

Branding of Engineering Technology Programs Arizona State University at the Polytechnic campus Mesa, Arizona

Abstract

The paper focuses on pros and cons related to the branding of Engineering Technology (ET) Programs. Two frequent topics among leaders of ET programs are how to educate others (prospective students, prospective employers of ET graduates, and the community) about what engineering technology is all about and how to differentiate between engineering technology programs and traditional engineering programs. Engineering Technology faculty and students face these challenges on a regular basis. This paper seeks to address the question can this paper initiate a dialogue among the ET educators with regard to the branding of ET programs? Moreover, can an ET program have its own brand identity and build the freestanding stature desired, without being compared to traditional engineering programs?

Introduction

The effectiveness of branding is closely coupled with market perceptions. The market perception of the engineering technology programs and the degrees that they award is that they are subordinate to those from the superior brand of engineering. The subordinate engineering technology program and its degrees have been often defined and explained in term of engineering programs. Often, the significant differentiation between the two is lost in the perceived familiarity with the term engineering and lack of complete understanding of the term engineering technology. The result for engineering technology has proven to be perpetual perceptions of subordination and inferiority to engineering without any value or quality assessment. It can be argued that this situation is largely due to the branding phenomenon. If that is the case, then there may be a branding solution to the problems that arise for engineering technology programs and graduates.

Branding

Scott Bedbury, the CEO of Brandstream, a Seattle-based marketing consultancy, advertising director during the "Just Do It" campaign, and CMO at Starbucks has said, "Today, branding is everything—and I mean everything. Brands are not simply products or services. Brands are the sum-total of all the images that people have in their heads about a particular company and a particular mark... Marquee brands suffer if they show up at retail in a sea of poor quality products or in a questionable store¹."

Throughout the business world, branding is considered the foundation of marketing. It is therefore an inseparable component of business strategy. When placed into context, branding is much more than putting a fancy name on a product. Brands represent grouped combinations of attributes, communicated through carefully selected names or symbols, which influence the perceptions of targeted groups to create value. The value of a brand resides in its effectiveness and its ability to deliver the desired message of the promise that the product or service will deliver to the target audience.

Therefore, brand biases are deeply seated in the psycho-social aspects of the target group. This includes both the tangible and intangible attributes that cluster around the product or service being branded. The attributes include the deeply held beliefs that the members of the brand's target audience recall when they think about it in context. In general, branding is a combination of art and science that coordinates associations between a product or service and the held memories in the minds of the members of the brand's audience. The owner of the brand must focus resources on the selected attributes that differentiate it in an attractive, meaningful, and compelling way for the targeted audience. Over time, to consistently deliver the brand promise at each point of interface with the customer community, the brand owner's must make a major commitment to follow-through on each selected attribute.

The Engineering Technology Branding Environment

Both tangible and intangible attributes are important to the branding environment of engineering technology programs. Due to the history of the field, some of the attributes are deeply entrenched and some of them have associated perceptions that appear to be very intractable. Some of these deep-rooted attributes are:

- (1) Engineering technology presently exist as a sub-brand to engineering.
- (2) A large part of the target branding community has deep seated memories that categorize ET as subordinate to engineering.
- (3) The basis for differentiation may vary across the ET community.
- (4) The engineering and engineering technology characteristics, functions, and career initiation processes are merging at the boundaries.
- (5) There is strong demand for the ET graduate's skill set and competence, but they must serve the employer without the emotional satisfaction of being associated with the favored brand.
- (6) ET graduates are first thought of as two-year technicians.
- (7) ET programs exist at four levels of education without clear distinction.

Branding Engineering Technology

An approach to the elevation of engineering technology, through differentiation based branding, from its subordinate status to a stand alone

eminence, requires the launching of a creative marketing campaign. A fully integrated brand with marketing provides customers both logical and emotional reasons to acquire the positive knowledge of a product or service to a level needed to achieve preferred status in the marketplace. According to Parker LePla integrated branding², the branding concept revolves around the various levels of the brand relationship that are shown in Figure 1. In most situations, it is prevalent that value and price are closely coupled with each other and many consumers are familiar with the relationship that exists between the value and price.

Based on the analogy shown in Figure 1, the *Engineering Technology* brand may be at the *Preference* level. However, the goal is to get to the level of commitment.

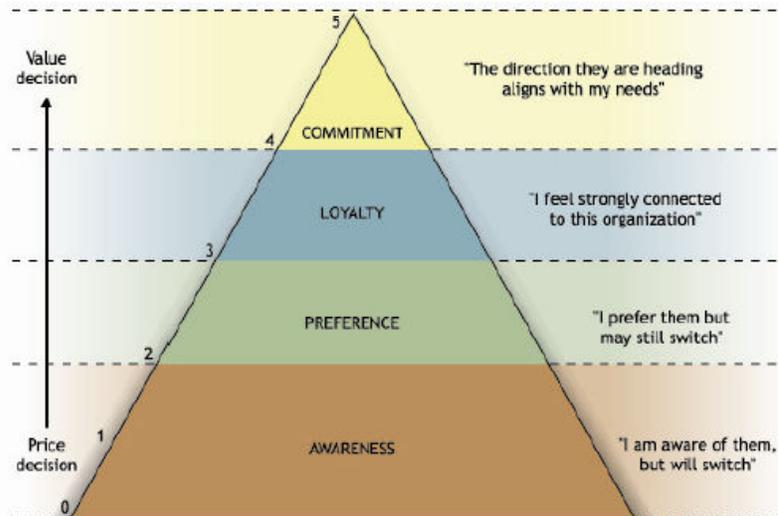


Figure 1: Brand relationship levels

Any assessment of the existing brand situation of engineering technology is based on the brand relationship levels and immediately leads to the understanding that the subordinate brand status means little independent awareness. On the value scale, this places ET at a level where a preference choice is not a possibility on a consistent basis. Therefore to engage this business model of marketing, the first step must be aimed at establishing product awareness in the consumer target group.

A Google (www.Google.com)³ keyword search was conducted to gauge consumer information available on the web using the identifiers Electronics/Electrical Engineering Technology in general. Then that was followed by a second web search using the identifier Engineering Technology to examine information on degree programs offered at the two-year, and four-year

institutions. The research was specifically focused on the titles used. The results are shown in the Table 1 and Table 2 below.

Keyword Search	Search Results Two-year Colleges	Search Results Four-year Colleges
Electronics Dept.of Electronics	Mainly pointed to two-year college degree programs and certificate programs,	Selected several four-year engineering programs at International institutions
Electronics Engineering Technology	Found two-year EET programs, Certificate programs and also Apprentice programs	Pointed to a small number of four-year TAC of ABET EET programs

Table 1.

Degree Program Name	Two-year Institutions Using these titles	Four-year Institutions Using these titles
1. Electronics Technology	22 Institutions	52 Institutions
2. Electronic Technology	# of	# of
3. Electrical Technology	Prog.Name	Prog.Name
4. Electrical Engineering Technology	3 --- Institutions (1)	11 --- Institutions (4)
5. Electronics Engineering Technology	1 --- Institution (2) 4 --- Institutions (3) 7 --- Institutions (4)	21 --- Institutions (5) 8 ---- Institutions (6) 1 ----- Institution (7)
6. Electronics and computer Engineering technology	0 – Institutions (5) 2 – Institutions (6) 3 --- Institutions (7) 2 --- Institutions (8)	1 --- Institutions (8)
7. Electronics Systems Technology		
8. Electrical and Electronics Engineering technology		

Table 2.

The Electrical and Computer Engineering Technology Department Heads Association (ECETDHA) data base was used to collect the data in Table 2. The EET community was chosen for this study because it represents the largest component of the ET community and has the greatest diversity. Based on these

data it is evident that there is no consistency either in the degree program names or for that matter the department names. For prospective students, the existing information related to Engineering Technology degree programs does not offer any special product awareness to the target student customers. Therefore it may be concluded that currently there is no real effort to promote these programs under a unified brand in the EET community.

The steps required to increase ET programs and product awareness must become the focus of the first level efforts. This requires that the ET community at large to move to discover a brand collectively that is effective and valued by the prospective graduates and their future employers. Leaders of ET programs will have to join hands to create a comprehensive integrated branding approach. The goal of the ET program leaders across the nation must be to provide consistent, compelling, and intellectually and emotionally differentiated messages and experiences to the target customers that achieve program awareness. The road to achieve this goal is quite challenging and can be achieved only through committed collaborative efforts from the entire engineering technology community. However, to support this concept, the first efforts may be to have strong ET programs establish a branding campaign that adopts the new approach and messages and uses them to demonstrate their effectiveness in achieving the community goal.

Conclusion:

Brands are the sum-total of all the images that people have in their heads about a particular company or a program. Therefore, branding is deeply seated in the psycho-sociology aspects of the target group. In its current state, the engineering technology brand is identified as a subordinate to the engineering brand as discussed in the paper. The focus of this paper is to initiate a dialogue among the ET educators with regard to the branding of ET programs. As a follow-up to this discussion, a more structured approach will be devised to address the needs of a wider ET community after collecting the input during the presentation of this paper at the ASEE Annual Conference and Exposition. A positive feedback from the ET community may generate the next level of approach to the ET branding.

Bibliography

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