
A New Stage for the Guthrie Theater: Refreshing an Iconic Brand

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Introduction

The Guthrie Theater was founded by Sir Tyrone Guthrie in 1963. His vision was to create a theater with a resident acting company that would perform the classics in a rotating repertory with the highest professional standards. While the Guthrie Theater's mission and artistic excellence have remained constant, it has enjoyed unprecedented growth over the past four decades. Guthrie had outgrown its current site. Because of this growth, a new multistage theater centered on the banks of the Mississippi River has been built to bring all of the pieces of the organization under one roof. The complex includes three stages: a classic thrust stage for the grand-scale classics of the centuries, a proscenium stage for the more intimate classics of this century, and a studio theater for developing the classics of tomorrow. The new facility will allow the Guthrie to retain its pre-eminence among theaters nationally and internationally.

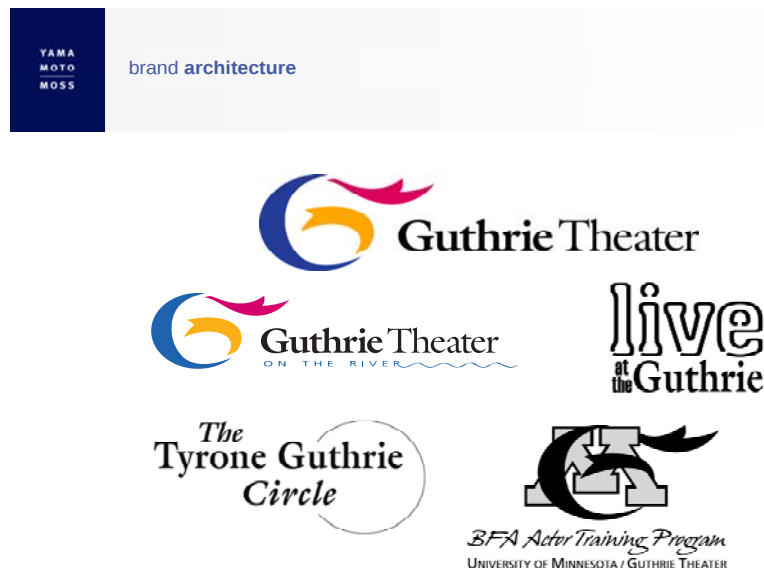
Objective

The objective of this branding project was to create a new brand image for the Guthrie Theater, reflecting its mission and values as it moves into its new phase and space.

The Old Brand Architecture

The old brand architecture was in disarray. The logos for the sub-brands (i.e. artistic programs, community relationships, communication and development) were too divergent from the primary logo, and there was also a concern that the brand had an old and stodgy image. In refreshing the brand, the goal was to streamline all the logos by creating a master brand architecture with a new spin. A master brand architecture would capitalize on the Guthrie's equity and quality reputation and give the theaters and outreach programs a halo effect which, in turn, would build the Guthrie name beyond "regional theater that does classics." A master brand architecture should consistently communicate the core and personality of the Guthrie brand and signal the changes at work in the organization.

Fig. 1 The Old Guthrie Brand Architecture



Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives of this project, several methods were used including site tours, strategy readings, a segmentation study, a communications audit, a competitive review, and a brand workshop to explore attributes of the Guthrie Theater. The mission statement was reworded and shortened to provide a clear and succinct representation of the Guthrie's purpose for existence. The mission statement now reads, "The Guthrie Theater, founded in 1963, is an American center for theater performance, production, education, and professional training. By presenting both classical literature and new work from diverse cultures, the Guthrie illuminates the common humanity connecting Minnesota to the peoples of the world."

In order to gain better insights into the behaviors and attitudes of Guthrie patrons and the greater Twin Cities population and to develop strategies that drive Guthrie patronage, a segmentation study was conducted. Based on the GMI segmentation study, a summary and recommendations for the new theater brand were generated as follows:

- Theatergoers can be segmented by their attitudes toward the theater into six segments (Enthusiasts, Socially Actives, Escapists, Social Loners, Homebodies, and the Casually Interested)
- For a penetration growth strategy, target the Casually Interested with comedies and a less formal atmosphere, leveraging one of the additional stages.
- For a buy rate growth strategy, target the Escapists with comedies and VIP perks for a total experience.

A competitive review was conducted by examining fifty-eight arts groups in the area, and internal and external brand workshops were conducted to explore the Guthrie's attributes. The brand workshops utilized a collage technique to gain insights into product perceptions. From all

of the data, a product truth, brand truth, brand core, and brand personality for the new theater was generated.

Product truth: The Guthrie Theater creates inspiring performances that explore the human condition.

Brand truth: The Guthrie Theater should be a catalyst for individual reflection and growth.

Brand core: The Guthrie Theater creates inclusive, inspirational performances. These are the three brand cores for the new Guthrie Theater. 1) Inspirational – Awe, Enriched, Creative, Engaging, Attractive, 2) Inclusive – Connections, Educational, Inviting, Accessible, Global, and 3) Performance – Excellence, Intelligence, Insight, Energy, Quality, Entertainment.

Brand personality: The current brand perception for the old Guthrie Theater is “classic/elegant, leader of the pack, slightly stodgy, expansive/intimidating, something acquired, and high class/ fancy.” The desired brand perception for the new Guthrie Theater is “modern/stylish, leader of the pack, wild and fun, inviting/versatile, surprising/something for everyone, and variable/multipurpose.” Based on the analysis, three key brand personality traits for new Guthrie Theater are “Illuminating, Creative, and Vital.”

Using these four brand elements, a new brand logo (Figure 2) was created and new web site was designed.

Fig. 2 New Brand Logo for Guthrie Theater



Conclusion

When it was founded, the Guthrie Theater sparked the nation’s regional theater movement. Forty-plus years later, the venerable brand is poised to move to a new signature multi-stage facility on the banks of the Mississippi River. The reframing, repositioning, and renewal of the Guthrie brand were an integral part of the physical movement of the theater. The refreshing of the brand helps legitimize and solidify the movement of the Guthrie from one stage to the next.

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