

STRONGER
ROOTS

The Stronger Roots Program

Case study:

Nadácia Milana Šimečku

Diverse programs, unified communication – a paradox that needed to be addressed

Civil society organizations often struggle with their identity being unclear because of the diversity of the programs they do. The experience of Nadácia Milana Šimečku is an example of how to find the focal points for planning a clearer communication, separating programs and creating new brands, and as a result even improve the internal workings of an organization.

Nadácia Milana Šimečku is one of the oldest non-governmental organizations in Slovakia. It bears the name of an important dissident, thinker, philosopher and writer in the former Czechoslovakia. The Foundation's aim is to stimulate and support activities aimed at further development of democratic open society that remembers its past, appreciates diversity and allows for development of each and every individual.

Nadácia Milana Šimečku was struggling to communicate about their various programs, and especially to unify communication about a group of their activities, targeting teachers. They felt that these programs – including courses for teachers, online tools to learn about diversity and discrimination, participatory art projects for high school students about xenophobia, and even city walks that brings the stories of Holocaust survivors and local history closer – though very different, had the same core values underneath. Thus their goal was to strengthen the organization's whole brand, while also making communication about these educational programs clearer and more appealing.

REMARKS FROM THE TARGET GROUP: MAKE IT CLEARER, AND ONLY SHOW US WHAT WE REALLY NEED

The solution, creating a new umbrella brand for these programs was instigated by comments by high-school teachers as one of their major target groups. The teachers gave them feedback that they feel lost when they visit the website of the organization. To find out more about how they view and understand the work of the foundation, their program director organized focus groups with 56 teachers that were involved in their educational programs, one teacher per program, and gathered their opinions on their programs, organization, and the brand.

It became clear that the communication and the website need to be more attractive and clearer towards target groups, and the information from other programs of the foundation make it confusing, and they get lost/don't find the information they are looking for. This feedback also confirmed the intention and need to create its own brand for the programs for educators. Teachers agreed that the main focus should be on the topics of diversity and remembrance, holocaust and totalitarianism, and even had very specific suggestions, e.g. creating a separate button for teachers, as the tools can be used by other groups as well and that they did not see

the added benefit of newsletter, as they are more inclined to news on social networks.

HOW CAN THE PROCESS OF DESIGNING A NEW BRAND LOOK LIKE?

They always had some programs/brands which united several projects. First of all, the information from constituents, the mentor and the strategic planning in the organization underlined the need to be more attractive and understandable towards their target groups. That was their main goal to reach. They agreed that their main topics are diversity and memory, holocaust and totalitarianism. What followed was a realization that their brands and programs do not work well for their target groups as well as internally. When creating the brand they had to think about several things: Which projects to keep? Do they monetize the projects? Do they need a partner? The process took a long time and eventually, they realized they need to terminate some projects and probably create a paywall for learning materials.

They received a grant for educational programs and a mentor support where they received a suggestion to create a brand. The creation of the name "Vedieť nestačí" was inhouse. But it was originally a part of a different small grant program. They decided to carry on with the name. As a result, the Vedieť nestačí

website was created, where teachers can find effortlessly all programs relevant to them. They decided to focus on two main topics: memory and inclusion, which is also reflected visually on the website.

A BRAND IS FOR THE OUTSIDE WORLD, BUT IT STILL IMPACTS THE INTERNAL

The foundation had to communicate within its own ranks what their priorities are and who is in charge of what to make sure that the new brand wouldn't cause conflicts or overshadow other programs. This process opened space for much needed dialogue: the question what the priorities are, what to focus on and who will be in the lead. First step was to create a new narrative through several strategic planning meetings. They realized that since the strategic ideas are diverging, they need to organize strategic planning for each of the three programs ([fjúžn], Vedieť nestačí (Knowing is not enough), and Spoločnosť pre všetkých (Society for Everyone) programs separately. This took some conflict potential away.

The discussion followed about which projects to prioritize. Creating the Vedieť nestačí brand induced a new dynamic, but also new ideas and energy within their educational programs. Now the teams feel more independent. They still meet together but now more as individual "departments". The brand creation went hand in hand with adapting the structure of individual programs in regard to their newly realized long-term goals. For instance, they decided to target fewer teachers but with more intensive programs. As a result, the individual programmes still work on the mission of Nadácia Milana Šimečku (a society that remembers, values diversity, and creates space for development for everyone) but more efficiently, as communication and work with the specific target groups became easier.



This case study was written as a part of the Stronger Roots Program.

The Stronger Roots Program aims to increase the resilience of civil society organizations and their networks, strengthen their social capital and embed them in the communities and societies in which they operate. It is implemented by Open Society Fund Prague, the NIOK Foundation, Open Society Foundation Bratislava and Glopolis.

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