

Eastern Illinois University

## The Keep

---

Masters Theses

Student Theses & Publications

---

Spring 2021

### Branding Small Businesses in Small Communities

Lacey Jenkins

*Eastern Illinois University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses>



Part of the [Advertising and Promotion Management Commons](#), [Business and Corporate Communications Commons](#), [Marketing Commons](#), [Public Relations and Advertising Commons](#), and the [Social Media Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Jenkins, Lacey, "Branding Small Businesses in Small Communities" (2021). *Masters Theses*. 4876.  
<https://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/4876>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact [tabruns@eiu.edu](mailto:tabruns@eiu.edu).

Branding Small Businesses in Small Communities

Thesis

Lacey Jenkins

Eastern Illinois University

### **Abstract**

Branding has grown into a vital part of communicating a brand to its audience members. Unfortunately, large portions of branding tactics are geared towards large corporations in large communities. Small and mid-sized businesses require different tactics in order to create a brand that effectively communicates its purpose and values to its consumers. Because of this, this thesis is looking at the branding tactics of a small business in Charleston, Illinois. This business, Phoenix Elite, showed weaknesses in multiple areas of its branding package. Using a literature review, the goal is to create a better understanding of what branding is, as well as some key components to branding in a small community. Once that knowledge has been established, this thesis will pinpoint the weaknesses in Phoenix Elite's brandings and create a branding campaign to help strengthen those weaknesses. The overall goal of this thesis is to create a better understanding of branding small businesses in small communities.

### **Introduction**

Small businesses are in almost every American community and take a variety of forms, such as a local gas station, restaurant, gym, or retail store. In fact, there are approximately 30.7 million small and medium sized businesses in the US, which accounts for over 90% of all businesses in the United States (Mohsin, 2020). These businesses sell an expansive array of products and services and each one engages in methods and strategies to get consumers in the door and then keep them coming back. One of the primary strategies businesses use is branding. Branding can be thought of as the physical and visual representation of a business, which connects consumers to an organization (Lloyd, 2019). Branding offers many small businesses a tangible way to stand out among their competitors. Unfortunately many locally ran businesses, specifically in small towns, do not have the resources necessary to engage in branding to the same degree as large corporations. This raises questions concerning how such businesses can brand effectively.

Besser (1999) believes that in order to create positive word of mouth and increase the chances for success small businesses must be involved in their communities. Besser argues that community involvement functions as a branding tactic that helps establish a strong connection with community members and in turn, leads to more business. Helping in the community allows an organization to demonstrate that it stands for the community's values. This leads to more word of mouth, allowing it to grow.

The purpose behind this creative thesis is to apply branding tactics to a small business in order to increase brand awareness and generate consumer interest. To this end this project utilized Besser's (1999) approach as the foundation for establishing brand values and encouraging community involvement. After identifying a local business in the Charleston,

Illinois area, the business' current branding was analyzed to identify weaknesses in techniques and message content. Using the conceptual framework on branding outlined in the literature review, these weaknesses were addressed through a new branding package, which was implemented over two months. Before discussing the new branding package and its impact, this essay will review previous research about branding, authenticity, social media, and small businesses. This review provides the theoretical foundation for this creative thesis and establishes the strategic guidelines utilized in the re-branding.

## **Literature Review**

### **Branding**

In order to understand branding, it is important to consider its history. Branding actually began in the 1500's, but it did not become what we know as "branding" until the 19th and 20th century (Cantor, 2020). The word branding originates from a word used in Old Norse, brandr, or to burn (Holland, 2017). Originally, branding was the process of using hot metal to burn the hide of cattle or horses. Farmers used this process to help butchers and consumers identify where meat was coming from. Butchers were able to distinguish the quality of meat based on the brand put on the cattle (Cantor, 2020). Eventually, branding transitioned from identifying cattle, to helping identify other products and services by their producers. Brands, such as Coca-Cola, started using this process to help distinguish their products from generic products (Lloyd, 2019). As people became more comfortable with branding, consumers started to remember brands and what their organizations stood for (Holland, 2017). As branding became more commonplace researchers began to look at techniques to help branding become more effective. Components of the branding process were identified and researchers focused on what encouraged consumers to

buy branded products. Branding has continued to evolve and has become a crucial part of any business' success.

Over time branding has had many definitions and has been researched from different perspectives. David Ogilvy, often considered the father of advertising, defines branding as “the intangible sum of a product’s attributes” (Lloyd, 2019, para. 4). Though this appears to be a straightforward definition, looking at branding as “intangible” deters businesses and consumers from feeling as though they can use it productively. This is because it can be difficult to create a physical logo, color scheme, or connection while highlighting the intangible. This has led to researchers arguing that branding is “a person’s perception of a product, service, experience, or organization” (Lloyd 2019, para. 5) resulting from a brand’s strategic communication strategies. This approach conceptualizes branding as a process that results in a sense of understanding between consumers and a brand. However, since branding is a conceptually fluid concept, it is hard to find a concrete definition that relates to the myriad of cultural and physical scenarios for every business and consumer. Therefore, researchers have settled on a generalized meaning that helps conceptualize the process, rather than create a strict definition. This allows organizations to use a specific logo, name, or color to help consumers create a connection to an organization and how they feel about their products or services (Lloyd, 2019).

As a result researchers and scholars have created their own understandings of branding and its general meaning. Jack Renwick, professional designer and branding scholar, had an interesting take on the meaning of branding arguing it was “the tangible manifestation of an idea, either to reflect conceptions around a product, or to inspire entirely new ones in consumers’ minds” (Montgomery, 2015 para. 6). Renwick simplified this definition to the “tangible soul” of

a brand. Seeing branding as the “tangible soul” of a company’s concepts and ideals helps establish a connection with consumers that makes branding more than logos, colors, and fonts (Montgomery, 2015). Instead it allows us to create a connection between the organization’s consumers and the brand’s purpose. Looking at an organization’s morals, ideals or virtues, and then creating a brand that represents those values to consumers, often leads to a deeper connection between a business and its stakeholders. When businesses understand this connection, they are able to create the “tangible manifestation” of who they are, hopefully creating a loyal customer base in the process. This has vaulted branding to the forefront of organizations’ focus when considering marketing and advertising strategies.

Since the 1970’s, “branding has moved from an occasionally studied activity to a major concern for both business and society” (Swaminathan et al, 2020, p. 25). The more a business understands about branding and how it functions, the better they are able to utilize its value creation with a large number of consumers. Research provides businesses with different branding techniques, styles, and distribution methods. Beyond this, organizations can brand effectively in a way that is easy for consumers to understand and to make connections with a business. Therefore branding has become a crucial part of any business’ communication efforts. This has opened up opportunities for branding to expand, especially through social media.

Swaminathan et. al. (2020) found that social media creates an environment where, “information is always accessible and abundant, search costs are low, (and) goods and services from geographic boundaries are easier to reach than ever” (p. 30). This suggests that branding is easier to distribute to today’s consumers because of our modern, hyper-connected world. Easy distribution is a positive development for branding because information can reach more consumers with less effort. However, distributing information at this rate can also be detrimental

to an organization because mistakes and issues with the product or brand are also distributed quickly.

Branding professionals create physical representations of an organization's morals, values, and purpose. There are multiple ways an organization can use branding to help create this physical representation, but one of the most common is a logo. Logos are a huge visual and symbolic part of branding that allow a businesses or organization to get attention from consumers, create a strong first impression, make a business memorable, separate one business from another, and create brand loyalty (Paget, 2017). This is one of the first steps in creating a brand. Beyond logos, other physical attributes of creating a brand are color schemes, font styles and types, copywriting, a mission statement, and a written purpose for an organization (Commentator, 2019). Creating unity and consistency with these attributes allows consumers to easily identify and connect with a product or service.

Consumers also connect internal organizational attributes to how they perceive a brand. These attributes are the organization's internal purpose and meaning as well as the experience consumers have with the organization (Lloyd, 2019). Since brands are amorphous, it is important to understand that each consumer has a unique and inimitable experience with every brand (Lloyd, 2019). Having strengths in both the physical and internal areas of branding allows an organization to harness the power of branding and build a successful business, which varies in definition based on its size, location, and goals. Since, this review is focused on small businesses, specifically in small communities, the definition of success will be vastly different than larger businesses.



### **Small Businesses in Small Towns**

The Hallmark channel does a pretty good job at identifying the environment of a small town. Everyone knows everyone, there are absolutely no secrets, and somehow Santa is the only old man in town. These stereotypes may seem ridiculous, but interestingly enough, small communities typically live up to them. In these communities, “mom and pop” shops are popular. People of the community try to stay loyal to businesses that have been passed down through generations. Unfortunately, this makes it difficult to build new businesses in communities dominated by local traditions and norms. One potential solution to this problem is through community involvement. Besser (1999) looked at community involvement in small towns and found that the larger the city, the more acceptable it was for a community member and business owner to be aloof or uninvolved. Once the size of a city or town decreased, the more community members expected businesses to be actively involved in the community. This is because the emotional connection to a “small town” correlates with the desire to want to be a part of a community that helps each other. Besser (1999) claims that when businesses take positions of leadership in small towns it allows for community members to feel as though that business is a vital link in the town’s social standing. This means that businesses in small towns are more successful if they put effort into being directly involved in community events and concerns.

Beyond being active in local communities, organizations also must understand the core values of their communities. Youth programs, church events, social events, or even political events are popular when it comes to small communities (Besser, 1999). This means that in order for a small business to succeed in a small town, it is important for the organization to be consistent with the morals and ideals of the community. Members of these tight knit communities rely on one another to stay strong and any ideas that threaten the community will

instantly be put down. However, it is also important for a business to be authentic in their morals and values, and if those morals do not fit the expectations of the town they may end up closing their doors because they lack the ability to be successful (Besser, 1999).

In *The General Model of Business Success* written by Besser (1999), he establishes that personal and professional support go hand in hand in small towns. In order for a business to be successful in a professional manner, the community must first have a personal connection with it, created through its work within, and interaction with, the community. The personal connection grows from the business supporting the community, which then leads to the community supporting the business. Small businesses in small communities must morph into a version of what the community, as a whole, believes and stands for. If a business is able to do this, they will be one step closer to success. As mentioned, this success depends on the authenticity of the brand, and whether or not the community feels the business is truly trying to be a part of it, or just pretending to receive support.

### **Authenticity**

Authenticity is derived from the Latin word “*authenticu* and the Greek word *authentikos* conveying a sense of trustworthiness” (Bruhn et al, 2012, p. 566). Authenticity has been around for centuries, meaning that its importance outdates any contemporary sense of branding or marketing. Authenticity in brands “is based on the evaluation of individuals rather than being solely related to the inherent attributes of the brand” (Bruhn et al, 2012, p. 568). This means that authenticity goes deeper than what the brand stands for and what it produces, but corresponds with the core of a brand. If the ideals and morals of a brand are not authentic, then they cannot stand strong to represent the business in a positive light. Authenticity in a brand “should be

authentic; reflect true character; and be built on values, uniqueness, and genius” (Taskiran, 2019, p. 147).

Authenticity is known as a “socially constructed phenomenon” (Carrol & Wheaton, 2009 p. 2). This is because authenticity is not a physical object or a natural phenomenon. Authenticity is constructed through the culture, conversations, and expectations between people and communities. Therefore authenticity can mean completely different things to different people, depending on the time, place, and situation. Due to this lack of clarity, it can be hard for brands to establish authenticity, but it is important because it helps build trust between a business and its consumers. Without an authentic brand, the consumer connection with the brand may become distressed, leading to a disconnection from the brand and the product (Bruhn et al, 2012).

The popularity of trends, values, and concerns in society change over time and this can make it extremely difficult for a brand to stay authentic (Atwal & Harris, 2017). Unfortunately, brands cannot create authenticity without being authentic, and sometimes the quest to be authentic can lead to “fabricated authenticity or staged authenticity” (Atwal, 2017, p. 349). The concept of fabricated authenticity, or authenticity that is created or staged, is something that is often overlooked. Celebrities, businesses, and organizations often use authenticity as an aspect of their branding to win over the public. Much like picking a clear font, photo, or color scheme, branding tactics use authenticity to manifest a particular idea about a brand or, in other words, fabricate an idea to make that brand seem trustworthy (Visser, 2020). Manipulating authenticity to gain the trust of consumers may seem like a paradox in itself, but it is a tactic that is widely used by businesses and individuals to brand and gain the respect of consumers (Visser, 2020). Having staged or fabricated authenticity can be detrimental to a brand because, if exposed, consumers will not feel as though they can trust a brand that creates fake values, morals, and

inauthentic behaviors. Since the word “authenticity refers to the qualities of genuineness, truth, and reality,” (Tran & Keng, 2018, p. 278) it is not something that should be fabricated. But some brands try because “Authenticity is one of the cornerstones of the contemporary marketing practice” (Tran & Keng, 2018, p. 279) and therefore, it has become evident that authenticity is necessary for successful branding.

Brand authenticity has multiple dimensions. This includes, but is not limited to, realism, control, connection, and virtue (Beverland, 2006). Realism looks at how real or genuine the brand is. Some concerns associated with realism are whether or not it repeats other brand styles or logos, or whether its concepts and ideals are unoriginal. Control uses knowledge and “mastery over their environment” (Keng & Tran, 2018) to show consumers that they are in control. For example, airline workers inform consumers of safety measures to help establish control within an aircraft. If a flight attendant seemed nervous or uneducated on safety protocols, individuals on a flight would be less inclined to listen in case of an emergency. This allows for brands to be aware of their environment, which helps create a link between the brand and its consumers. Connection is geared towards creating a relationship with a community. This is important because consumers rely on their connection to a brand to help them decide how active they will be with the brand and its products or services. Finally, virtue refers to the beliefs and morals of a company. It is more important now than ever before for a company to stand strong to what they believe and, at times, even advocate for current political or social issues (Atwal, 2017). Staying true to your virtues derives from the societal pressures that an organization needs to be authentic, passionate, and speak out on their beliefs. If a company steers clear of this, consumers and stakeholders can see the brand as inauthentic, which can then lead to fewer supporters. Together these components help determine a brand’s authenticity, and are important for a brand’s success.

In order to create a feeling of authenticity, organizations need a platform to distribute their ideas and behaviors. Though word of mouth and community involvement can be the most organic way to communicate authenticity, social media is a popular contemporary distribution method.

### **Social Media**

There are many ways to communicate, but currently “the most popular means of interaction with each other is related to web-based technologies” (Gulati, 2019, p. 28). Web-based technologies come in many forms, social media being one of the most widely known. Social media is “a collective term for websites and applications which focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration” (Rouse, 2020, p. 15). Society uses social media to get in touch with each other instantaneously. Social media can include many things like “social networks, social news, media sharing, micro blogging, discussion forums, community blogs, social reviews, or bookmarking sites” (Gulati, 2019, p. 27). The communication opportunities for businesses are endless and social media is often used for branding. Since social media is constantly changing, there are always new methods and techniques to use for branding a business. Currently some of the most popular social media sites for branding are Linked In, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Gulati, 2019).

Even though social media is one of the most popular “means of interaction” in today’s society, there is still a significant number of businesses that do not utilize this tool (Gulati, 2019, p.30). However, since social media is so prevalent in consumers’ lives, it is important for businesses to utilize this resource. Fortunately as social media grows, “businesses of all types are getting involved in social media in an attempt to reach new audiences and strengthen their ties with existing customers” (Perdue, 2010, p. 3). Businesses that utilize social media receive easy access to their consumers. However, a portion of businesses that use social media still do not

have guidelines for posting, content creation, or social media regulations (Gulati, 2019). Studies done in the past two years have found that “many companies had no specific social media guidelines or policies, and those that did ‘stretched existing editorial guidelines to cover social media’” (Mourao & Harlow, 2020, p. 219). This is an issue because it can lead to inconsistency or laziness. Since people connect what they see and hear about a business to its brand, such qualities may create confusion for consumers.

Today’s society is full of instant gratification, and therefore it is important for businesses to work towards an audience centered gratification approach. This approach “sees target audiences as active (and) differs from other notions which tend to argue that the tools of mass communication greatly affect the target audience” (Taskiran, 2019, p.144). This means that businesses are starting to look at customers as active beings that need gratification in order to be satisfied. Without the instant gratification of receiving information about a product or service they can become frustrated, and discouraged from making purchases. One of the most important social media tactics connected to branding is a quick response time. If a business “keep(s) up with the comments on its page” it can “keep consumers attracted, interested, and motivated” (Gulati 2019, p. 30). Many social media sites even publish how quickly a business responds to questions, comments, and mentions. Quick response times make the customer feel important and appreciated, leading to higher levels of customer satisfaction. Since social media is “a communication medium based on participation and interaction” (Taskiran, 2019, p. 144) it is important to maintain this standard of interaction.

As social media’s reach grows, it is important to observe what current and potential consumers are doing with the information they find there. If a business analyzes which posts get the most exposure, they will have a better understanding of what and when to post. Utilizing

social media is important for branding and gives businesses an opportunity to reach potential stakeholders much faster. If used correctly, social media can be the turning point in the success of a business. Understanding social media, small business, authenticity, and branding allows us to apply branding techniques to small community businesses.

### **Charleston, Illinois**

According to Britannica (2013) Charleston, Illinois was first settled in 1826. Charleston was established in 1831 but was not incorporated until 1865. Settled by Benjamin Parker, the city's name came from its first postmaster Charles Morton. Being the host of one of the Lincoln v. Douglas presidential debates, Charleston has a personal tie to our late president Abraham Lincoln. Because of this, there is a connection to Lincoln's childhood, leading to a large influence of agriculture and upcoming factory work since Lincoln came from an agriculturally based family. Visitors can see this connection when visiting one of Central Illinois' historical sites, the Lincoln log cabin, only 20 minutes from Charleston. As Charleston has expanded over time, the community continued to focus on this connection and utilized it to build a strong community that led to growth in both size and population. According to the 2018 census, Charleston has a population of approximately 20,000 people. The median household income is approximately \$37,000, with a median age of 26 years old and a poverty rate of 32%. With such demographics, Charleston is the prototypical small town community (Charleston, 2018).

### **Phoenix Elite**

Phoenix Elite was established on February 1, 2016 and provides gymnastics, ninja warrior, cheer, and tumbling classes to the Mattoon-Charleston community. It also provides rentals for birthday parties and family events. Phoenix Elite utilizes Facebook and Instagram as its main social media platforms. It also relies on its website to share information. During four years of

operation, Phoenix Elite has grown exponentially and during peak season, September through March, can have upwards of 300 kids walk through the door on a weekly basis. This thesis examined the branding of Phoenix Elite to identify weaknesses and then provide solutions that would allow Phoenix Elite to grow. The goal was to create a new, defined brand with which consumers can easily connect while staying true to the community ties it has already built.

An evaluation of its current branding practices revealed that Phoenix Elite had issues with their branding consistency and unity. There was little to no consistency in the colors, fonts, or logos, and the organization's social media presence was paltry at best. Looking at past interactions on social media, Phoenix Elite posted once or twice a month. Some months, the business had no presence on social media. Looking at the business' history, there have been four different logos, and there is no establishment of a consistent font or color scheme. This can create a huge issue when consumers are trying to identify a business. Having such visual inconsistency creates a gap in customers' understanding of the brand, which could potentially lead to a loss of business. According to previous research, a brand needs to have consistent colors, fonts, logos, slogans, and social media presence (Commentator, 2019). As noted earlier, these components are essential to creating authenticity and unity between the business and its consumers. Taking this into consideration, it was clear that Phoenix Elite would benefit from the creation of guidelines that allow the business to be consistently represented.

This creative thesis developed a branding package for Phoenix Elite. This includes, but was not limited to, a new logo, fonts, color palette, formatting for documents, formatting for social media posts, and layouts for flyers. This helped create a consistent look and feel across all its social media platforms and the website. The goal was to take this small business and create a consistent and clear message in its branding to help connect it to the community and draw people



to the organization. When coupled with a new social media strategy, based on regular posting and connecting with the community, this should create an influx of followers on their Facebook and Instagram accounts and hopefully increase the number of customers. In order to track these results, I looked at current followers, impressions, social media interactions, and current members of Phoenix Elite. Then for two months, the new branding techniques were implemented into Phoenix Elite's social media platforms and website. Before we examine the impact of the branding campaign, this paper covers the new branding packing in detail.

### **Branding Package**

A complete redesign was done for Phoenix Elite's new branding package, including new fonts, logo, colors, and slogan. As mentioned previously these are the core components that create more effective branding and therefore I created the brand's physical attributes as a visual expression of the brand's values. These changes will hopefully create an understanding of Phoenix Elite's values and can evolve as the brand grows over time.

As a brand Phoenix Elite is geared towards families. Phoenix Elite's purpose is to help people of all ages to grow as individuals and athletes by encouraging them to push themselves and work toward their goals. Because of this, the business puts most of its focus on family oriented values. This includes, but is not limited to, kindness, honesty, hard work, and positivity. Kindness refers to treating everyone with respect and using language and actions that are considerate of others. These lead to a positive environment, which is another value of Phoenix Elite. Generating positivity allows for members of the community feel as though they are safe and welcome at Phoenix Elite. Hard work and honesty allow community members to feel like they can trust Phoenix Elite to not only be transparent, but to also give them a service based on

hard work. The Charleston community is family oriented and having organizational values that directly correlate hopefully leads to a stronger connection with the community.

### *Brand Font*

It should be clear by now that the main purpose of branding is to help establish a connection between a brand and its audience. In order to do this, one step a business needs to take is to establish a consistent font. Fonts have personalities, meaning you can get a feel for what the brand means before you comprehend the words you read (Burgess, 2019). Therefore, it is important to find a font that displays a brand's personality. There are two levels of fonts that are important for a brand. There is the primary font, which is utilized for the logo, headers, and key information, and the secondary font that is utilized for paragraphs, smaller pieces of information, and elaboration on headers. The process of deciding a font requires multiple steps. The first step is deciding on a serif or sans serif font (Fulmer, 2020). Fulmer (2020) explains that serif fonts have small additions at the ends of some of the strokes that make up a letter, sans serif fonts are simply fonts without those decorative additions.

The next step is deciding on a font that is clear and readable. Phoenix Elite is an athletic facility geared towards children, allowing the brand to have a free flowing, energetic personality. A simple, clean cut, young, and stable font best represents such a personality. Because we are branding a business geared toward families, it is also important to have a font that is easy to understand. Therefore, I decided to stay away from handwritten and decorative fonts. After moving through the steps of deciding a font, I chose the "Din Condensed" font for my headers (Appendix A). As mentioned earlier, Phoenix Elite revolves around family values and, because of this, Din Condensed helps Phoenix Elite appear as kid oriented and fun.

According to research, when choosing a secondary font, it is important to make it opposite of your header (Burgess, 2019). This means, if your header is a san-serif font, your secondary font should be a serif font, and vice versa. As a result, I followed the same process that I did for my primary font and made my secondary font simple, clear, and young, but with serifs. The secondary font is “Timeless” (appendix A). These fonts work well together, and help express the “personality” of Phoenix Elite.

### *Brand Logo*

The next step in the branding process is choosing a brand logo. Logos are intended to be the face of the company, allowing consumers to recognize a business (Decker, 2019). A good logo allows a business to be separate itself from its competitors, establish brand loyalty, and helps new consumers to get to know a business (Padget, 2017). Phoenix Elite’s current logo is distinct, so it allows for the audience to understand what it represents, with or without text, and with or without color. I decided to maintain the all black coloring of the logo because it allows for it to be put on most backgrounds without the need for a color change, making it more universal (appendix B). The image can be put on stickers or plastered on any surface without much concern for visibility. This logo could also work with any shirt color and is easily visible on most backgrounds. This is important because it allows the logo to stand on its own and is adaptable to multiple situations (Pomerleau, 2020). The logo is also timeless, simple, and relevant, and when integrated with the new fonts it will be adaptable to all platforms (Appendix B). Phoenix Elite strives to help their customers feel comfortable and at home, which is a part of the brand’s values. Using this logo across all platforms creates consistency, helping demonstrate to consumers that Phoenix Elite is here for them, ensuring its customers are its number one priority.

*Brand Color*

The next area of focus was the brand's color scheme. A brand's colors help create a connection between the brand and its consumers. Color psychology plays a huge role in this. Color psychology is the study of colors and how they relate to human behavior (Ferriera, 2020). There is a generalized understanding of what each color means in different cultures. In Midwestern America, where Phoenix Elite is located, colors like orange and yellow are used for happiness and energy, shades of green mean growth and health, blues and purples represent trust and loyalty, and reds stand for confidence, youth, and excitement. The color scheme for Phoenix Elite will focus on red, orange, and black. Red helps draw attention, create excitement, and convey youthfulness. This is important because a gymnastics facility is a place of excitement, a place where children can be children, and a place full of energy. Therefore, red is a beneficial color to use, because it encompasses the characteristics of the business. Red can also represent danger and anger and so I have decided to pair it with orange. Orange is geared more towards "creativity, adventure, enthusiasm, success, and balance" (para. 8). Using these colors together, allows the positive attributes of red to come forward and create a brand that is bold, strong, confident, and ready to take on the world, characteristics parents typically want in their children. The final color, black, allows for consistency. Brands use this color as a baseline, which allows for the logo to be easy to see and distinguishable against a variety of backgrounds. When combined these colors create a strong brand and allow consumers to connect with the brand's personality and purpose. Deciding on the correct tint and shades of these colors, I decided to stick with bright colors that are strong and vibrant. Because of this I chose candy apple red, Tiger orange, and onyx black (Appendix A). These colors will help strengthen the brand and create

unity by consistently using these colors throughout the social media and physical branding elements of the business.

Color also plays a role in a brand's authenticity because it allows the audience to see that the business is geared towards its values, right down to the colors. If Phoenix Elite used colors like brown, grey, and cool blue, the look would not exemplify its core characteristics. Since colors mean something then the way a brand uses those colors can change the way consumers see it. Using the right colors and good color combinations can allow consumers to feel more comfortable with the brand, as if it authentically resembles the values and purpose it says it does.

### *Slogan*

Once a visual foundation was established, it became important to look at Phoenix Elite's slogans and social media presence. To start, the slogan is "Fuel your Flame." This is intended to make athletes feel like they can accomplish anything so long as they surround themselves with people and activities that help them achieve their goals. This slogan follows the branding guidelines of being likeable, memorable and related to the brand (French, 2020). It is also important that the brand slogan is simple, consistent, and timeless. "Fuel your Flame" is not time sensitive, gets straight to the point, and relates to the values of the brand. Phoenixes are made of fire, fires correlate to flames, and the slogan ties those components together to connect the business to its personality. However, the slogan needs to be promoted better and utilized more often in the business' branding. Looking at the business and its social media accounts, the slogan is not well known or promoted. This leads to the next step in the branding process, the business' social media presence.

### **Social Media**

The Covid-19 environment demanded changes in Phoenix Elite's social media presence. Social media is one of the most interactive and communicative aspects of a business and its current value has increased due to social distancing and health guidelines. This was an opportunity for Phoenix Elite to embrace staying active and communicative on social media, something it struggled with in the past. Though the effects of the virus might deter from a large impression rate on social media, I am hopeful that increased social media activity will be able to maintain, if not increase, the number of followers and supporters. So even though significant effects may not be noticed in the short-term, I believe the branding campaign will benefit the business in the long-term and Phoenix Elite will be better off because of it.

#### *Social Media Calendar*

According to Perdue (2010), using social media allows for businesses to connect to new and current consumers and these connections are imperative for businesses to succeed. Social media calendars are essential for businesses to understand what to post and when to post it (Aboulhosn, 2020). Having a calendar helps create consistency and ensures intentional posting. If there is a calendar to specifically plan social media posts, the posts have a higher chance of being well thought out and executed. Currently, Phoenix Elite posts twice a month on Facebook and is inactive on Instagram. This is an area where improvement will help the business. Establishing a social media calendar will not only enable the business to know when to post, but will keep it accountable for posting.

It is suggested that a small business should post on Facebook three to five times a week, and Instagram one to three times a week (Myers, 2020). According to Arens (2020), the best time to post on Facebook and Instagram is between 10am-2pm on the weekdays. Weekends,

weekday mornings, and evenings have low levels of engagement. Therefore, the social media calendar for Phoenix Elite (Appendix C) requires social media posts on Facebook on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 12pm. Additionally it calls for posts on Instagram on Mondays and Fridays at 12pm since those days have the highest social media traffic on Instagram according to Arens (2020). Using this social media calendar, Phoenix Elite has the potential to create consistent branding on its social media pages and increase brand awareness.

It is also important to determine what content a small business should post on social media. According to Farid (2021) photos are a compulsory requirement for a social media post. Photos allow for a post to be more charming and affective rather than wordy and dull. Because of this I decided to add photos to all posts on the Phoenix Elite accounts. In cases when a photo was not used, information was posted with a background or attractive design to draw visual interest and attention. Farid claims that without the attractiveness of a photo, consumers are more likely to scroll past the page or not read the information. The photos I used were directly related to the gym and included photos of the gym space, equipment, special events, or athletes participating in gym activities. When a photograph was not used visually attractive flyers related to important gym information was posted (Appendix D).

According to Seiter (2020) it is important to create text for social media posts that is short, sweet, and to the point. She mentions that social media users have a short attention span and therefore it is important to make a post as simple and task free as possible. Because of this, I made sure to focus on creating posts that were not chock-full of information, but rather communicated only the necessary information, allowing consumers to feel knowledgeable on the topic, but not overwhelmed. Posts are typically filled with simple sentences that are short and to the point.

Kessler (2018) argues that parents thrive off validation, saying that it provides the comfort people desire to confirm that they are doing the right thing. Because of this, we decided to make an athlete spotlight post. Every Friday I chose an athlete that demonstrated the values of Phoenix Elite, hard work and a positive attitude, to feature on social media. During athlete spotlights, we posted photos of the athletes as well as interviewed them about what they love about the gym and some things they are working on (Appendix D). This helps to establish authenticity by reinforcing the organization's values, while also validating parents' decisions to enroll their child at the gym. Before the campaign, there was no attempt to establish the business' values and morals or validate choices.

### *Goals*

A business needs to set short- and long-term social media goals. The short-term goal of Phoenix Elite was to increase brand awareness by 5% by March 2021. To measure this goal, I conducted a survey before and after the branding campaign to see if brand awareness had increased. The long-term goal is to continue to increase brand awareness yearly. I will be able to monitor this by tracking social media impressions, reactions, and overall influx or reflux of consumers utilizing the business' services. I can use this information to adjust the social media and branding presence of Phoenix Elite.

### **Discussion**

At the beginning of this research I wrote about the importance of branding, authenticity, and social media. A major takeaway from the initial analysis of Phoenix Elite's branding, paired with the literature review, is that Phoenix Elite exhibited numerous weaknesses when it came to its branding package. One of the primary weaknesses is that the business did not have a consistent brand. Commentator (2019) argued that a brand must be consistent because it allows



for consumers to create a better connection between the brand and its organization. Fonts, logos, colors, and social media posts need to show unity across all platforms and branding tactics. For instance, having an inconsistent logo hindered the consumer's ability to connect the different logos to the brand. Constantly changing the logo took away from the purpose. Originally there was a different logo for ninja, cheer, and trampoline classes, and the different logos were used interchangeably, despite their original intent. By eliminating those and turning to a single logo, I helped Phoenix Elite communicate a consistent brand. Once this was addressed, we were able to look at the components surrounding the logo. This included the font, color, and slogan.

Implementing consistency and having a purpose behind each decision allowed for the brand to appear more unified. Hopefully these decisions will continue to be implemented, adding to the overall consistency of the brand.

Another weakness revealed by the initial brand analysis was Phoenix Elite's poor social media usage. Phoenix Elite rarely posted, and when they did there was not a consistent model. To remedy this I created a social media calendar that allows the business to know when and what they should post. This ensures that the business knows that on Mondays, between 10am-12pm, they need to post a picture with information referring to the class schedule or birthday party openings. On Wednesdays they post important information about upcoming events, and on Friday they post an athlete spotlight. Athlete spotlights also allowed for the brand to share accomplishments in the gym, class opportunities, and doubled as a way to express family values. Because of the social media calendar, I believe I addressed the weaknesses related to social media. According to Gulati (2019) if a business keeps up with its posting and maintains its contact with its consumers over social media, it will have a higher chance of becoming more relevant in its community. Within the posts, language was used to help display the values of

Phoenix Elite. Since Phoenix Elite follows family values like integrity, kindness, honesty, and togetherness, I made sure to highlight athletes that had these attributes. Through each post we used language that was inclusive and helped to display these values. Because these values are consistent through the organization, Phoenix Elite is more likely to be considered an authentic organization. Earlier we read that in order to be authentic a business needs to “reflect true character; and be built on values, uniqueness, and genius” (Taskiran, 2019, p. 147). Through social media and the function of the organization, Phoenix Elite is able to establish authenticity according to this definition.

As mentioned earlier, community involvement is an essential part of branding in a small community. Therefore staying relevant to community members is essential to small businesses. Phoenix Elite was already relatively active in its community, but throughout the campaign, I decided to increase the role it played. During the two month campaign, Phoenix Elite coordinated with the Fields church, the local soccer team, as well as participated in local boy scout and Saint Jude fundraisers. Letting organizations utilize the location, as well as planning future fundraising events, Phoenix Elite was able to maintain its involvement with the community. This was already a strength of the business and the branding literature reinforced that it should continue.

Prior to unveiling the new branding package and social media content, Phoenix Elite’s Facebook page had 1,357 followers. Posts in the month of December had a reach of 506 people, and there were 301 monthly page views. On a weekly basis, for the month of December, Phoenix Elite received an average of three calls, one scheduled birthday party, and two consumers asking about classes. Throughout the campaign, I logged the number of phone calls received, birthday

parties scheduled, classes inquired about, Facebook messages, and new followers on a weekly basis. In Figure 1 you can see the results of the branding campaign broken down by week.

**Figure 1.**

Week of date	Calls	B-day parties scheduled	Classes Requested	Facebook messages	New Facebook Followers
1 / 4 / 2021	23	6	9	17	8
1 / 11 / 2021	31	7	5	19	3
1 / 18 / 2021	20	5	12	18	10
1 / 25 / 2021	13	3	5	14	2
2 / 1 / 2021	7	1	2	6	11
2 / 8 / 2021	31	13	6	20	3
2 / 15 / 2021	24	16	4	17	3
2 / 22 / 2021	13	7	5	10	4

Though I cannot prove that this campaign created the influx of Phoenix Elite's consumer base, I believe it played a significant role in its growth. Looking at the analytics before and after the campaign, Phoenix Elite's engagement increased in every single area. By the end of the campaign its Facebook page gained 44 new followers, and increased its page engagement by 17%. According to the analytics on Facebook, Phoenix Elite increased in page engagement, post engagement, video interactions, shares, likes, and photo interactions, all by over 17%. This is noteworthy because it allowed us to understand that though the branding campaign may not have been the sole source of growth, it appears to be a contributing factor given the timing of the large increases in numerous aspects of its social media. The Instagram page did not receive as much growth, but prior to the branding campaign the Instagram page was desolate, meaning it might take more time to create significant growth on that platform. Overall, the branding campaign shows signs of benefiting the business in its social media.

Following the campaign, Phoenix Elite received anywhere from 7-31 calls a week, up to 16 birthday parties scheduled, 2-12 classes inquired about, and 6-20 Facebook messages. Looking at the numbers prior to the campaign, all of these numbers are substantially larger. Once again we cannot assume that all of these influxes are due to the branding campaign, but we can assume the campaign played a significant role in these increases.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose behind this creative thesis was to apply branding tactics to a small business in order to increase brand awareness and generate consumer interest. There are a few key takeaways of note to consider after completing the branding work and implementing the new branding package. First it is clear that branding in small communities is much different than branding large corporations in big cities. Small communities require a higher level of authenticity and community involvement (Tran & Keng, 2018). Because of this, we had to utilize social media and branding tactics to highlight organizational values and build and maintain strong relationships with the surrounding community. Phoenix Elite's values of trust, integrity, honesty, and kindness needed to be communicated and displayed in order to create authenticity and benefit from their community involvement.

Second, the importance of social media to a local business in a small town was really made clear. Small towns get most of their information from word of mouth but because of our mediated world, business are able to generate word of mouth through social media (Centeno et. al., 2012). The increase in engagement on the social media pages helped me realize that utilizing social media is a key component to branding a small business in a small community. This is a resource that is easy to utilize and, if done correctly, it can greatly benefit the branding of a small business.

Lastly, this thesis highlights the importance of consistency in branding a small business. Through logos, social media, colors, fonts, and the day-to-day functions of the organization it is important to stay consistent. Once Phoenix Elite established consistency in its branding, audience members were able to better understand what the brand offers and represents. Referring to Commentator (2019), a consistent brand is important for the business and the audience members. Being consistent allows a brand to stay in the forefront of the consumers' minds and when a consumer in the Coles County area thinks of ninja, cheer, or gymnastics classes, they will be more likely to think of Phoenix Elite.

Through this thesis I learned about the importance of branding. Putting time and effort into a business' branding package is a lengthy process. But that process allows for the organization to learn more about what they stand for and how they want to be presented, as well as determined the best way for consumers to understand the brand and what it represents. This process allowed Phoenix Elite to identify its weaknesses and work on ways to make its brand stronger, more authentic. I learned why it is important to focus on details because something as simple as posting frequency can change the perception of the audience. Small towns and businesses are sprinkled across the entirety of the United States. In today's world, small businesses are becoming a dying breed. Because of this, it is important to implement branding tactics and continue to allow small businesses to grow and thrive in today's fast pace, instant gratification geared society. It is hopeful that this branding campaign outlines the beginning of that process.

### References

- Aboulhosn, S. (2020, December 2). *How to create a social media calendar that works*. Sprout Social. <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-calendar/>
- Arens, E. (2020, August 31). *The best times to post on social media in 2020*. Sprout Social. <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/best-times-to-post-on-social-media/>
- Atwal, N., & Harris, L. C. (2017). Examining how brand authenticity is established and maintained: the case of the Reverso. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 34(3–4), 347–369. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257x.2018.1447008>
- [Besser, T. L. \(1999\). Community Involvement and the Perception of Success among Small Business Operators in Small Towns. \*Journal of Small Business Management\*, 37\(4\), 16-29.](#)
- Beverland, M. (2006). “The Real Thing”: Branding Authenticity in the Luxury Wine Trade, *Journal of Business Research*, 59(2), 251-58.
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2013, July 31). *Charleston*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Charleston-Illinois>
- Bruhn, M., Schoenmüller, V., Schäfer, D., & Heinrich (2012). *Brand Authenticity: Towards a Deeper Understanding of its Own Conceptualization and Measurement*. *Advances in Consumer Research*.
- Burgess, B. (2019, October 28). *The Importance of Fonts in Your Company’s Branding*. Hyperchat Social. <https://hyperchatsocial.com/the-importance-of-fonts-in-your-companys-branding>
- Carroll, G. R., & Wheaton, D. R. (2009). The organizational construction of authenticity: An examination of contemporary food and dining in the U.S. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 29, 255–282. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2009.06.003>

Cantor, A. M. (2020, June 12). *A brief history of branding*. 99designs.

<https://99designs.com/blog/design-history-movements/history-of-branding/>

Centeno, E., Hart, S., & Dinnie, K. (2012). The five phases of SME brand-building. *Journal of*

*Brand Management*, 20(6), 445-457. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2012.49>

Charleston, IL. (2018). Data USA. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/charleston-il>

Commentator, E. (2019, April 4). *The basics of branding [Infographic]*. Smart Insights.

<https://www.smartinsights.com/online-brand-strategy/branding-basics-infographic/>

Decker, K. (2019, August 30). *The importance of a logo—5 reasons you must have one*.

99designs. <https://99designs.com/blog/tips/logo-importance/>

Farid, Z. (2021, January 20). *How Social Media Posts Of Images Are Essential For Marketing*.

Social Champ. <https://www.socialchamp.io/blog/how-social-media-posts-of-images-are-essential-for-marketing/>

Ferreira, N. M. (2020, November 30). *Color Psychology: How Color Meanings Affect You &*

*Your Brand*. <https://www.oberlo.com/blog/color-psychology-color-meanings>.

<https://www.oberlo.com/blog/color-psychology-color-meanings>

French, K. (2020, September 11). *How to Write a Great Tagline (According to Science)*. Column

Five. <https://www.columnfivemedia.com/the-secrets-behind-a-great-tagline>

Fulmer, C. (2020, July 3). *How to Choose the Best Business Fonts for Your Brand*. The Golden

Vineyard Branding Company. <https://goldenvineyardbranding.com/best-business-fonts/>

[Gulati, T. \(2019\). \*Futuristic Employer Branding Strategies: A perspective Beyond the\*](#)

[Traditional HR With Social Media](#). Anvita Home Solutions.

Holland, T. (2017, August 11). *What is Branding? A Brief History*. Skyword.

<https://www.skyword.com/contentstandard/branding-brief-history/>

Kessler, D. P. (2018, March 15). *Why It Is So Important For Parents to Validate Their Children*.

PsychAlive. <https://www.psychalive.org/why-important-parents-validate-children/>

Lloyd, T. (2019, June 18). *Defining What a Brand Is: Why Is It So Hard?* Emotive Brand.

<https://www.emotivebrand.com/defining-brand/>

Mohsin, M. (2020, August 27). *10 Small Business Statistics You Need to Know in 2020 [May*

*2020]*. Oberlo. [https://www.oberlo.com/blog/small-business-](https://www.oberlo.com/blog/small-business-statistics#:~:text=more%20proactive%20manner,-,Summary%3A%20Small%20Business%20Statistics,small%20businesses%20in%20the%20USA.)

[statistics#:~:text=more%20proactive%20manner.-](https://www.oberlo.com/blog/small-business-statistics#:~:text=more%20proactive%20manner,-,Summary%3A%20Small%20Business%20Statistics,small%20businesses%20in%20the%20USA.)

[,Summary%3A%20Small%20Business%20Statistics,small%20businesses%20in%20the%20USA.](https://www.oberlo.com/blog/small-business-statistics#:~:text=more%20proactive%20manner,-,Summary%3A%20Small%20Business%20Statistics,small%20businesses%20in%20the%20USA.)

Montgomery, A. (2015). *What is your definition of what branding is?* Design Week.

[https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/19-25-january-2015/what-is-your-definition-of-](https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/19-25-january-2015/what-is-your-definition-of-what-branding-is/)

[what-branding-is/](https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/19-25-january-2015/what-is-your-definition-of-what-branding-is/)

Mourão, R. R., & Harlow, S. (2020). Awareness, Reporting, and Branding: Exploring Influences

on Brazilian Journalists' Social Media Use across Platforms. *Journal of Broadcasting &*

*Electronic Media*, 64(2), 215–235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2020.1766929>

Myers, L. (2020, July 10). *How Often To Post On Social Media: 2020 Success Guide*. Louise

Myers Visual Social Media. <https://louisem.com/144557/often-post-social-media>

Paget, I. (2017, May 14). *What's the Purpose of Logos and Why do they Matter?* Logo Design.

<https://logogeek.uk/logo-design/why-logos-matter/>

Perdue, D. (2010). *Social Media Marketing: Gaining a Competitive Advantage by Reaching the*

*Masses*. Virginia: Liberty University. Senior Thesis, 1-39.



Pomerleau, C. (2020, June 12). *What makes a good logo?* 99designs.

<https://99designs.com/blog/logo-branding/what-makes-a-good-logo/#:%7E:text=Your%20logo%20should%20be%20distinct,a%20distinct%20logo%20for%20it.>

Rouse, M. (2020, April 7). *social media*. WhatIs.Com.

<https://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/social-media>

Seiter, C. (2020, July 24). *The Complete Guide to Stand-Out Social Media Formatting*. Buffer

Library. <https://buffer.com/library/the-complete-guide-to-social-media-formatting-make-your-content-stand-out/>

Swaminathan, V., Sorescu, A., Steenkamp, J.-B. E. M., O'Guinn, T. C. G., & Schmitt, B. (2020).

Branding in a Hyperconnected World: Refocusing Theories and Rethinking Boundaries. *Journal of Marketing*, 84(2), 24–46.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242919899905>

[Taskiran, B. \(2019\). \*Uses and Gratifications Approach, Social Media and Personal Branding: A\*](#)

[\*Study on Social Media Users in Turkey. Communication Today.\*](#)

Tran, V., & Keng, C. (2018). The Brand Authenticity Scale: Development and

Validation. *Contemporary Management Research*, 14(4), 277–291.

<https://doi.org/10.7903/cmr.18581>

Visser, M. (2020). *Manufacturing Authenticity: How We Yearn for the Real and Fall for the*

*Fake*. Medium. <https://epochemagazine.org/manufacturing-authenticity-how-we-yearn-for-the-real-and-fall-for-fake-21cc3b7397ea>

**Appendix A**

Primary Font:

**DIN CONDENSED**

Secondary Font:

Timeless

Colors:

Onyx Black, Tiger Orange, Candy apple Red



**Appendix B**

Old Logo



New Logo



**Appendix C**

## Social Media Calendar

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Facebook	12pm Image Post with reference to new classes or birthday parties. Picture of athletes being active, or of birthday parties. This post will directly copy onto instagram.	<b>Prepare Post</b>	12pm Information Post on upcoming events, important information, or schedule changes.	<b>Prepare Post</b>	12pm Image Post. Fridays are for the athlete spotlight. Pictures and videos of the chosen athlete are taken as well as information about why they were picked and why they love gym.		<b>Prepare Post</b>
Instagram	12pm Image Post			<b>Prepare Post</b>	12pm Image Post		<b>Prepare Post</b>

Appendix D

**Phoenix Elite**  
Published by Lacey Jenkins · March 5 at 11:56 AM

It's that time of the week again! For today's athlete spotlight we have Sophia! Sophia is apart of our recreational gymnastics class! Sophia's coach recommended her because she always has a positive attitude! Sophia is kind to her coaches and her teammates! Not to mention, she is such a hard worker! She is working on a few new skills, but this week she learned her barani! It won't let me post the video with a picture, so a video of her new skill will be in the comments! Sophia loves trampoline and double mini and loves to learn new skills! Thank you for being such a good example of a positive attitude and good work ethic! We are grateful to have to have you as apart of our family! Stay awesome and congratulations!



**Phoenix Elite**  
Published by Lacey Jenkins · March 1 at 11:13 AM

It's another crisp, beautiful day at Phoenix Elite! We scheduled 10 more birthday parties over the weekend and we just keep getting calls! We are so glad you choose us to help celebrate! If you'd like to book a party let us know! They are \$120 for an hour and a half and \$150 for two hours! We are here to help you celebrate birthdays, accomplishments, or even to just burn off some energy! I hope you are all having a beautiful Monday! We will see you all soon!



**Phoenix Elite**  
Published by Lacey Jenkins · February 10

We will be OPEN for Presidents' Day! Here are the list of dates we will be closed this year!

**PHOENIX ELITE  
CLOSED SCHEDULE 2021**

WE WILL BE CLOSED FOR THE FOLLOWING DAYS THIS YEAR

- APRIL 2ND-4TH: EASTER WEEKEND
- MAY 31ST: MEMORIAL DAY
- JULY 4TH: INDEPENDENCE DAY
- SEPTEMBER 6TH: LABOR DAY\*
- OCTOBER 15TH-17TH: FAMILY EVENT
- NOVEMBER 25TH-29TH: THANKSGIVING
- DECEMBER 24TH-JANUARY 2ND: CHRISTMAS/NEW YEAR

\*THIS IS ON A WEEKDAY AND CAN BE MADE UP

**Phoenix Elite**  
Published by Lacey Jenkins · February 17 at 2:00 PM

**Hello everyone! We are OPEN today! Excited to see you all again!**