

**Possible Benefits of a Global Branding Strategy for LibreOrganize**

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### Possible Benefits of a Global Branding Strategy for NOVA Web Development

On page nineteen of the fifth edition of his textbook, "eMarketing: The essential guide to marketing in a digital world", author Rob Stokes makes what has become such a commonplace assertion that it probably goes completely unquestioned by the vast majority of readers, "The end-goal of any business is to make money, in one way or another" (2013). That money, the abstract metric used to measure exchange values in the social reproductive system of capitalism, should come to be seen, not as the metric of value exchange, but as an end in itself, is deeply troubling. In a world in which capitalist social reproductive relations have led humanity to contradictions in wealth inequality and environmental sustainability that threaten its very existence, it is time for businesses to adopt a very different set of end goals.

At the small web development cooperative of which I am a cooperator, we take this concern very seriously. Section 6: Purpose, of the Limited Liability Company Operating Agreement of NOVA Web Development, LLC, states the following:

The purpose of the Cooperative is to engage in and conduct lawful business, activities or functions aimed at providing for the livelihood of the Members in a manner consistent with the interests of society as a whole, guided by the following principles:

1. We want to make a living, not a killing.
2. We want to help build the world we want to live in.
3. The people's movement should use the people's software.

These principles form the ethical foundation guiding NOVA Web Development and make clear its commitment to both social justice and software freedom (Limited Liability Company Operating Agreement of NOVA Web Development, LLC, 2019).

I need to return to this section over and over to remind myself of why I am working so hard to make our cooperative succeed and to avoid drowning in a logic that sees money as an end in itself. The dangers of falling into the trap of commodity fetishism are ever present. I make it a point to expose myself regularly to cultural works like Macklemore's "Wings" music video, which powerfully presents the dangers of using corporate branding in the unquestioned pursuit of maximum profit (Macklemore & Lewis, 2011). Sociologist Patricia Louie, in a review of this music video, calls it "an excellent way to introduce students to Marx's theory of commodity fetishism" (2013).

It is no easy challenge to navigate the contradiction between falling into the trap of accepting capitalist social relations as "normal" and a wholesale rejection of them. In the latter case NOVA Web Development will not survive as a business, making its stated aim of providing a living for its members unrealized. The goal must be to find a way to navigate this contradiction, and to make NOVA Web Development work as a viable business within the rotting carcass of present social relations until new ones can be built from the wreckage.

Our product is the skills of our cooperators, primarily our development team, but also our partner service team, to provide value to our partners in meeting their needs for custom web application software. In the longer term, our success will rest almost fully on the reputation we have for being able to provide recognized value to our partners, as stated by the partners themselves. In the short term, we need to find a way to bootstrap this process. We can not establish a reputation without partners, and we can effectively find partners without a reputation. Where do we begin?

We need to establish a reputation for our brand. There is no end to the number of articles

by online business writers stating the benefits of a strong brand. CEO Linda A. Fanaras in her article "5 Major Benefits of a Strong Brand" lists customer recognition, competitive edge in the market, easy introduction of new products, customer loyalty and shared values, and enhanced credibility and ease of purchase (2020). In "8 Benefits of Branding: Why you need a Strong Brand" designer Jacob Crass adds consistency, ability to attract talent, and confidence to the previous list (2018). The EquiBrand Consulting company lists fourteen benefits on their website that are separated into four categories: marketing, human resources and productivity, corporate development, public relations and social media, and financial. Of greatest interest to NOVA Web Development and missing from the shorter lists is the human resources and productivity benefit to "facilitate teamwork and decision making" (n.d.). Since our ethical and social values are core to what we do, a brand which reflects these values could indeed help unify us in this way.

Our plan is to develop our own flagship product, LibreOrganize, a web platform aimed at unions and progressive organizations to manage their member engagement and data, and to support collaboration among members for organizing (LibreOrganize, n.d.). LibreOrganize is free software, and the source code to it is hosted on GitLab (Tarabuta & Buchholz, n.d.). I do not have a good sense yet whether supporting deployments of customized LibreOrganize will be a viable source of revenue. We are currently partnering with my local union, the Arlington Education Association, to do their website with it (Arlington Education Association, n.d.). We also have a local non-profit organization using it, and we use it ourselves. Even if it does not generate enough revenue, it will be central to our branding strategy, since it will be the part of our digital portfolio that will show the world what we can do and help us establish the reputation we need to be successful in the market. Free software web development projects need only

attract interest from developers and users in different parts of the world to become "global", and almost all successful free software projects do that. With LibreOrganize to show the world, NOVA Web Development plans to develop the reputation it needs to establish its brand.

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