



**HELP A NON-PROFIT FIND BRAND CLARITY AND  
ALIGN RESOURCES TO IMPROVE FUNDRAISING  
AND AWARENESS**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

UCAN helps youths who have suffered trauma become our future leaders. Each year the non-profit provides over 11,000 children and families with a consistent presence, meaningful programming, and unrivaled diversity. They are one of Chicago's oldest, yet most innovative social service agencies.



### **ASSIGNMENT**

Improve UCAN awareness and positioning for current/future fundraising by aligning brand throughout the organization.



### **CHALLENGE**

UCAN historically focused on mission versus marketing. As a result, its resources, awareness, and organizational mindset had suffered.



### **RESULTS**

- \$40M capital campaign goal met to build new campus
- Non-capital campaign annual giving rose 32% over 3-year period
- Customer satisfaction levels rose above 92% year-over-year
- Earned media through branded storytelling features topped over 100K hits
- Featured by Branding Magazine for its innovative work in non-profit branding
- Broke single-event fundraising record at 2017 Youth Leadership Awards Dinner, with over \$900,000 raised.

# BRAND FRAGMENTATION

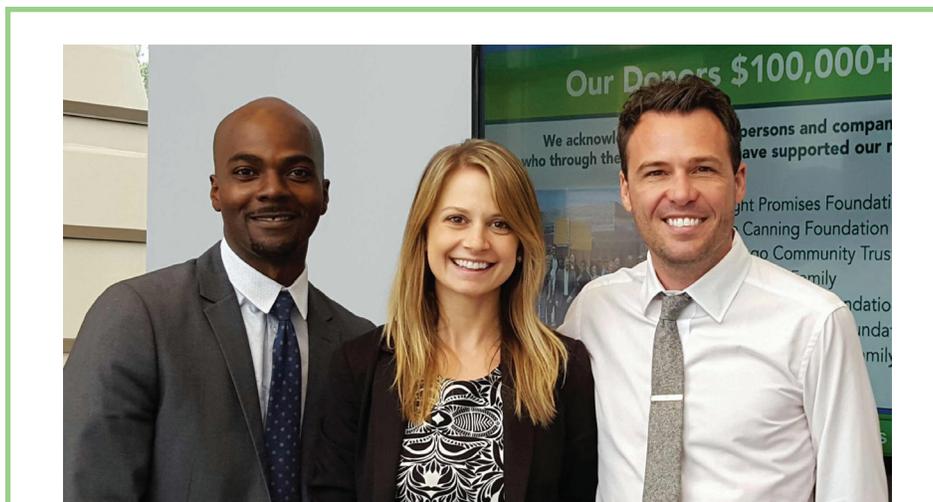
A brand doesn't endure for 150 years if it isn't strong. However, during a journey lasting 15 decades, it's no surprise if that same brand may have managed to wander off its intended path along the way. Such was the case with UCAN, a youth-focused Chicago non-profit with roots dating back to the Civil War and a modern-day identity that often was at odds with itself.

"Our organization didn't have our brand well under control. We had a lot of different types of programs and ideas that were all over the place and weren't managed very well," explained Thomas Vanden Berk, UCAN's CEO Emeritus.

To bring clarity to UCAN's brand, build consensus across the organization, and improve positioning for future fundraising – all while staying within a limited budget – UCAN tapped AE Marketing Group.

The assignment was not easy, as President and CEO, Zack Schrantz recalls, "We were at a critical point in our organization and marketing in non-profits is never easy. We have over thirty unique programs and are communicating to a wide range of audiences."

Many of these diverse programs and their corresponding staff were communicating different brand values, messages, and even identities. "To make matters worse, we were in the middle of our largest capital campaign ever – the city campaign to raise \$40M to build a new campus in Chicago's North Lawndale community," added Vice President of Development and Government Affairs, Fred Long.



# A CO-CREATION MINDSET

AE Marketing Group executed a four-step process built around its CoCreation Lab Series™ platform. This included:

1. An Enterprise Brand Audit
2. Refine Brand Architecture and Communications
3. Improve Emotional Connections with Youth, Families, and Communities
4. Operationalize the Brand Across the Enterprise

In order to begin the brand audit, AE Marketing Group CEO, Brian Walker asked to go into some of the neighborhoods most impacted by trauma and violence to meet directly with the customers (youths and families) UCAN served. That's where he first met Fred Long and immediately noticed something different.

“Sitting in on the Project Visible Man Program, designed to help young men of color see there are options beyond violence and other role models, was a profound experience,” said Walker. AE asked questions and listened.

“The youth looked at UCAN through an emotional lens,” noted Walker. “They didn't see themselves as victims, nor UCAN as a clinical solution.” Instead, the youth AE interviewed talked candidly about how UCAN, “Helps me understand what being a man is all about,” and how the organization, “Keeps me from doing bad stuff”, or “Gives me a place to go every Wednesday instead of the street corner.”

But, that was the first of many conversations.

Next up were in-depth interviews with staff throughout the organization. Suddenly, the conversations shifted from emotions to facts. Many of UCAN's employees have been there a longtime and they talked about trauma, clinical-focuses, and outcomes. It was a different mindset from their customers.

To see all sides of the brand, Walker, felt it was equally important to personally meet with many of UCAN's board members. Again, it was a different perspective. The board focused on its mission – to help youth become future leaders and how they could build investments in its future.

By conducting in-depth interviews with UCAN's customers/youths, staff, and board members, AE Marketing Group determined that one of the nation's oldest social

service organizations indeed did have a strong brand.

However, that brand was hiding behind inconsistent messaging and confusion. Those problems, combined with a clear misalignment of design and data, were creating an emotional void at UCAN that was resulting in missed fundraising opportunities.

By leveraging these brand insights, AE Marketing Group activated a strategy to showcase UCAN's consistent presence along with its meaningful programming, unrivaled diversity, and innovative approach to violence prevention. Balancing both internal and external brand forces with design and data provided a clear brand architecture that resulted in:

- Operationalize brand positioning, tone, and style, which included realigning and/or eliminating dozens of sub-brands to cut clutter and waste. Vanden Berk noted, "AE did a good job of tossing out the garbage while keeping the good stuff."
- Enhance creative treatments by integrating key satisfaction data with emotional photography and stronger calls to action.

### MEANINGFUL PROGRAMMING, UNRIVALED DIVERSITY



# EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Led by AE Marketing Group, the key to success with the brand transformation was ensuring that everyone within the UCAN community, from the governing board to the front-line staff, had ownership in the process.

As Vanden Berk noted, “By getting everyone onboard, everyone better understood the importance of communicating our brand and solidifying the organization around the message of our brand. At the end of the process, we had a better handle on brand control, if you will, and clarifying our brand message.”

AE then worked with Community Relations, Communications and Development to align the brand, and to educate, equip, and empower staff, from managers to new hires, on an ongoing basis. This included training, management meeting outreach, and brand guidelines co-created amongst all parties.



## **ZACH SCHRANTZ**

President and CEO, UCAN

“Our management team sees AE Marketing Group as a partner for both UCAN’s marketing and mission. Their process provided instant clarity to our brand chaos by improving emotional connections through data and storytelling. Those connections help us better serve our diverse audiences.”

# EMOTIONAL STORYTELLING

“AE Marketing Group pointed out rather quickly in our relationship, ‘you have hundreds, and hundreds, and literally thousands of stories,’ and that’s true. But we didn’t understand well enough what those stories could do, and what they meant for the organization, but most importantly what it meant for the kids,” said Vanden Berk.

Long found hope through UCAN as a south-side youth with drug-addicted parents. UCAN gave him the tools he needed to move to a safer area, enroll in university, and become a role model for today’s UCAN youths.

Long was hesitant about Walker, telling his story again. He was nervous that the story had been told too many times and it could no longer impact those who knew it.

However, Walker saw the potential for Long’s story to pull in clientele, let youths tell their stories, and allow them to be leaders. Walker crafted the idea of using the CTA Red Line to track Long’s story and development. Beginning at 95th, continuing to 87th, and eventually journeying to Jarvis, the impact of each stop on Long’s life was explained through his own lens.

The story was not sensationalized, but real, and meant to offer youths the chance to speak out about their own trauma. Long explained that Walker’s crafty way of bringing in other elements to make his story more complex and layered was entirely different from how his story had been told previously.

“Fred is able to communicate and tell his story, and it’s not made up—it’s authentic,” said Vanden Berk. “Part of the area of trauma is that you tell your story, and your story becomes yours, and that helps you grow as an individual. Brian has helped us put some attention to that, and has helped us with making those stories healing.”

AE Marketing Group’s way of telling Long’s story was not only the most unique way the story had been told, but it allowed people unfamiliar with UCAN to engage and learn more.

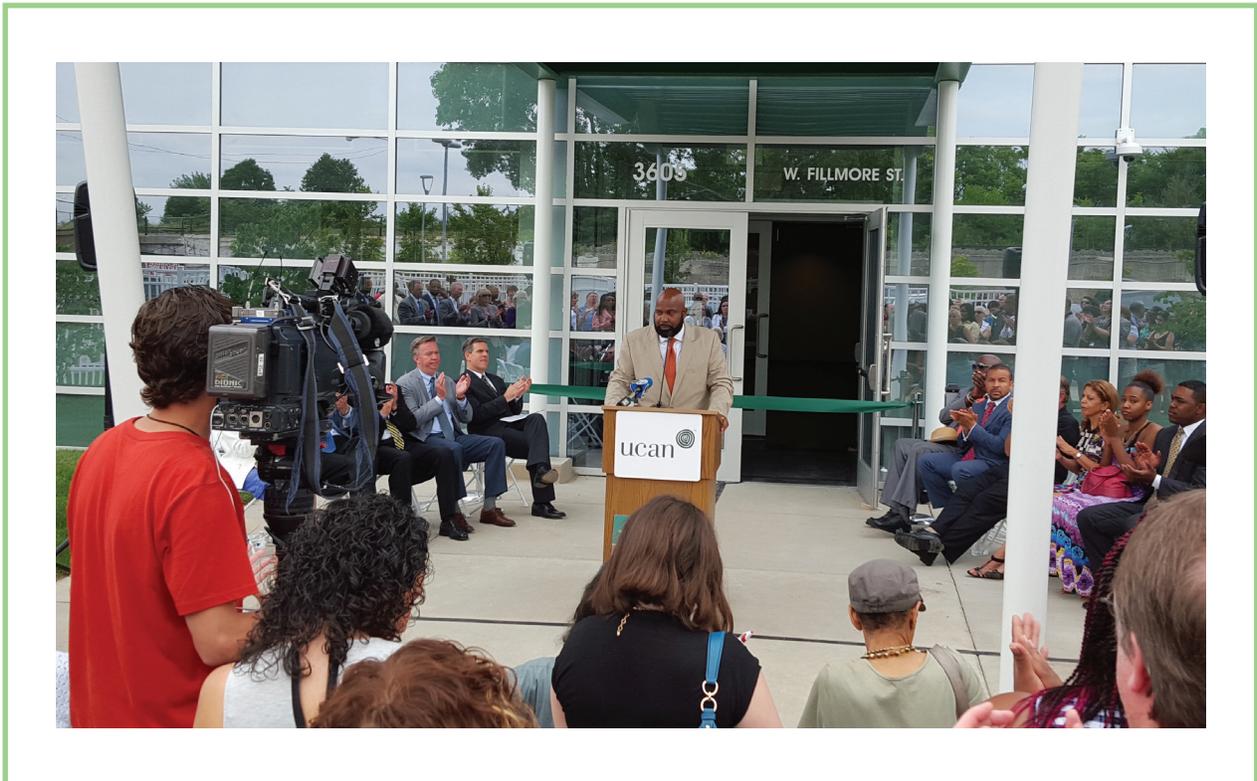
# EARNED MEDIA

“Long Journey on the Red Line” story was an instant hit garnering over 100K hits within thirty days and launched an entirely new marketing strategy. Stories of UCAN’s move to North Lawndale, combating violence in Chicago and its youth, became paramount.

This strategy led to coverage by traditional and non-traditional media, including Crain’s Chicago, NBC, ABC, the Brand Lab Series™ and a feature in Branding Magazine for its unique approach to non-profit branding.

Chuck Kent, Contributing Editor of Branding Magazine said, “I wanted to include AE Marketing Group and UCAN because I’d been immediately struck by the sense of simplicity, clarity, and purpose put forth in the branding and the extent to which it both accurately reflected and helped amplify the organization.”

Something else that struck Kent was the strong relationship between UCAN and AE Marketing Group. “I also wanted to explore the client-agency dynamics, and what could result from an obviously open and honest working relationship,” said Kent.



# UCAN 2017

Today, 47% of black men between the ages of 20 and 24 are both out of school and out of work. With a bold vision, millions of dollars in investment, and a sparkling new campus atop the land on which Sears' printing presses once whirled UCAN has become a community partner and true stakeholder in North Lawndale.

Schrantz describes the UCAN campus as, "the culmination of years of commitment by many dedicated people. UCAN now is well positioned for many years to come to build strong youth and families through compassionate healing, education, and empowerment."

Walker said, "UCAN is full of talented people and incredible stories of adversity. Our job was to guide them along the brand and co-creation process. Achieving buy-in from the entire organization and community was critical to this transformation. It is incredibly gratifying to see UCAN emerge stronger than ever from the process."

## RESULTS



- **\$40M capital campaign** goal met within 3 years to build new campus
- Non-capital campaign **annual giving rose 32%** over a 3-year period
- **94% increase in customer satisfaction**
- **Earned media** through branded storytelling features topped over **100K hits**
- **Featured by Branding Magazine** for its innovative work in non-profit branding, marketing and development
- **Broke single-event fundraising record** at 2017 Youth Leadership Awards Dinner