Branding Faith: Why Some Churches and Nonprofits Impact Culture and Others Don't by Phil Cooke

I'm On A Brighter Walk Because Of Branding Faith!

Have you hit a wall with your church, ministry or non-profit organization? In spite of a genuine calling, an exceptional team and solid investment in the vision, have you noticed that the spark never catches fire? Media and marketing expert Phil Cooke wants every ministry to ask, Who are we? By identifying what makes your organization different from the thousands clamoring for attention, you can get your message heard. Cooke has consulted with many of the most recognized churches and non-profits in the world, and in Branding Faith: Why Some Ministries Impact Culture and Others Don’t, he shares his road-tested strategies for using media and marketing to make your mark on people’s minds and hearts. Whatever the size of your organization, his helpful hints and insider know-how will give you the tools to set your ministry’s strategies ablaze.

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My Personal Review:
Marketing and branding all too often are looked down upon --- especially when it comes to issues of faith. In BRANDING FAITH, Phil Cooke explores the dos and don'ts of communicating your message in the modern age. As a television producer and media consultant, he has worked with a long list of clients and has been given a front row ticket to what connects with this generation and what does not.

Cooke recognizes that we're living in a media-driven culture. The ways that people get their information and evaluate it has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. Unfortunately, the church and many non-profits have failed to keep up with the rapidly changing landscape of communication and ideas. The result is that many great causes are not only losing their voice, they're getting lost in the shuffle.
Cooke writes, "The key to effective branding is that a successful brand isn't what you say it is; it's what they say it is. For instance, it doesn't matter if the local food bank is the best in the nation if word leaks out that it's giving away tainted produce. It wouldn't matter if you're a brilliant pastor if your congregation thinks you're a hack. And it certainly won't matter that a humanitarian organization is global if nobody's ever heard of it."

These kinds of challenging ideas penetrate the book, causing readers to reflect not only on the organization they want to promote but also the very words, design and ideas used to promote it. One of the best chapters, "Telling Your Story," looks at the taglines of individual advertising campaigns and the importance of understanding who you are so that you can effectively tell your story. Cooke is quick to remind readers that visibility is just as important as ability. After all, if no one knows you exist, it doesn't matter how excellent you are. The beauty of the chapter is that Cooke encourages you to find your "honest voice in the middle of the media madness." He wants you to discover you're real you and make that the basis of your branding and marketing.

Despite all of its strengths, the book does have a few weaknesses. Cooke has a tendency to repeat his information multiple times. At some points, the manuscript feels like it's drawn straight from one of his presentations and didn't make the full translation from spoken word to written word. While some of the conclusions drawn from his anecdotal evidence seem like a stretch, the vast majority offer colorful illustrations that display the issue well. A slight annoyance is that Cooke is all too quick to remind you that he is a speaker and a consultant, and that he has a busy schedule. But maybe that's the nature of marketing, and if so, it's well-displayed.

BRANDING FAITH is a must-read for anyone who works for a church or non-profit; there is much to be gained, discussed and thought about. The truth is that far too many books of this nature are available for non-profit and faith-based agencies. As a result, this title is a much-needed resource and I'm glad Phil Cooke tackled the subject.

--- Reviewed by Margaret Oines

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