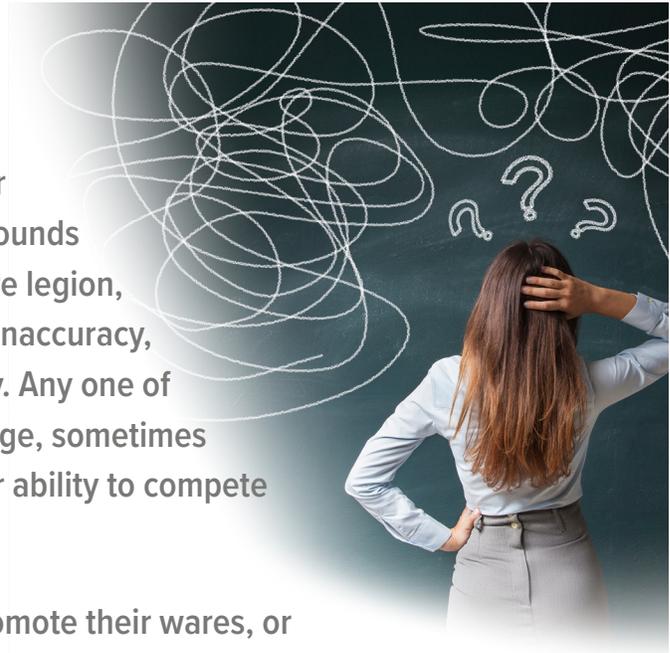


## 4 obstacles to clarity

As a concept, clarity has many virtues, chief among them making your meaning — whatever it may be — clear to your intended audience. Sounds simple enough, except that clarity's enemies are legion, including insincerity, obscurity, clutter, jargon, inaccuracy, obfuscation, background noise, and complexity. Any one of these can lead to consequences that can damage, sometimes irreparably, an organization's reputation and/or ability to compete in the global marketplace.



For marketers seeking to establish a brand, promote their wares, or educate their target audience, four circumstances are particularly challenging:

### 1. Mergers and acquisitions

Clear, accurate communication, to internal and external audiences alike, is critical for dealing with the distractions that can accompany mergers and



"What if, and I know this sounds kooky, we communicated with the employees."

acquisitions, and could very well damage the existing businesses. Without a strategy to ensure the right messages are communicated and reinforced, anxieties among employees will increase (and rev up the rumor mill), harm company morale, and prompt valuable talent to update their resumes and look for an exit.

### 2. Multi-tier marketing environments

Follow most products or services from their point of origin to their point of use, and you'll see most businesses have multiple tiers, each requiring some amount of communication — be it sales training, instructions for use,

sales strategies, pricing, or higher-level marketing and branding guidance. Each of these levels is an opportunity for clarity or muddiness.

Franchises are an especially good example of this principle at work: Consider how the strongest chains — McDonald's, KFC, JiffyLube, Burger King, et al — establish and retain tight, explicit, and data-driven control of their messaging... Everything from colors, fonts, packaging, signage, floorplans, employee orientation and training, POS systems, just to name a few of the unvarying variables at work in such businesses. And if the guidance provided 'from corporate' aren't already clear enough, there are also juicy carrots (e.g., incentives and peer recognition) and sticks (e.g., consequences for missed sales targets or deviating from corporate standards) to emphasize the point.

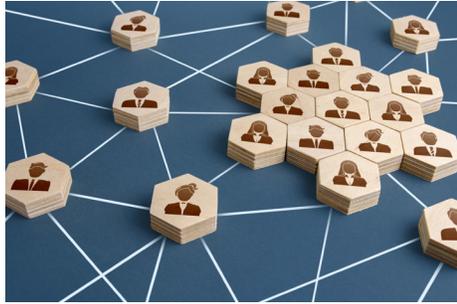
### 3. Complex organizational structures

Issues of complexity and coordination are seemingly built into organizations made up of several disparate entities each with, or striving to establish, their brand.

Case in point: The branding issues that can arise in large universities encompassing multiple colleges, research entities, or autonomous departments. Take a look at

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the websites of different universities and you will likely find graphics and messaging that are outdated or out of alignment with the university's



marketing standards. In some instances, there isn't an overall university communications and marketing plan at all, so little wonder there is discord in the institution's communications. In others, a school or college has established such a strong brand identity of its own (e.g., the Wharton School at Penn, the Newhouse School of Communications at SU, or the SC Johnson School of Business at Cornell) that the larger institution can be dwarfed or lost in the communications process. Absent strong marketing leadership or a clearly articulated

brand structure and marketing plan, such decentralized communications and marketing environments tend to muddle the messaging of the entire university.

#### 4. Decentralized marketing communications structures

The potential for unclear communications can also result from scattered responsibilities. This often happens in small companies and start-ups, where — by necessity — many team members 'wear many hats.' When this happens, branding and marketing activities and messages are likewise scattered — both literally and figuratively — resulting in messy messaging.

Whatever's causing your unclarity, the antidote inevitably requires a well-considered branding strategy, objectives-driven and consistently funded marketing plan, and a well-devised decision-making structure. Call or email Cowley Associates to ensure your organization has these elements in place. You'll be clearer for it!



Need help clarifying your organization's branding and/or marketing messages, reach out to Gail Cowley today at 315-475-8453 extension 1 or via email at [gcowley@cowleyweb.com](mailto:gcowley@cowleyweb.com).