Branding the bear

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BRANDING THE BEAR

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural & Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

By
Veni Harlan
B.F.A., Louisiana State University, 1981
December, 2010
“In wildness is the preservation of the world.”
—Henry David Thoreau

“Wildlife conservation will succeed only when local people are convinced that their lives are tangibly improved as a result of having wild animals around them.”
—Alan Rabinowitz, CEO of Panthera
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ABSTRACT

Currently due to successful restoration efforts, the Louisiana Black Bear sub-species is rebounding. Correspondingly this increase in numbers accompanies the rise of human-bear conflict. Fiction, misinformation, resentment, and devaluation of the bear as a valuable asset stand to undermine the tremendous strides made by multiple public and private agencies over the course of twenty years.

Discovery revealed a lack of knowledge by the public not only of the very existence of bears but also their remarkable recovery. An overwhelming number of the 400 Louisiana citizens polled expressed interest in the bear and interest in supporting its restoration.

I learned that central to the success of bears in this region is the Black Bear Conservation Coalition, a non-profit organization whose mission includes education, research, and habitat management. The problem is that few people outside conservation circles know of this organization’s existence or the role they play. The focus of the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries is primarily on enforcement and licensing with a primary goal of delisting the bear for hunting. There is concern that science-based decision making will fall victim to public and political whims.

Based on these and other findings it’s clear that key to bear conservation from this point forward must focus on public perceptions. An integrated branding program is the best solution to accomplish this goal with its ability to inform and engage the public.

The Coalition is ideally suited to expand their role and serve as an independent voice for bear and habitat conservation. However, upon a thorough audit of communications I found many obstacle to the Coalition serving in this expanded role. Despite these challenges, the organization has a strong knowledge base, cooperative network, is receptive to recommendations, and eager to employ new tools to support their objectives.
“Branding the Bear” utilizes graphic design and creative communication as tools in cultivating a positive and informed image of the Louisiana Black Bear to citizens of Louisiana and the greater region. It’s my hope that branding strategies utilizing the Coalition will bridge the gap between the historic conservation of the bear and citizen tolerance and appreciation.
INTRODUCTION

A ‘brand’ may be characterized as the ‘personality’ of an organization and is shaped by public perceptions. A designer cannot create a brand but may form the foundation of the brand. Broken brands with negative public opinion are harder to repair than obscure brands like the Coalition’s. Other examples of actions that may negatively influence bears are inadequate responses to human-bear conflict, lack of access to clear information, poor visual representatives of the bear, a web site that is not user friendly, or an organization that does not engage the public.

It’s useful to remember that the fundamental concept behind having a ‘corporate image’ is that everything a company does, everything it owns and everything it produces should reflect the values and aims of the organization as a whole. It is the consistency of this core idea that makes up the organization, driving it, showing what it stands for, what it believes in, and why it exists. It is more complex than a set of colors, typefaces, logo, and slogan. Nonetheless, these elements are very important to a branding effort.

The means by which I’ve branded the Coalition includes both visual and verbal communication. It’s based a thorough audit of current materials as well as the structure and design of the organization itself. I divided the Coalition into eight areas. Note that no one area is greater than the other. All are intended to work as a whole just as a wheel supports a vehicle. My approach to design is something I learned in figure drawing from professor Tom Cavanaugh—approach your subject globally and work equally on all parts until your vision is clear. Interestingly, this approach has correlations to the subject matter. A habitat is not only built of trees, but is diverse with grasses and wildlife, waterways and pollinators. Nature is cyclical, ebbing and flowing. This is reflective of an organization’s brand. As the forest responds to seasons, an organization must respond to changing attitudes, political climates, and developing pressures. A non response jeopardizes the brand.

There are many ideas and recommendations put forth in this study. While there is not a specific need that they all be implemented simultaneously, a long range perspective and specific goals
must be set. Significant attention and investment must be addressed in as serious a manner as is given research or land owner enrollment. Many organizations make the fatal misjudgment of mistaking a face lift for a communication plan. Successful groups take advantage of graphic design, visual communication systems, professional creative writers, and savvy use of medias to move their organizations forward and better serve their missions. As Mr. Cavanaugh would say, “know where you are going or you will get lost in the details.”

In the following pages, I discuss current communication vehicles and put forth solutions that address current and recommended Coalition objectives. It is my sincere hope that these ideas be helpful in planning discussions.

Chart illustrating the focus divisions for the Black Bear Conservation Coalition.
AUDIT | Logo

Logos are graphic symbols that represent the character of an organization. Logotypes function by literally identifying the organization they refer to. The visual below is a combination logo that functions more as a seal. Seals are used to authenticate documents are often and appropriately complex. Here the rather longish name with a slogan, four stars, two rules, and a image that was extracted from an illustration of a bear with its front foot on a rock is indeed complex but this is not a positive for the following reasons. The bear’s position out of context with only three legs showing is awkward and off balance. The profile is more that of a Brown Bear with its strong stop between the eye and nose. A longer profile with less stop is one of the identifying features of the Louisiana Black Bear. The stars have no relevance other than as spacing devices. There is no differentiation from the organization’s name and its slogan resulting in unintended equal emphasis. The Helvetica font is applied with inconsistent tracking no doubt to fill the space. Space serves to amplify the slogan here and give it unintended emphasis.

Overall this is a very busy combination defying the “keep it simple” rule of logos. It’s my opinion that this mark does not represent bears or the Coalition well and, in fact, may work against them.
AUDIT | Web site

When an organization has little to no funds for advertising, a web site can do a lot of heavy lifting. What is positive about this site is its technical content. The viewer is assured the Coalition is knowledgeable about bear and there is much information to gather. At the same time, the density of the content is challenging to digest, intimidating to read, difficult to navigate to, and visually unappealing. There are superfluous elements on the home page and so many links as to utterly discourage exploration. The viewer is hit with a dizzying array of demands such as “Bears need trees!” Donate now,” “Buy a cap,” etc. Understanding that the home page sets the tone for the organization, the visitor is very likely to have a negative impression. Messaging is also a concern here. Multiple action words are currently employed by the Coalition: save, conserve, restore, promote, preserve, etc. While it may be appropriate to use all or any of these words in context, use of a slogan should be carefully considered and consistently applied. (www.bbcc.org)
Like the web site, the newsletter is well written with great detail and depth of content. But if you wish to expand your audience and improve your visibility to the general public, the approach to communications like these must be revolutionized. While I don’t subscribe to the thinking that paper is evil and electronics are good, the facts are that mailing printed newsletters is a costly endeavor. The organization is further handicapped in efforts to reach potential supporters (a much needed priority) due to costs. To keep expenses down only one color is utilized. Issues of sixteen pages are published annually basically substitutes as an annual report, a useful item in itself but ineffective as a newsletter. There is no way for the viewer to link to details on the web site, or easily join or donate. Understandably the time and effort to create even one of these issues is considerable.
Recently the Coalition joined the social media world with a Facebook page. The logo, with its aforementioned issues, nonetheless indicates the name of the organization. However the title “Black Bear Conservation Coalition / East Texas Black Bear Task Force” serves to negate the name and confuse the viewer. East Texas is a valuable partner but they are a sub-group of the Coalition. While it may seem politically appropriate to include both names, it dilutes the brand, confuses the viewer, and distracts from the message. The statement under the logo is inconsistent with the organization’s mission statement. There is no rhyme or reason to featured content or coordination with other communication efforts. This is not be approached as a church bulletin but rather a dynamic communication tool that has the potential to drive viewers to specific information on the web site. Organizations that successfully use social media provide interesting facts, historical reference, engaging visuals, and compelling links or action items. I don’t believe in a “social media strategy.” I believe in a well thought out communication strategy that may include social media. If having a Facebook presence is just that, then it’s a distraction and a tax on limited resources.
AUDIT | Coalition Signage

These two signs have the identity issues previously discussed as well as too many contact numbers and an overall cluttered appearance. Clarity regarding bears (as indicated with misidentification below) is paramount. I would also posit that the time for educating hunters about the difference between hogs and bears is in the lodge, community center, or online.
AUDIT | Highway Signage

Clearly, I’m not the only one who has struggled with the graphic depiction of a black bear. The collection of hazard signs illustrates the challenge this animal’s physique presents. The first hazard sign is actually from the Louisiana Department of Highways. It’s closer at least to a more accurate portrayal of our bears. Others depict the distinctive Brown Bear shoulder hump and short, dished face. The official U.S. image for bear (bottom) is globular in shape and intentionally vague to cover all types of bear. (I don’t agree with this approach since aggression varies between bears and humans need to understand the differences.) Since we’re trying to brand a specific sub-species in Louisiana, particular care needs to be taken with regards to the shape and clarity of a Louisiana Black Bear image.
Interestingly, the most ubiquitous element of “bear media” is the prestige plate available through the Office of Motor Vehicles. It uses a flipped Coalition bear logo with added palmetto foliage and the slogan “Save the Louisiana Black Bear.” Aside from the aforementioned issues with the bear illustration, the term “save” is inconsistent with the Coalition’s mantra “Restore the Bear.” The word “save” should be avoided as it potentially conflicts with eventual harvests to control numbers, as is done with other species such as alligators and deer. Without adequate public education, no one understand the complex issues surrounding the bear.
BRAND ELEMENTS | Bear Photography

The majority of existing Louisiana Black Bear photography is poor to inadequate for high end publication, though there are a handful of attractive images. I point this out as photography is a particularly important medium to educate and inform the public about bears and the unique environment they occupy. Because they are shy, nocturnal creatures, rarely seen, and often mistaken for feral hogs, clarity of image is important. On the bottom left are images from the Coalition and/or wildlife biologists. On the bottom right is an image of an American Black Bear taken by wildlife photographer Don Jones. His work is illustrative of the quality required to help build a brand. Beautiful images engage the public in a way few other mediums can. Ideally, the Coalition should enter into a year-long contract with a wildlife photographer to capture images of Louisiana Black Bear through the seasons. These images would be used to build a high quality image database and potentially utilize in book form.
Restoration of healthy bear populations cannot occur without adequate food, shelter, and water. This is why habitat is so important. Conserving habitat for bears also helps hundreds of other flora and fauna. To emphasize the importance of habitat I made a particular attempt to photograph elements for incorporation into design. Many of the images are utilized on the web site with a tag that brings the viewer to a landing page with all habitat photos featured on the site. Ideally a biologist would identify the plants in a manner that would be interesting to the average viewer. Aspects such as details on forest items that bears find particularly tasty (like the bean plant below left) would be instructive. These images could potentially be featured in a guide or made part of an iPhone application for visitors to hardwood bottomland forest.

The photographic image has the power to invoke feelings, trigger thoughts, and project perceptions. And when it does, a photograph achieves what imagery endeavored to do—it stirs emotion and leaves an indelible impression.
BRAND ELEMENTS | Human Photography

There was such a paucity of images outside the focus of research that I made it a priority to inject regular people into the mix of branding elements. These landowners, business people, students, and urban dwellers represent the hope for viable bear populations. Without their engagement and support of bears conflicts will grow and the image of the bear will diminish from unique asset to disposable nuisance. The approach I’ve employed is photo journalistic portraiture with subjects interacting with the viewer. I sought to include settings that either help tell the story of who the people are or frame them in a natural environment which visually links to habitat. In addition, viewers like to identify with subjects so care must be taken to provide a diversity of models and settings.
Illustration is utilized extensively as a contrast to photography, a means to simplify complex images, and reinvent poor images. Proposed illustration for this study falls within the aforementioned color scheme, further tying visual elements together.

Certainly biologists, government agencies, and researchers require very specific parish graphs, however the general public does not. Maps are illustrated in a very simplified manner with focus given to the subject and geographic particulars afforded a more generalized approach.

Photo alteration using digital software is useful when an image is poor or to convert the image into a more graphic, simplified illustration. This last technique is utilized sparingly for this project but it is a useful tool to have within the system set for visuals.
BRAND ELEMENTS | Color & Texture

Color plays a particularly strong role in helping the viewer navigate and connect to content. I chose a dozen colors inspired by elements of habitat. When used in fields and frames they are typically contained in smooth contours. This is in contrast to the textures present in habitat photography. I could easily find any color desired within bear habitat. I found this fact particularly surprising. From a distance the forest appears fairly monotone, but upon closer observation a kaleidoscope of color is discovered. Here in the south it’s common to hear people lament the lack of fall colors that paint the hills of our northern neighbors. Our environment requires a more observant eye and for one’s effort a bounty exists.
BUILDING ON A FOUNDATION

Based on the eight subject areas, I chose mediums, vehicles, products, and messages that address concerns mentioned in the audit, accomplish goals, and form the basis for building a brand.

Several solutions apply to multiple areas. Some improve upon existing medias and others are completely new concepts. All employ graphic elements and approaches previously outlined.

Note: grey text indicates existing elements and colored text indicates revised or new elements.
COMMUNICATION | Symbol

One of the most challenging items to address was the bear itself. This animal has few definitive characteristics unlike for example a fox with its pointed ears and bushy tail, or shrimp with their curled body and long antennae. Bears are globular, monochromatic for the most part, and vary in length of leg and body mass depending on age and season. Keeping in mind some of the characteristics that distinguish the Louisiana Black Bear from an American Black Bear—longer head profile, longer ear, less stop—I chose to orient my bear to profile. For clarity I include all four legs and most anatomical parts. I purposely chose to make the illustration more graphic than photogenic and more realistic than abstract. Too abstract and I miss my opportunity to educate and identify. Too realistic and I lessen it’s ability to work as symbol. Bear characteristics, agility, intelligence, alertness, and nocturnal nature informed my approach. I sought symmetry and flow to communicate this species beauty and strength. The illustration is generally formed with a series of ovals and circles which aid in a fluid composition. The eye is purposely abstract giving a wild expression. There is indication of a plantigrade foot, characteristic of all bear species. I chose to have the bear in motion to reflect its journey from near extinction to viability. Direction is flexible but primary usage has the bear oriented to the right, generally considered to represent “forward.” Though our region doesn’t have Brown Bears it’s worth mentioning that Black Bears do not have the characteristic shoulder hump of the Brown Bear.
The challenge in developing identity for the Coalition is two-fold. Few people are aware we have bears or have heard of the Coalition. So placing visual emphasis on the actual name was a priority. I’ve avoided using the acronym “BBCC” for the same reason. The alliteration is awkward and generally acronyms are terribly overused at the cost of clarity. The very name was also difficult for me to resolve as it fails to identify the sub-species it represents—the Louisiana Black Bear. (I was led to believe this was specifically done for political reasons as Texas and Mississippi are partners in restoration.) I don’t agree with this decision as it is direct conflict with clarity and branding a specific sub species. I would strongly suggest the Coalition take a look at reasons and review options.

After much experimentation, I settled on a stack approach that emphasized the species and visually reduces four words to three lines. While not completely square, the shape is purposefully solid and steady. In developing a typographical logo I looked for a font that offered simplicity, texture, and strength. I settled on Berliner Grotesk* with its high x height corresponding visually with the bear’s heavy mass. Unlike a strict san serif, Berliner is more organic in feel with its nubby outline. The weight of the font allowed for appropriate emphasis on the words “black bear.” Its simplicity is intentional as it must represent a very complex organization. I chose gold as my primary color both for contrast, visibility, and meaning. The preference is for the text to run in black for obvious reasons but reversing to white is sometimes necessary and acceptable.

*Based on Hausschnitt’s 1913 Berliner and digitized by Erik Spiekermann for Berthold in 1979.
COMMUNICATION | Logo

Explorations of text with bear symbol lead to the horizontal version which suites many applications and is a bit more solid. I went through quite a few versions to get to the design at the bottom.
COMMUNICATION | Logo

It’s helpful to remember that a logo identifies an organization in its simplest form via the use of a mark or icon. To understand what a logo is, we must first understand what it is for. The final combination with signature color gold is extremely clear in word and symbol.
This graphic is exactly half of the previous one. It emphasizes the contrast between organic shape and hard line while expressing balance. Because bears and the Coalition do not have high visibility, using this symbol as the primary identifier without benefit of text is not advised at this time due to the lack of public awareness. However, use of this graphic finds many uses in this study.
COMMUNICATION | Identity System

An identity should be simple, memorable, versatile, and appropriate. This system is useful for every medium or purpose.
“Art is the imposing of a pattern on experience, and our aesthetic enjoyment is recognition of the pattern.” —Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), English philosopher and mathematician. Dialogues, June 10, 1943.

I had thought about a pattern early on. The very “fabric” of the bottomland forest is made up of so many living creatures, plants, and substances all interwoven. Balance connotes peace and serenity. The bear is an important part of this habitat. I chose to make the bear the only mammal and selected pollinators, fruit, nut, tree leaf, fern, flowers, bugs, birds, and insects to weave a pattern. All elements are executed in the same manner as the bear—simple and graphic with a smooth line. I use this pattern on several items.
COMMUNICATION | Pattern

The final composition in gold.
The final composition in gold combined with the bear icon is a useful visual to represent the bear within a balanced habitat.
COMMUNICATION | Pattern

I also created a pattern with the bear symbol. This and other graphics are available on the Coalition web site as screen savers. The pattern also works well on a man’s tie, one of the gift items mentioned later in this document.
COMMUNICATION | Business Card

The more horizontal format combining symbol and text works well for the business card. All information is on the back with a visual play off the eye (or focus if you will). The two color design is conservative in cost even with both sides being printed. Its strong graphics and bold color will keep the card from getting lost as well. Overall I believe the business card will be extremely useful in presenting a positive impression to the public.
COMMUNICATION | Stationery

A very simple and direct approach to stationery. The right paper stock will be key. It should of course be from an environmentally rated stock. Again the two color printing keeps cost conservative which is not only a practical matter but on of image. Expensive, complex stationery would reflect negatively on an organization whose very core centers on conservation of natural resources. So a balance between necessity and effectiveness must always be a consideration.

The postage stamp is something I have in the gift shop. It’s featured here for interest only. I do not recommend using this stamp for Coalition business as there is a significant surcharge. But it’s useful for those who would like to show their support for bears.
COMMUNICATION | Web site

My challenges were many with the web site. For the most part I was able to utilize all of their text. I created headlines, reworded categories, and added additional concepts. To help the viewer navigate and access information quickly, I relied heavily on a grid and two primary menus—the left area below the logo and the top menu. These menus are consistent on all pages. Visually I chose to have the home page appear warm, inviting, with interesting highlights (bottom) to explore. These features could alter per need. Major stake holders should be pleased with a proactive online presence as well as the attractive manner in which they are recognized. The web site is not only a utilitarian tool but also a means to attract new members, landowners, and sponsors. People want to be part of something they perceive as successful. The current web site does not reflect the caliber organization they truly are and in fact may do harm. (Prototype site: http://web.me.com/veniharlan/BBCC/splash.html.)
COMMUNICATION | Web site

I utilized “habitat” images in the banner area as both neutral elements to contrast with text and instructive purposes to reveal the richness of bear habitat. These were taken by myself in hardwood bottomland areas. A small tag on the bottom right of the banner indicates the plant’s call name and links to this album page with interesting information about the flora. Ideally a catalog of images from bear habitat would be utilized in book form, in an iPhone application, or in guide. You cultivate interest in something by presenting it in a beautiful manner and teaching the viewer something about what he is seeing.

This page also welcomes participation from visitors by inviting them to send in their habitat images for possible inclusion.
Gift items for museums and non-profit organizations are not simply revenue generators, but vehicles to drive people to web sites and influence the brand of an organization by the products featured.

With the Coalition’s mission of conservation it’s imperative that every aspect of the organization reflect this goal. With this in mind I created a line of items that utilize renewable, natural resources and are manufactured/crafted locally in Louisiana. This unique gift shop would potentially be a great tool to drive the public to the web site where hopefully they will linger and learn.

The shop icon utilizes the bear symbol in a light-hearted manner and can also be employed in print.
An electronic newsletter has several advantages over a printed one—namely, an easy way to establish a brand. Other pluses are full color, more vibrant images and graphics, the potential to reach a larger audience with the purchase of mailing lists, and the flexibility to publish more frequently. Stories would link back to the web site driving the viewer to linger and learn. The challenge of this project is that it is time consuming to write “digestible” and creative copy that the public will want to read. This is another example of where a freelance creative writer would be a useful investment. Below is a working concept for the newsletter.
HABITAT RESTORATION | Signage

All elements currently employed must be revisited with new graphics, even this simple property sign. Here the bear symbol works perfectly for a multi-agency initiative. The bear and font connect with the new identity. I simplified the content at the bottom. A sign in the woods does not require multiple contact numbers. These signs do not need to be ordered in quantity so changing the number for different states is easy.
HABITAT RESTORATION | Supporters

The process by which landowners enroll property in state and federal programs dealing with conservation is quite daunting and complex. One of the services the Coalition provides is guidance based on the location and type of land. I wanted to create a print piece that celebrated landowners and other supporters illustrating a variety of individuals (farmer, businessman, hunter, grandmother, beekeeper, bird watcher, etc…) These images were photographed by myself in bear habitat. They put a face to people who support bears in the community and would likely have a quote that speaks to the various challenges and pleasures of living with bears.
HABITAT RESTORATION | Trees

The Coalition has partnered with the American Bar Association in their project to plant One Million Trees by 2014. It’s good to partner but the Coalition should promote its organization first when mentioned with other partnerships. In general they should explore partnering with all groups that plant trees such as Baton Rouge Green and in other public venues. They could participate in Hilltop or Burden Plantation events where contact with receptive audiences is very likely. The focus on trees give the Coalition a great platform to discuss hardwood forests and how bears utilize specific trees. I feature a teenager actively participating in a Coalition sponsored program. These opportunities stand to engage parents who wish to expose their children to activities in which they may make a difference environmentally.
FUND RAISING | Toy

When I visited the Baton Rouge Zoo I noticed that every item in the gift store was made in China. The bear mask, the bear statue, the plush bear… not a single, locally made item. In a state that prides itself on cultural arts and crafts, imports are an affront. For many organizations, but particularly the Coalition, what is offered in their gift shop reflect the values they hold. My recommendation is to stock the gift shop with locally made, completely unique, environmentally responsible items.

The goal with a gift shop is to carry your message, voice, and perspective to your audience. Making a profit is a plus but it’s not “the” purpose. Using local talent is also an investment in good will. I would particularly solicit craftsmen in communities near bear habitat.

This toy bear evolved from sketches I made on the bus one day. I sought help with materials and production from a friend, Fran Gauthier, who was able to locate natural wool and bamboo cloth. The stuffing is Louisiana grown cotton and the embroidery was done locally. These would make great fund raising items and membership gifts. The custom manufacturing precludes maintenance of a huge inventory.
FUND RAISING | License Plate

Personalized license plates are popular and an easy way to show support for a variety of causes. Revenues from the current bear license (see page 8) support the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries. I propose that the Coalition explore establishing their own license plate. My suggestion for the design utilizes the bear symbol, a visual short hand for the organization. The slogan “Restore the Louisiana Black Bear” should instead reference Black Bear Conservation Coalition.
FUND RAISING | Banquet

While I was still doing discovery and sketching I was asked by the Coalition to design their 20th anniversary invitation. Overall the look remained the same but I refined the bear head from what is featured. (The label here has been updated to reflect this change.) The invitation cover is illustrated to convey a simple, balanced, graphic look. The front side of the invitation is intended to act as miniature poster that may even be kept and hung in a home/office by the recipient. The number 20 is somewhat decorative and contrasts with the bear and palmetto. It is also reflective of the celebratory event centering on 2 decades of successful bear conservation efforts. One must turn the piece over to learn what “20” refers to so the design encourages an action on the part of the viewer. The standard 4 x 9 package of envelope and 2 separate pieces sans bindery or fold is specifically intended to be conservative in cost. Accordingly only the cover is printed in four pms colors and the rest in one. The recipient is asked to provide an envelope or remit online, avoiding the waste of an unused return envelope. The new materials were enthusiastically received and the event well attended.
FUND RAISING | Tee Shirts

I created multiple designs that would be fun and unique works for tee shirts and other promotional materials. In the case of these three the bear symbol is the consistent element even though it is used in very different ways. Having a variety for these types of materials is fresh and fun.
FUND RAISING | Tie & Scarf

I utilized the pattern for two elegant gift items, a hand printed silk scarf and tie produced locally.
MEMBER RECRUITMENT | Ad

Messaging to learn, join, volunteer, participate, support should not be single channeled. For example, multiple opportunities to join should be employed versus a single, time limited membership drive. According to Robert Hall, Executive Director of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, “The best membership campaign is not a membership campaign. If you offer value to members, and get that word out, membership will follow. New members come not from membership mailings, ads, or a ‘member get a member’ effort, but from successful public education efforts. Not brilliance, just taking advantage of the potential that’s there.”

Nearly every person I spoke with about bears in the course of my research wanted to know how they could help. Several did. With any small organization, volunteers are worth more than a monthly ad in Business Report. My concept is to recruit and train a citizen corps of Coalition/Bear advocates. They would of course need to be chosen with care and thoroughly educated. Such a group would not only “carry the water” for the Coalition, but be valuable as advisors, liaisons, and fresh idea generators. The Delta Service Corps, an AmeriCorp group here in Baton Rouge, would also be a terrific resource for highly motivated young people who want to make a contribution.
MEMBER RECRUITMENT | Ad

Utilizing actual people with real stories about their connection to bears or their affection for wildlife, I created this series in the hopes that compelling statements by fellow citizens would encourage others to become supporters, volunteer, or at very least, visit a green space. The ads are multi-purpose but have a positive cohabitation emphasis. This series could work for member recruitment, fund raising, or bear education initiatives. Conceivably there would be a landing page connected to the web site connecting the viewer with a personal story and a button to join/volunteer/donate depending on the campaign.

I live with bears.

Learn how at www.bbcc.org

Bears matter.
The Coalition has been an important partner in all areas of bear research. As distasteful as it may be to scientists, condensing and “de formalizing” content, and always accompanying it with graphics or imagery, is strongly recommended. Here is where social media (in this case Facebook) may be especially useful. One is almost forced to lead the story with a clever headline and a compelling visual, or the item falls flat. If the viewer likes what you’ve listed, one click will take them to the web site where they may read a very focused feature item or details on the topic. (This requires the talent of a creative writer, which I mentioned early on is an indispensable component of any branding effort.) A Facebook page must be tended regularly. Post too much, and your audience tunes you out. Post boring or inappropriate content, and you leave a bad impression. Coordinated with other efforts and initiatives, social media can be a boon. Advertising through Facebook may be an appropriate venue for some purposes.
When considering methods of connecting regular citizens with the work of the Coalition, particularly its science-based conservation, I was faced with a couple of challenges. While the content is excellent, it is relatively dense, complex, and not particularly user-friendly. Again with the goal of reaching regular citizens with the work of the Coalition, I created a Flickr page. The widget would be available on the web site. People want to see Louisiana Black Bears so this is a fun and easy way to share more “visual” research and information. It further sets the Coalition up as “the” expert and source for bear information. As with Facebook, care should be made in choice and frequency of content. Merely dumping everything you come across is not a strategic approach and works against the professional impression desired. (As a side note, I do not believe Twitter is appropriate for the Coalition. Not every media should be used simply because it exits. All media should work within a specific context and for specific reasons.)
RESEARCH | Partner

With the goal of reaching corporate, business, and regular citizen support for research, I created a Partner document. It may be customized for a variety of purposes such as fund raising or recruitment. Images of real individuals with real quotes about their relationships with the natural environment drive the content.
I had from the start wanted to do something to reach children. The Coalition had a few recipes on their web site which I expanded upon to created an “activity” cook book for kids. The theme is of course bears but other forest dwellers are also featured. I art directed, designed, and photographed the children. David Humphreys, a renown food photographer, volunteered his studio and talent to photograph the feature food shots. (The frog, ladybug, caterpillar, and robin were sourced from Wiki Commons and the bear cubs from the Coalition.) Ingredients are suggested but processes are not defined to encourage creativity and resourcefulness on the part of the child. Each page has a fun factoid and the back has a link to the Coalition web site. The cookbook is as much a communication tool for children as it is for their parents. Hopefully, the goodwill the book brings will reflect well for bears and interest purchasers to learn more. It also makes a terrific fund raiser. Because it’s self published, stocking huge quantities is not an issue.
EDUCATION | Bear Smart

In a paper presented at the International Bear Association’s Eighth Conference on Bear Research and Management, Christopher Servheen, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, stated that “Conservation efforts on bears must be based on accurate biological information and knowledge of the habitat requirements of the species. Even when required biological data are available, implementation of conservation efforts requires an effective governmental commitment and incorporation of the needs of the local people into bear conservation. Management implementation and public education remain the greatest challenges in bear conservation.”

With the bear restoration comes an unintended effect—human-bear conflict. These twelve graphics are intended to accompany information on key trouble areas. This is a tough topic for many citizens so I sought to inject an element of playfulness intended to calm fears and foster openness to the idea that people can live safely near bears if they use a few precautions.

Ideally the Coalition would make “bear” presentations in all communities in or adjacent to bear habitats. Events should be with the blessing of the major/council/law enforcement organizations. Local businesses should be approached to sponsor the presentation and/or be paid to provide refreshments. Such events would not only include “Bear Smart” information, but also discuss the bear’s value to the community, heritage, culture, and the opportunity for questions and feedback. Such proactive efforts may not solve every issue but can work towards creating good will for the bear.
EDUCATION | Know Your Target

As bear and feral hog populations gain in numbers, identification between the two animals presents challenges. Both bodies are round and bulging. Uneven light and obscuring shrubbery are common. Because the Bear is protected, jail time and hefty fines accompany illegal Bear kills even when accidental. Gary Kinsland, an experienced hunter of 34 years mistook a bear and her cub for feral hogs. He immediately reported the mistake and now speaks about his experience at hunter education classes. “I try to explain to the class that even the most experienced hunter can make the same mistake I did and that you have to be able to see the snout, head, and ears to make a positive i.d. before shooting at a feral hog.” Kinsland’s comment inspired this graphic which combines a rifle reticle with a magnifying glass. The graphic may be made available as a sign or sticker to hunters by the Coalition as a public service. In addition, the web address invites the viewer to visit and learn more about the Coalition’s work.
COMMUNITY OUTREACH | Rack Card

Businesses that offer activities and attractions that appeal to tourists commonly utilize a rack card to advertise. I recommend that the Louisiana Black Bear have its own rack card. It’s not a business selling a product but a natural heritage species whose value is its very existence and connection with our unique environment. Information on the bear, its history, and the remarkable efforts made towards its recovery would be of great interest to tourists. That interests can translate to and increase in value and reputation of the bear by the region's public. These same cards could also be used at Festivals and other public events by the Coalition.

Capitalizing on the wonderful symmetry of the bear's head, I created a very graphic illustration. Visibility was a large consideration in the placement on the rack and amidst other competing brochures. Simplicity is particularly useful to aid in distinguishing the card from the sea of clutter. The illustration departs from those graphics used for the Coalition's identity as the purpose of the card in this setting is to promote bears, not the Coalition, though their logo and web site would be on the back side.
COMMUNITY OUTREACH | Wild Bear Art Show

Finding ways to insert the bears into community thinking is key to positive conversations about the species. Ideally suited to the task, art plays a unique role in generating interest and focus to issues. It has the potential to engage all ages in the issues of bears and the environment they inhabit. I recommend that the Coalition sponsor community art shows, particularly in communities near or in bear regions, and utilize the events to promote appreciation of bears and habitat, to educate, and otherwise cultivate pride in the region’s wild creatures and places. Such an endeavor also has the potential to reach people on a wide economic level and serve to inspire a greater connection to our wild spaces. The annual event could be held in conjunction with the Endangered Species or Earth Day.

I created this poster to promote such an endeavor. Select work could be published as a fund raising item. Most importantly the art project would work as a means to connect the public with the work of the Coalition, bears, and habitat.
SPECIAL INITIATIVES | Go Wild!

As our society becomes increasingly more urban, fewer individuals experience wild spaces and outdoor activities. Wilderness becomes the unknown and the unknown is often a thing to be feared. Fear and disconnect between man and nature widens every day. This fact is a primary threat to not only bears, but to habitats and all they contain. In addition, Louisiana lags behind states like Texas and Arkansas who draw thousands of “eco-tourists” every year. Though Louisiana bills itself as the Sportsman’s Paradise, only one in 25 visitors to the state cited outdoor recreation as the primary purpose (Baton Rouge Advocate). This is half the national average according to the U.S. Travel Association. So what does this have to do with Bears? Everything. Multiple studies show that if individuals do not experience their natural environments, they will not value them, care about the issues surrounding conservation, and appreciate why it’s important that our wild heritage be preserved for future generations.

The “Go Wild!” campaign is designed to address the above concerns and in turn help bears. The Coalition is uniquely positioned to take the lead on such a campaign with their history of building partnerships, track record, and mission to restore bears—the very symbol of the forest. Currently there is no concerted effort to organize governmental, educational, private business, non-profit, hobby organizations, eco-tourist, and concerned citizens in activities that connect people with outdoor activities. It would benefit all involved. (Below are simple “how-to” downloadable brochures that link citizens to groups. For example if you want to learn about birds but don’t know where to start, the local Audubon group will host its own “Go Wild” series of beginner birding lectures/hikes.

Go Wild!
SPECIAL INITIATIVES | Wildlife Crossing

Our nation’s transportation programs and policies have a tremendous impact on wildlife and pose some of the greatest conservation challenges of the 21st century. Various wildlife crossings are extensively utilized in Europe and several places in North America. The Coalition has recommended a tunnel-style crossing on US Highway 90, west of Calumet, Louisiana. This is an area where bears are routinely hit by vehicles. The Coalition is working to use monies from the Coastal Forest Conservation Initiative (CFCI) to fund either an outright purchase by the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR), or a perpetual servitude. It has been almost 2 years and no response from the DNR. A wildlife crossing would not only be positive for Bears and other wildlife but a huge public service to drivers. No one wants to collide with a 300 pound animal. This flash ad is designed to draw attention to the project in a fairly friendly manner, bring viewers to a landing page on the Coalition site, and provide the opportunity to pro-actively engage with their representatives. The graphic could also be converted to print. This places the Coalition in a public leadership position and is a project that helps wildlife and citizens alike. Additionally educational information about safe driving and avoiding collisions with wildlife could also be at this portal, providing an excellent opportunity to educate and create a positive public service image.
SPECIAL INITIATIVES | Signage

As seen earlier, bear signage is not very attractive. I’m unaware that Louisiana even has any. This is a missed opportunity. Not only do we need to put signs in regions where bears live, but the image needs to clearly represent a Louisiana Black Bear. Typically wildlife signage designation is the responsibility of Wildlife and Fisheries. However this does not stop the Coalition from putting together a proposal to the Lt. Governor (in conjunction with other public “bear” initiatives). Surely if we are working to restore the bear we don’t want to hit them. Ideally, the graphic chosen would be the Coalition’s graphic and correspond with other materials. Signs would be useful in promoting to citizens and tourists our success in restoring this species and our desire to do all we can as responsible stewards. Even when there is a hunting season these reasons still apply.
Despite the fact that the Louisiana Black Bear is the state mammal and that this designation in 1992 corresponded with it being federally listed as a threatened species, few know the bear exists. Equally at issue is a lack of knowledge about habitat, conservation, or the issues surrounding these critical aspects of our state. Creating a “Bear Month” is designed to build awareness and pride in our unique natural heritage. Ideally, “Bear Month” should occur in conjunction with other events in line with conservation and use of our wild areas. To accomplish this, the Coalition should develop a public relations plan, recruit partners both public and private, and craft a petition for the governor. Newly elected Lt. Governor Jay Dardenne would be an excellent individual to act on the bear’s behalf particularly with his duties covering state parks, tourism, and the Atchafalaya national heritage area. Prior to or in conjunction with, public feedback via a Coalition web site would be a useful aid in gaging public support. In addition involving the public in a simple, positive, no obligation action creates opportunities to educate, gain support, and in general, engage citizens to participate and advocate for bears and habitat. Another element either before or after a “Bear Month” designation would be the use of life size bear signs covering the lawn of the state capitol and other public and private spaces both in support and celebration.
SUMMARY

The charismatic mega fauna we know as the Louisiana Black Bear stands at a crossroads, as does the Coalition who ushered him to this point. Both must find their place in society. Employing a branding strategy with clear objectives, investment, and dedication, will position the bear as an important part of our natural cultural heritage. The bear more than any other species is a symbol of what we nearly lost and still stand to lose. There is much public affection for this thinking particularly in light of the recent BP oil disaster. Branding the bear will work to communicate conservation messages not only for bear but for all natural resources.

Visual design elements (such as fonts, illustrations, and photographs), working within a prescribed system, have the potential to attract the viewer and portray a positive impression. Content (in the form of articles, news items, and press releases), written with the general public in mind and consistent in language and tone, has the potential to effectively communicate the message of conservation. Products (such as newsletters, promotional items, and educational materials), dressed in visual elements, written in the proper voice, and channelled through the appropriate medias (such as web, print, radio) have the well established power to influence, inform, and educate. Applying this system consistently, partnered with other non-visual actions (such as community outreach and business partnering), will aid in building a positive brand for the Louisiana Black Bear.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


VITA

Veni Harlan was born in South Ruislip, England, February 9, 1959. The daughter of a U.S. Airforce pilot/mechanical engineer and a business owner, Veni graduated from Episcopal High School in 1977. Upon graduation, she enrolled at Louisiana State University to pursue an undergraduate degree in graphic design with minors in photography and history. Graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in the fall of 1981, Veni went on to work at a variety of advertising and design firms, in the LSU public affairs office, as a sole proprietor, as well as for her family’s business. She has designed and art directed for nearly every industry including higher education, government, non-profit, financial, food, industrial, medical, political, entertainment, and retail business. Many of her works over the span of several years have been recognized, including a national Advertising Award. Veni is also a published writer of creative non-fiction and exhibits photography at juried shows across the country. She is a member of several design, art, culture, conservation, historic, and humanitarian groups to which she contributes her time. Veni looks forward to graduating with the credentials to teach, something she enjoys very much, and pursuing ongoing creative projects.