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Boston needs new brand to show off its 'smahts'

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What does Boston represent? *Discussions continue about how Boston's technology community can better communicate what happens here to the world. Kel Kelly of the Boston public relations firm Kel & Partners took on the branding challenge on her blog.*

Unfortunately, [Boston's branding] problem is bigger than a simple rebranding strategy and it's not something a new logo or tagline is going to fix. Why? Because the personality of a brand can only represent the personalities of the people behind it. Here in Boston, our technology brand image continues to be driven by the same good-old-boy network of faces, many of whom haven't changed in over a decade. Like the polyester suit that lets the world know you are out of touch with today's trends, Boston continues to pimp "leaders" who had their glory days over a dozen years ago and haven't done anything hot since. For the record, this isn't about sexism. There are many fantastic, edgy new male personalities here in the Boston area who aren't part of the "club." The problem is that many don't get the visibility or platform to emerge and help put a new face on Boston's technology brand.

There is no judgment here, only a feeling that we are responsible for our own image. Compared to the Bay Area and Silicon Valley, the Boston area looks like a bunch of up-tight peeps. When you go to a Web 2.0 Expo and Tim O'Reilly gets up in jeans and sandals, it screams the personality of the West Coast brand — hip, innovative, fresh, risk-taking, and relaxed. You can feel it the sec-

ond you walk into an event. From newly minted Mark Zuckerberg (founder of Facebook) to repeat icons like Marc Andreessen (cofounder of Ning and Netscape) to threepeat icons like Max Levchin (cofounder PayPal, Yelp, and Slide) their personalities really are the West Coast brand image — they are successful, casual, laid-back and approachable.

What's a Boston-area peep to do? Own the brand. Change your ways. Vote suits off the island and, for God's sake, people, lighten up. Better yet, shake it up. Have some fun. Throw away the PowerPoint and jump on Mac's Keynote. We have all the ingredients to be a hip, cool, iconic beacon on the hot technology horizon. From . . . "wicked smaht" peeps from MIT to cool Web 2.0 start-ups like Helium to social media mavens like Laura Fitton (aka Pistachio), we got it all goin' on. It's time to start struttin' some new stuff and usher in a fresh lineup of companies and peeps to represent the Boston area tech world. Obama hopes to put a new face on the United States brand. Isn't it time we put one on Boston's technology brand?

kelandpartners.com/kelkellyblog

Ashton Kutcher vs. CNN. *Oddly, the first two "personalities" to approach the mark of having 1 million people following their Twitter messages are CNN, the cable channel, and Ashton Kutcher, the actor who has starred in "That '70s Show" and "Punk'd." Ben Haber of the Waltham public relations firm Racepoint Group took note of the unusual rivalry.*

Kutcher [promised in a YouTube video] that if he beats CNN to 1 million followers, he will "ding dong ditch" Ted Turner's house.

To Kutcher's surprise, CNN put Larry King in front of this challenge, who told Kutcher that he didn't stand a chance against the massive network. Kutcher, then realizing that CNN was ready to take him on, had two very interesting observations about Twitter and social media:

■ He found it amazing that one person can have as big a voice as an entire media company (on Twitter).

■ After being invited to join "Larry King Live" to discuss this Twitter showdown, he noted that this is an Internet saga that should be discussed online, not on television.

With both parties closing in on 1 million followers (but CNN still in the lead), it looks like Ted Turner's house is saved. However, Kutcher has made his point that certain individuals can be just as powerful (if not more) on Twitter as a large news organization.

racetalkblog.com

Have you seen an interesting item on a local business blog? E-mail kirsner@pobox.com.



CNN PHOTO VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ashton Kutcher faces off with CNN's Larry King about the Twitter challenge.