic plan. If they are not comfortable, they should change the brand until they are. Many utilities will already have several important plans in place. Implementing branding does not mean that all of this good planning work is for naught. Uncovering the values or standards embedded in utility strategic plans or key activities is a tool for refining the brand. In turn, the brand development process will likely uncover areas where the utility needs to modify its plans or investment priorities. Developing a brand not only improves communications, but also planning and decision making.

The output of the second workshop is a refined set of commitment statements.

WORKSHOP 3

The third workshop should focus on ways the brand will be implemented and ways to create short-term successes. This discussion helps define the brand because discussing how the brand will be used makes it more real. Reviewing branding tactics in some detail typically precipitates at least some minor changes.

There is no rule that says a utility must come to consensus on the brand in three workshops. However, if it requires more than four or five sessions, there may be issues with the way staff interacts or collaborates, or there may be leadership issues. If that is the case, it makes sense to hire an experienced facilitator who understands utility branding. That should make the process more efficient. Not being able to agree on simple statements of the utility's value is a serious problem that must be resolved. If this is the case, it is hard to imagine that the utility is not sending mixed messages to the community, which does not help build trust or secure investment.

COLLABORATING WITH GOVERNING BODIES – The process defined above involves collaboration among utility staff members. City council members or a governing board were deliberately not mentioned as being part of the workshop process. This is because the staff will need to be the ones to formulate at least a draft of the branding statements.

This is not to say that board members or policy makers should not be a part of the brand development process. Asking the board to formally adopt a set of organizational commitment statements created by the staff members makes sense. Asking for this approval will likely yield some changes based on input from policy makers. One of the key benefits of defining and implementing the brand is that it can improve the relationship with policy makers. This is because utility managers tend to speak in the language of technology, regulations, and projects, while governing bodies speak in the language of finances, rates, value, and political issues. The brand brings these two groups together using a common language. •

Appendix B

The following list provides some advice for managing disagreement and conflict. It is important to remember that opponents have typically decided that the utility's motivations are in conflict with their own motivations or desires. Using the utility brand as the context for all communications and actions will reduce conflict caused by confusion about the utility's motivations. It will also ensure a more productive dialogue about the issues and investment decisions facing the community.

LEAD A FAIR AND MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE WITH THE COMMUNITY

CAREFULLY SELECT UTILITY SPOKESPEOPLE
Spokespersons should be employees of the utility, be committed to the utility's values, and have a genuine desire to have a meaningful dialogue with the community. They must be clear-spoken, not condescending, and have the authority to speak for the utility.

PROVIDE INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPATION AND SOUND DECISIONS — Meaningful public
participation requires timely and full access to information about proposals, problems, impacts, and alternatives. Those with the resources must produce this information and share it. Make sure that there are widely announced opportunities for comment on all documents or proposals.

ADDRESS THE PROCESS NEEDS OF ALL PARTICIPANTS — People understand issues, com-
municate, and make decisions in different ways depending on gender, class, race, culture, religion, and education. Utility managers must recognize those differences and make all participants in the dialogue feel their issues are important and will be addressed.

ALLOW PEOPLE TO SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES — The
public must articulate for itself and in its own ways what its concerns are. Make sure that there are many opportunities for people to express themselves.

EMBRACE DIFFERING POINTS OF VIEW

GATHER DIVERSE OPINIONS — Actively seek out
and understand different perspectives, concerns, suggestions, local expectations and needs, and different priorities.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SHOULD HAVE AN IMPACT ON DECISIONS — The public's involvement should
have an impact, or else community members will believe that they are merely window dressing for decisions that are already made. Ignoring public sentiment de-legitimizes the process, sours relations, makes future interactions more difficult, and robs the utility of creative ideas.

ASSESS THE COMMUNITY WITH RESPECT TO CONFLICT — All communities have a history of
conflict, which can act as catalyst for future conflict. Utilities should understand what happened and who was involved. Those involved should be high on the utility's relationship development list.

FIND OPPOSING POINTS OF VIEW EARLY — Finding
opponents after major capital has been committed to a project is a big problem. Design communication efforts such that they find people with differing points of view before expenditures are cast in stone.

PURSUE DEEPER RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE WHO DISAGREE

DEVELOP INDIVIDUAL RELATIONSHIPS — The
number of opponents, or those who lead groups of opponents, is usually not a large, so utilities can and should pursue individual relationships.

UNDERSTAND THE MOTIVATIONS AND NEEDS OF OPPONENTS — In order to foster a relationship,
you have to listen. Really try to understand the motivations of opponents. Sometimes people just want to be heard. Listening allows you to improve your message and uncover flaws in your current approach.

Appendix B (continued)

MAKE SURE OPPONENTS UNDERSTAND YOUR CONSTRAINTS – In developing relationships, both parties must come to understand the other's situation. Make sure that opponents understand the constraints that the utility is working under, or assuming. This helps them better understand your position and motivations, making them less likely to demonize you. Working together, you may be able to remove constraints or secure more investment.

AVOID LABELING OPPONENTS AS IRRATIONAL Marginalizing those who disagree without ever listening or pursuing a relationship with them is the easy way out but is risky. Pursuing a relationship allows you to better assess risks and often turns a liability into a relationship asset. •