

# Marketing Your Program; *Leveraging Your Unique Brand*

By Sandra Lundgren



This article builds off the both the overview of the role of marketing presented by Courtney Kochuba in “Marketing Your Program,” and the overview of channels and tactics presented by Andrew Kuhlman in “Marketing Your Show”.

## Why It Matters

Your ‘brand’ is your public shorthand for everything you work so hard for your program to represent and embody.

Think of some of the most iconic brands you know, for example Coca-Cola. Even if you don’t drink it, or don’t like it, you know exactly what it is because for more than 125 years the brand has consistently delivered the same beverage delivered in packaging that is unique in its visual presentation—same color, same font, same words.

Whether in restaurants, clothing, cars, stores, or tech, chances are one brand in the category will pop into your mind, unbidden, without effort. Maybe McDonald’s, or Starbucks, or Levi’s, or Chevy, or Target, or Apple.



Your goal in ‘leveraging your unique brand’ is to become that top-of-mind choice in the arena of school theatre, because of what your brand represents: students and teachers and volunteers who are passionate and dedicated to creating a worthwhile, high quality experience for participants and audience alike. It is shorthand for anticipating the kind of favorable experience they will have with you just as you know in advance what to expect from Starbucks, Target, McDonalds, or Apple.

So how do you communicate that shorthand and stand out? About 26,000 schools nationwide are counted as having theatre programs. Some of those programs use the name and reputation of the school and some create their own names. And several schools in any given state or community may choose the same show to produce during a given school year.

But right now there are just 5,000 schools around the world that may include in their identity that they are part of the International Thespian Society. Leverage that affiliation to make your identity shine as brightly as your work does.

## Things to Consider

Since marketing theory is covered by Kuhlman and Kochuba, the focus here is on the basics of branding. Begin by identifying the brands your troupe has to work with—ITS, school, drama club, and current show. ***The goal of this article is to help you understand how they work together and within the framework that marketing considerations provide.***

In marketing you consider:

- product—your program, season, and current production
- audience—loyal season fans, students who turn out for their friends, and people who are attracted by the current title (such as a mature, edgy drama or a family-friendly musical)
- the channels that are most effective in reaching each of those audiences, which are influenced by demographics and reach
  - channels include: school-based channels such as announcements, posters and banners, and word-of-mouth; websites, which pull; social media which pushes and amplifies; email which pushes; and gate-keeper media, where you have to go through someone else to get the information shared (radio/tv/newspapers, community newsletters, posters in store fronts and other public places) which push and amplify

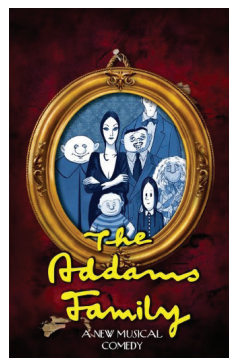
All of the marketing communication referred to above, to be most effective, must use a consistent brand to identify your program.

So far you've considered who you are going to talk to, and where you're going to reach them. Now consider what you're going to say and what it's going to look like.

THINK FOR A MOMENT—ENVISION YOUR SCHOOL LOGO, NOW PICTURE THE AUTHORIZED LOGO AND ART THAT IDENTIFIES YOUR CURRENT PRODUCTION

Which one do most people recognize? Which one are more people interested in? What are the connotations of each one? Ask yourself these questions about people within the school, and in the community. These audiences could well have different reactions to the same images.

HERE'S THE NEXT QUESTION: WHO, exactly, are YOU anyway? Your program is not your current show. Your program is not your (entire) school. So, which one symbolizes your credibility as a source and the quality of your work?



*And on anything you would create using The Addams Family image you would include the credits:*

THE ADDAMS FAMILY, A NEW MUSICAL

Book by MARSHALL BRICKMAN and RICK ELICE Music and Lyrics by ANDREW LIPPA

How do you make all these identities work together? And which ones are most important for those audiences? Here are some of your tools.

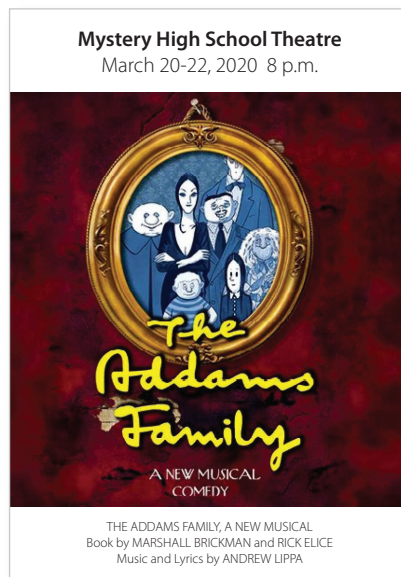
**Boilerplate:** a paragraph that is always the same, describing the organization and its mission for a reporter/editor who may not be familiar; it's a verbal signature or shorthand.

A boilerplate should include a synopsis of the relevant portions of organization's mission, size/scope, history, and most well-known product or service. It's an introductory snapshot, or the equivalent of a (two-story) elevator speech. It should be around 100 words. You can develop one for your school theatre program and ITS troupe, and use it on your website, in your Facebook and Twitter profile, and in every communication you send to any outside organization—media, business, school board, elected officials. Use the one from EdTA/ITS as a model—it encompasses three organizations, one event, and three publications; yours can be shorter and simpler.

**About the Educational Theatre Association, home of the International Thespian Society**

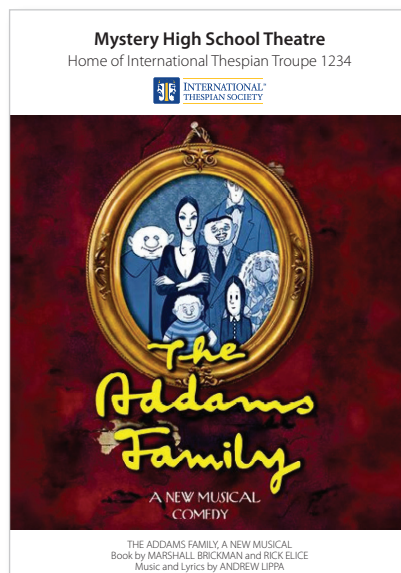
The Educational Theatre Association is an international association with more than 139,000 active members. EdTA's mission is shaping lives through theatre education: honoring student achievement in theatre; supporting teachers by providing professional development, resources, and recognition; and influencing public opinion that theatre education is essential and builds life skills. EdTA is the home of the [International Thespian Society](#), an honorary organization established at nearly 5,000 schools, that has inducted more than 2.4 million theatre students since its founding in 1929. EdTA also produces the [International Thespian Festival](#) and publishes *Dramatics* magazine in print and online for high school theatre students, and *Teaching Theatre*, a journal for theatre education professionals. The [Educational Theatre Foundation](#) is the philanthropic arm of EdTA.

**Show Program:** Here's another shorthand example of how you can make all identification elements work together, using a show program to illustrate. First is a typical cover (it could also be a social media post, a poster in school, or whatever you want to imagine from your promotion portfolio).



It prominently features the production and includes the school, and date; it covers the what, where, and when of the typical 5 W's that need to be communicated. What is not there? The who and the why.

Now consider this program cover.




What's the difference between these two covers?

Answer—BRAND! This show program now communicates 'who,' and is co-branded with BOTH your ITS brand and your troupe identity! It's easy, it can work with just about any show art—social media post, posters, banners, etc.

Of course some of those will need the date and time included prominently, while that is not true of your show program.

There are several things you can include to make the most out of your ITS brand in your show program, **and throughout all of your promotion. Everything that is suggested here for the show program can be re-purposed into: website copy, social media posts, and information for community media.**

**Cast list:** use asterisks to indicate who has earned Thespian distinction.



★ Thespian (10 Points: 100+ hours of excellent work in theatre arts)  
X★ One point star added for each additional 100 hours  
☞ Honor Thespian (600+ hours)  
2☞ National Honor Thespian (1,200+ hours)  
3☞ International Honor Thespian (1,800+ hours)  
◆ Honorary Thespian (the helpful adults we couldn't do shows without)  
\* Scholar (3.0 GPA or above)  
2\* Vice President's List Scholar (3.5 GPA or above)  
3\* President's List Scholar (4.0 GPA or above)

The International Thespian Society (ITS) is an honorary organization for high school and middle school theatre students. Induction and subsequent ranks are earned via a system that rewards dedication and quality works in the theatre arts.

Mystery High School is proud of its affiliation with ITS through Thespian Troupe 1234.

**CAST**

VeraClaythorne	Ima Star	2★
Phillip Lombard	Jim Nasium	
Dr. Armstrong	Rose Petals	15★ 2☞ 2*

**TECHNICAL CAST**

Stage Manager	Guy O'Toole	9★ ☞ 2*
Makeup	Willie Cuyote	6★ ☞ *
Publicity	Debbie Corbee	18★ 3☞ 3*

**PARENT VOLUNTEERS**

Drama Mama	Mrs. Violet T. Potts	
Ticket-master	Clara Van Garthington	◆
Mister Fixer	Mr. Bob T. Builder	

**Director's notes:** include in your comments shout-outs to members of the crew and cast who have achieved ITS-related achievements, such as earning enough points to be honor Thespians (and what that means.) Here's an example:

*Congratulations to Name and Name, who recently **achieved International Honor Thespian ranking** as a result of their hard work and dedication to our theatre program. They've each earned more than 180 Thespian points, accumulating 1,800 hours of excellence in the theatre arts through performance, crew, and serving as officers of troupe 1492. These students have demonstrated a commitment to excellence in theatre arts and have proven themselves valuable assets to Mystery High School's theatre program.*

**Biographies:** Every parent reads his or her child's biography, right? So will many other people. Here are examples of a couple of listings.

**Jim Nasium** (*Phillip Lombard*)

Jim is one of six International Thespian Officers nationwide. In between traveling to various state chapter festivals and planning the ITS student leadership training program, this Honor Thespian always finds time to lead our school's participation in the national awareness campaign. Theatre In Our Schools Month, or TIOS. This is Jim's third time under the lights; previous credits include Oliver in Oliver! and Rusty Charlie in Guys and Dolls. Jim dedicates his performance to Grandpa Joe.

**Chris Anthemum** (*Dame Margaret Wargrave*)

Chris is a senior International Honor Thespian who will be sorely missed. Her hard work, dedication, and involvement have been a valuable asset. She single-handedly organized "Read With Me Theatre," a community service initiative for high school theatre students to share their talents with local elementary schools. You may recognize Chris from such performances as Juliet in Romeo and Juliet, Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, or an Ensemble member of Brigadoon. After graduation, Chris plans to continue her work in the arts at the University of Theatre Studies.

**Honorary Thespians:** highlight them—local media will love it.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NEW HONORARY THESPIANS!**

*The following individuals are to be known hereafter as "Honorary Thespians" for their level of involvement and dedication to Thespian troupe 1492 and the theatre department at Mystery High School.*

**Misty Bink**

**Kevin Lomberg**

**Paul Schneider of Schneider Lumber**

**Veronica Luvowski of The Costume Shop**

**Mr. and Mrs. Sam Star**

*This title is a token of our utmost appreciation for contributing your time, talent, and treasure in support of our theatre program.*

*Everyone in the Mystery High School community is invited to attend our induction ceremony on*

**May 17, 2018 at 8:00pm**

*to welcome all of our new inductees and these new honorary members into our troupe.*

**How It Works Together:** all the info you compiled for the show program can now be used in multiple ways.

Through branding you've 'optimized,' your show program with information about ITS, member officers and honors, member performances at the state and national level, etc., and a few hundred people have had the chance to get the information.

That's just the beginning. The time and effort you invested in gathering and composing the information about the Troupe can now be 'repurposed,' making it available for anyone to see whenever they want to online. And you're going to drive people to it, using marketing tactics, so they become informed, generating awareness and recognition for your ITS theatre program.

Chances are the material you developed for your show program is close to tailor-made for the web. The sentences are the right length for easy screen reading on any size screen (up to 10 words). Paragraphs are at most three sentences long.

In some ways it's easier than a show program, because you won't run off the printed page, so you can open the text up with bulleted lists, making it even easier to read.

And, unlike a show program that is most likely printed in black and white, you can include terrific, engaging photos, and videos, of your Thespians where they shine-- being inducted, being honored at chapter and national events, and, of course, on stage and back stage.

Now that you have the foundation of your content, you can develop a branded marketing campaign, using the elements described at the beginning of this article and in other articles, to distinguish your theatre program and attract the audience and appreciation your students deserve.

## Recommended Actions You Can Take

1. Choose the identity to co-brand with ITS—your school or your theatre program/drama club
2. Compose your boilerplate
3. Compile the ITS-related information about your troupe members to highlight in your show program, your social media posts, and your news media releases.
4. Use the [calendar](#) in the Marketing and Promotion [toolkit](#) to build a three- or four-month marketing campaign that you can integrate with your production calendar.

## Links and Resources

### Marketing and Promotion Tools Library

<https://www.schooltheatre.org/viewdocument/public-relations-res>

### International Thespian Society branding library

<https://www.schooltheatre.org/viewdocument/its-master-icons-and?tab=librarydocuments>

### The Educational Theatre Association

[www.schooltheatre.org](http://www.schooltheatre.org)

### Theatre Educator Pro online learning center

<http://learn.schooltheatre.org>

## About the Author

*Sandra Lundgren is Content Director for the Educational Theatre Association. A 30-year veteran of non-profit marketing communications, she has an award-winning track record in branding, writing, media relations, integrated content management, and publishing, earning awards on both the local and national levels. Previously she was national director of chapter communications and marketing for the March of Dimes Foundation, providing communications guidance, tools, and training for hundreds of staff and volunteers for more than a decade.*



## Additional Credits

### EdTA's Business of Theatre Steering Committee Members

- Sarah Jane Arnegger, iHeart Radio Broadway
- Jason Goldstein, Booktix
- Andrew Kuhlman, Stages, St. Louis
- Meredith Lucio, Producer
- David R. Scott, Disney Theatrical Productions
- Cory Wilkerson, EdTA Education Manager

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- *Developing your Audiences*