

BUILDING YOUR COMMUNITY BRAND

Designing experiences and communication
that build public trust in recreation.

Michelle Bigelow
RFABC Marketing & Communications Manager
Founder, EmBee Visual | Visual Communications Strategist



EMBEE
VISUAL



WELCOME

In this course, we will explore:



Participant experience as brand experience



Building trust through communication and operations



Creating consistency across touchpoints



Aligning departments around shared experiences



Supporting accessibility and participant confidence



Building communications plans that bring your brand to life



WHY THIS MATTERS TO ME

I've spent my career in recreation communications and have seen **community trust** built through everyday experiences — not just campaigns.

How we **communicate** programs, maintain facilities, welcome patrons, and reflect our values shapes how communities feel about recreation.

This course shows how communication, consistency, and community experience work together to build **trust and connection**.

“When communication is intentional and consistent, people feel informed, included, and connected.”



RECREATION MARKETING ISN'T JUST PROMOTION

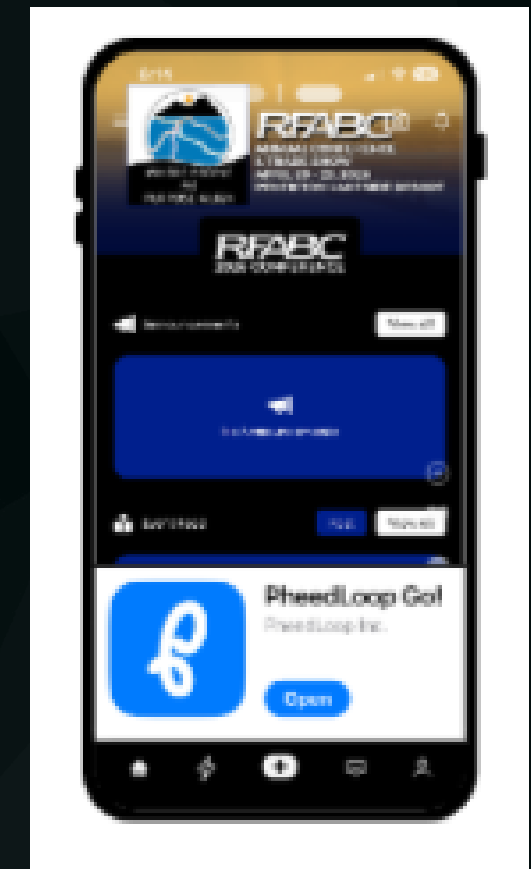
What we usually mean by “marketing”

- Emails and announcements
- Social posts and collateral
- Apps, signage, and promotions

Great for visibility and participation—but not what people remember most.



Email: Event info + expectations



App: Announcements + wayfinding



Contest: Participation prompt

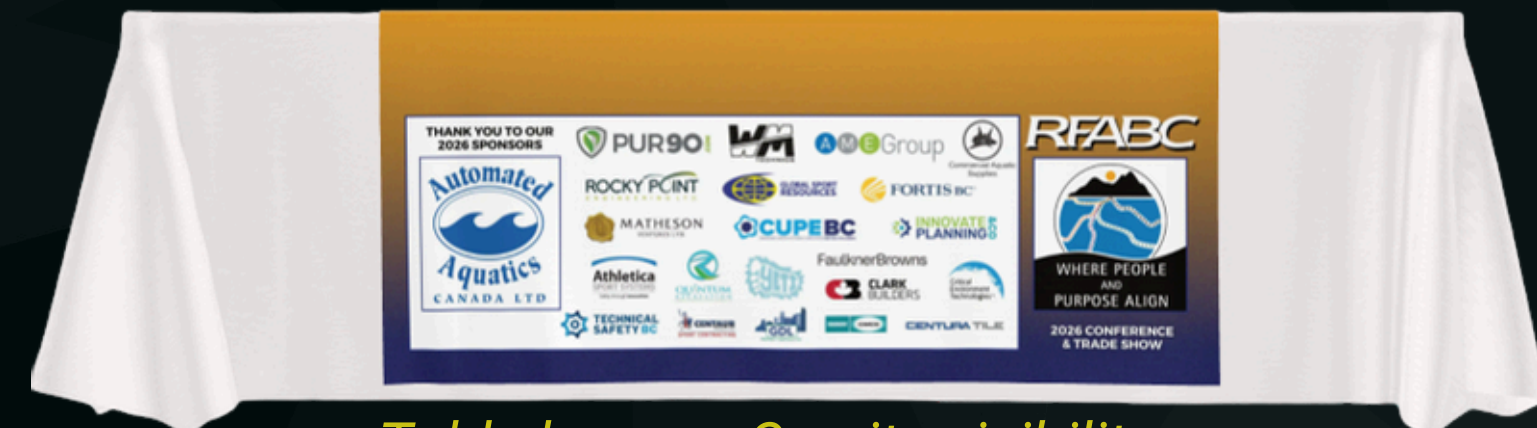


Table banner: On-site visibility

WHAT COMMUNITIES ACTUALLY REMEMBER

How they felt.

- **Welcome:** staff treatment, welcoming facilities, tone
- **Clarity:** clear communication, info easy to find, signage
- **Ease:** easy participation, consistency, cleanliness/care

Resident Voice

#PICKYOURFIT Adult Kickboxing with Tennielle **#StrongFit**

"Love the class, Tennielle rocks!" ~Kelly C.

"Love Tennielle. The class was awesome!!)" ~Lyndsay P.

"I am now the undisputed champion in 3 countries. Thanks T 😊" ~Zach Mytrunec

"Great kickboxing class. Definitely joining!" ~Abilene Primeall

"Fun alternative to an aerobics class!" ~Daniela Stewart

"Great endurance warm-up's & fun stress reliever!!!" ~Brian Meads [See less](#)



RECREATION MARKETING IS DIFFERENT

Different purpose. Different proof.

CORPORATE MARKETING



Sell products



Drive profit



Compete for customers

VS

RECREATION MARKETING



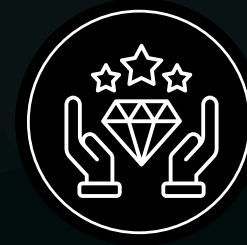
Build trust



Support community wellbeing



Encourage participation



Reflect public values



Create belonging

“ In recreation, communication shapes how communities experience public service.

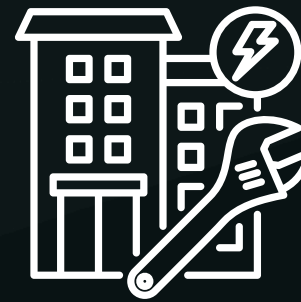
YOUR COMMUNITY BRAND IS...



Experiences



Customer Service



Facility Condition



Communication Tone



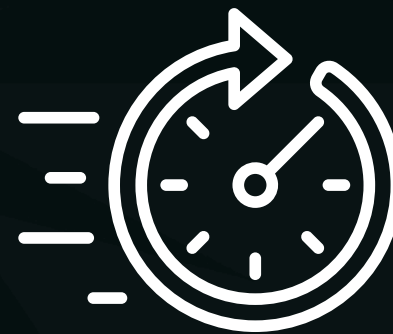
Staff Interactions



Programming Choices



Accessibility



Responsiveness



Consistency



Community Connection

“ *Your community forms opinions long before they read a brochure.* ”

HOW DEPARTMENTS SOUND

**TONE IS HOW YOUR ORGANIZATION FEELS
EMOTIONALLY THROUGH COMMUNICATION.**

HOW YOUR ORGANIZATION SOUNDS

Friendly and welcoming

Clear and organized

Supportive and accessible

Inconsistent

Formal or impersonal

WHAT IT MAY COMMUNICATE

Inclusion and approachability

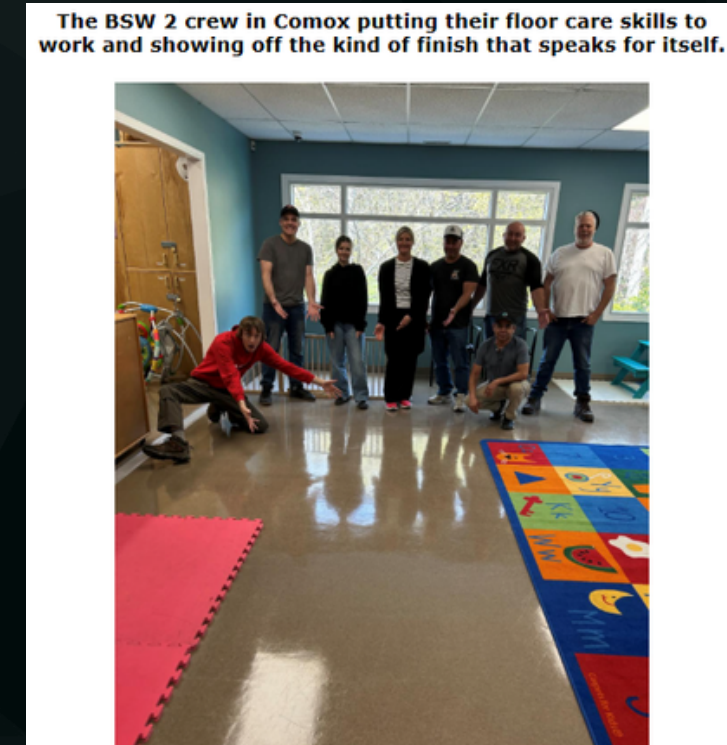
Trust and professionalism

Care and community

Confusion and unreliability

Distance and bureaucracy

*“BSW2 Crew” highlight
→ Inclusion and recognition*



*“Don’t worry—here’s how” e-news
→ Reassurance and trust*



“Where Rec Facility Operators Belong” → Belonging and clarity



*Tip: Read your last message notice out loud.
Does it sound like a helpful neighbor or a policy manual?*

“ People experience organizational values through communication tone.

COURSE OVERVIEW

01

DEFINING YOUR DEPARTMENT'S IDENTITY

How mission, public experience, and values work together to shape a consistent and trusted community brand.

02

PROGRAMS, EVENTS & SERVICES AS BRAND EXPERIENCES

Translating mission, values, and identity into meaningful community brand experiences.

03

COMMUNICATION, CONSISTENCY & TRUST

Using intentional communication and consistent experiences to strengthen trust in your community brand.

LET'S GET STARTED

Quick introductions

- ➡ Your Name
- ➡ Organization or Facility
- ➡ Your Role
- ➡ Share one small detail that made a recreation experience feel either really clear and welcoming — or confusing and frustrating.



SESSION 01

DEFINING YOUR DEPARTMENT'S IDENTITY

How mission, public experience, and values work together to shape a consistent and trusted community brand.



SESSION 1 - LEARNING OBJECTIVES

MISSION, VISION, VALUES & COMMUNITY IDENTITY

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- 1) Explain the role of mission, vision, and values in shaping community brand.
- 2) Identify how organizational values are communicated through different departments, divisions, and roles.
- 3) Assess opportunities to strengthen alignment between organizational values and everyday service delivery.

MUNICIPAL VALUES IN ACTION

MUNICIPALITY



Broad community vision



Governance & planning



Long-term priorities



*expressed
through*



RECREATION DEPARTMENT



Programs & services



Facilities & operations



Public interaction



Community experience

“Community members experience municipal values through recreation services.”

ONE DEPARTMENT, MANY DIVISIONS, MANY EXPERIENCES

DIVISION	PUBLIC EXPERIENCES SHAPED
Aquatics	Safe participation, swimming lessons
Arenas	Public skating, sport programs, community events
Parks	Clean parks, safe trails, well-maintained sport fields
Fitness	Supportive wellness and fitness experiences
Programs	Social connection, community engagement
Facility Operations	Safe facility conditions, reliable operations

Every division contributes to your community brand.



HOW DOES THE PUBLIC EXPERIENCE OUR WORK?



Front Desk

- Questions
- Registration
- First impressions



Arenas

- Ice quality
- Events
- Tournaments



Aquatics

- Swim lessons
- Public swim
- Safety supervision



Parks

- Trails
- Sport fields
- Accessibility



Maintenance

- Facility condition
- Repairs
- Cleanliness

“ Every interaction contributes to the public experience.”

HOW DO EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES BECOME INTERPRETED VALUES?

PUBLIC EXPERIENCE

Staff are welcoming

Facilities feel clean and cared for

Programs run reliably

Participants feel supported

Spaces feel safe and accessible

PUBLIC INTERPRETATION

“This place cares about people.”

“I feel comfortable participating here.”

“This organization is dependable.”

“People like me belong here.”

“I feel confident being here.”

POSSIBLE VALUE

Care

Inclusion

Trust

Accessibility

Safety

“People don’t experience our intentions — they experience our actions.”

ACCESSIBILITY IS PART OF YOUR BRAND

IT INFLUENCES WHO FEELS WELCOME, INFORMED, AND ABLE TO PARTICIPATE.

COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

Information is easy to find

Registration feels simple and supportive

Participants feel prepared before attending

Participants feel supported when asking questions

Signage and spaces are easy to navigate

Facilities feel clean, safe, and well maintained

MAY COMMUNICATE

“This organization wants me here”

“Participation feels possible”

“I know what to expect”

“I feel supported and understood”

“I feel confident being here”

“I feel safe and comfortable being here”

“Accessibility influences who feels like they belong.”

COMMON VALUES COMMUNICATED IN RECREATION

COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

Friendly staff interactions
Facilities feel clean and cared for
Programs run reliably
Registration feels simple
Spaces feel safe and welcoming
Participants feel supported
Information is easy to understand
People see themselves represented

POSSIBLE VALUES

Respect / Care
Professionalism
Trust / Reliability
Accessibility / Support
Safety / Inclusion
Community / Belonging
Transparency / Accessibility
Inclusion / Representation



“ Values are not just words on a wall — they are what people experience through our services.

ACTIVITY

Independent Reflection

Approx 20 minutes

Partner / Group Discussion

Approx 10 minutes

Debrief & Discussion

Approx 10 minutes



ACTIVITY: BUILD PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE SYSTEM

1 IDENTIFY YOUR FOUNDATION

Review your department mission, values, or purpose statement.

Think about:

- Who are we serving?
- What experiences are we trying to create?
- What values should people experience through our services?

2 IDENTIFY WHO CONTRIBUTES TO THE EXPERIENCE

Which divisions/service areas help shape the participant experience?

Examples:

- Operations
- Front Desk / Guest Services
- Programming
- Communications
- Maintenance
- Aquatics
- Arenas
- Parks
- Fitness

3 IDENTIFY THE ROLES THAT SUPPORT THE EXPERIENCE

Within each division or service area, identify the staff roles or teams participants interact with or rely on during their experience.

EXAMPLE: AQUATICS

- Lifeguards
- Swim Instructors
- Guest Services
- Maintenance Staff

EXAMPLE: ARENAS

- Ice Technicians
- Programmers & Instructors
- Guest Services
- Operations Staff
- Janitorial Staff



When we understand our mission and every part of our department, we can align our work and create stronger experiences for our community.

ACTIVITY: CONNECT THE WORK TO THE EXPERIENCE

4 EVERY ROLE CONTRIBUTES TO THE EXPERIENCES PEOPLE REMEMBER

Connect it back to your purpose...

1. Look at your broad municipal or recreation department mission statement.
2. For each role, think about the experience they help create.
3. Think about the values each division/role communicates for the community every day.

DIVISION / SERVICE AREA	ROLE / TEAM	EXPERIENCE THEY HELP CREATE	VALUES THEY REINFORCE / COMMUNICATE
 Aquatics	Lifeguards	Safe, supervised aquatic spaces where participants feel confident participating.	 Safety, trust, professionalism
 Aquatics	Swim Instructors	Encouraging learning environments for swimmers of all ages and abilities.	 Inclusion, confidence, support
 Aquatics	Guest Services / Front Desk	Smooth registration and welcoming first interactions.	 Accessibility, care, positive first impressions
 Aquatics	Pool Maintenance / Operators	Clean, safe, well-maintained water and facility conditions.	 Reliability, safety, professionalism
 Aquatics	Aquatic Leadership / Supervisors	Organized, coordinated programs and responsive participant support.	 Trust, consistency, leadership
 Aquatics	Program Coordinators	Inclusive aquatic programs that meet diverse community needs.	 Belonging, accessibility, community wellbeing
 Aquatics	Janitorial Staff	Clean, comfortable spaces that feel cared for and welcoming.	 Respect, care, community pride
 Aquatics	Communications Team	Clear program information, schedules, and participant expectations.	 Transparency, accessibility, participant confidence
 Aquatics	Signage / Wayfinding	Easy navigation through change rooms, pools, and spectator areas.	 Accessibility, clarity, confidence
 Aquatics	Volunteers / Event Support	Friendly support during swim meets, events, or special activities.	 Community connection, inclusion, engagement



Every interaction contributes to the community experience.

ACTIVITY: DOES THE EXPERIENCE MATCH THE INTENTION?

5

EVALUATE THE PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE SYSTEM

Consider:

- Are all divisions supporting the same participant experience?
- Do different roles within a division create the same overall experience?
- Where might participants experience confusion, inconsistency, or frustration?
- Do communication and operations work together to support the participant experience?
- Are any participant needs being overlooked?
- Where could trust or confidence break down?
- What improvements could strengthen the overall experience?

If you notice areas where the participant experience could be stronger, make note of possible improvements or ideas.



When communication and operations align, participants feel the difference.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

STRONG COMMUNITY BRANDS ARE BUILT WHEN ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES ARE CONSISTENTLY COMMUNICATED THROUGH EVERYDAY WORK.

- Mission, vision, and values help define community brand
- Community brand is experienced through services, programs, and operations
- Every department contributes to community perception
- Every role communicates organizational values
- Public experiences shape trust and confidence
- Consistency strengthens community perception
- Strong community brands are built through alignment across the organization

“Community brand is not what we say about ourselves—it is what people experience through every interaction.”



HOW COMMUNITY BRAND IS BUILT



If any part of this chain becomes disconnected...

The community experience changes.

**“For an employee
to take responsibility,
they must first
be given it.”**

Simon Sinek

NEXT CLASS

02

PROGRAMS, EVENTS & SERVICES AS BRAND EXPERIENCES

Translating mission, values,
and identity into meaningful
community brand experiences.

