

Renewing the Mission

BY RACHEL YOKA, LEED AP, CPSM

Timothy Haahs & Associates, Inc. (TimHaahs) is turning 15 this year—a comparatively young age for an engineering and architectural firm. The firm started with a change of heart, office space converted from a home garage, and core values written at the family kitchen table. From this simple start, TimHaahs has grown to a Pinnacle Award winner, in large part due to president and CEO Tim Haahs' constant focus on marketing—and always raising the proverbial bar.

TimHaahs rebranded in 2007, launching an internal and external marketing program designed to change the perception of the company and increase the range and complexity of the firm's services. This successful rebrand featured a slanted *H*, representing the mission statement of the firm.

In 2009, as we celebrate 15 years of going the extra mile for our clients, employees, and friends, TimHaahs is again focusing on the *H* and the mission statement to *help* those in need.

Redefining Brand, Reflecting Character

Every firm is special and unique in its own way. TimHaahs is no different. Founded on Biblical principles with a mission to do good, TimHaahs' brand is a reflection of the firm from the inside out.

In mid-2006, the firm began a rebranding process with the objective to raise its profile nationally and within the industry and to position itself for growth. TimHaahs' range of services and level of expertise had increased significantly from 2000 to 2006, and yet perception of the firm lagged somewhat behind the reality of what the firm could truly provide.

TimHaahs was well known as a parking consultant and an expert in functional design. Clients and teaming partners were at times unaware that TimHaahs provided prime design architectural and engineering for parking structures, and more. The rebrand sought to break down those assumptions and provide a more accurate picture of TimHaahs as a parking planning and design expert.

Initially, TimHaahs hired a graphics company to design a new logo and material to jump-start the branding process for the firm. Although some of the designs were more bold and modern, none of the concepts seemed to capture the essence of the company. Particular about the emotional response to the design, we didn't know exactly what we wanted, but we would know it when we saw it. Like many brand exercises, our efforts reached a holding pattern, until TimHaahs was fortunate enough to retain a talented graphic designer to join our staff. Discussions and new concepts abounded, until the firm selected its new logo and a foundation to build the balance of the collateral and media.

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The selected concept featured the firm name “TimHaahs” in a whole new light. The logo in particular highlights two key elements. Most importantly, the *H* is slanted to reference and draw attention to the key word in our mission statement: “We exist to *help* those in need.” The *H* is also featured to help people remember the second ‘H’ in ‘TimHaahs’. Our name is spelled wrong on outside documentation with amazing regularity. This was a strategic decision to improve our odds.

TimHaahs launched the new design in distinct phases, tackling different areas of interest, and building on previous experience and developed resources.

- **Logo Launch:** Integrated a brand mailer with new stationery, business cards, project sheets, resumes, and templates in Spring 2007.
- **Marketing Materials Revamp:** Brought all remaining essential collateral into the fold over a six-month period.
- **Advertising Campaign:** Provided dedicated, consistent exposure in targeted publications for the new logo and repositioning efforts over a two-year period.



Old logo and new logo



Business cards with different colored names



Branding piece, front and back



Newsletter

- Web Launch/E-mail Marketing: Followed up the previous efforts with a “clean-slate” exercise, a total overhaul of the site with new concepts and linkages to build on for years to come (Spring 2008).
- Renewal: Planning for the 15th anniversary.

The Logo Launch kicked off with a branding piece sent to our master mailing list of over 7,500 industry contacts. There were a few critical themes to the mailer, which included a cutout *H* ruler designed to be kept, attached with a small sticker that read, “Our H just got even more helpful.” The mailer reinforced the theme of the logo with a two-part message focusing on the *H*:

- We exist to **help** those in need.
- Parking is becoming the **heart** of development.

This effort was coupled with the internal launch of templates and formats for marketing and project work. Business cards feature a palette of color choices, to allow employees to select and personalize their cards while still keeping with the new brand. This feature also facilitates discussion about the brand with clients at meetings with multiple TimHaahs employees.

TimHaahs executed an extensive campaign for a firm of our size, advertising regularly in high-profile publications like *Urban Land* and *AIA* journals, as well as industry-specific magazines, namely *Parking*, *Parking Today*, and *Parking Professional*.

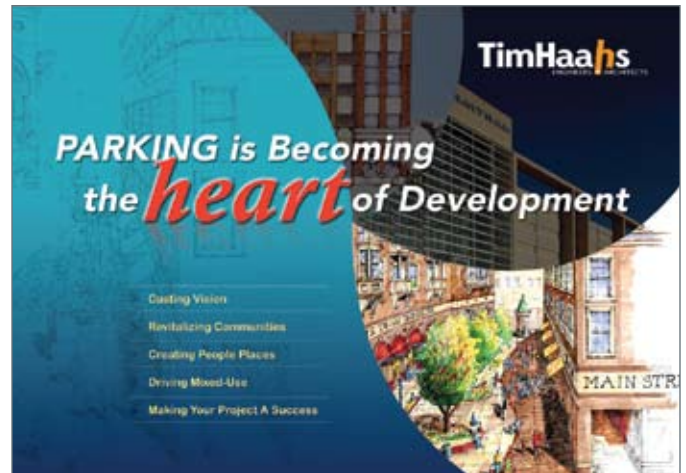
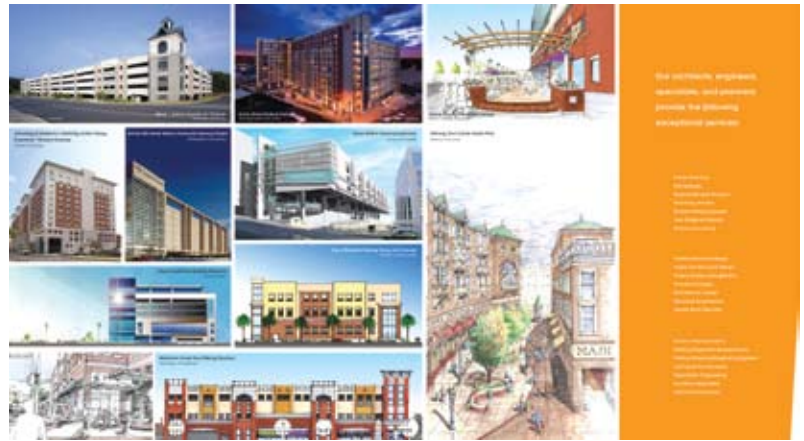
The themes run consistently throughout the firm’s collateral, both internal and external, including a new tri-fold brochure, exhibit design, and company video. The exhibit features the tagline, “Parking is becoming the heart of development,” paired with promotional material explaining the theme and how clients would find unexpected value in parking. The video provides an in-depth look at the firm and the industry, and it is frequently utilized in client presentations and other venues.

The heart has a double meaning in the brand, very particular to the firm’s history. Timothy Haahs, a two-time heart transplant recipient, founded the firm after his medical challenges led him to have an epiphany about his true purpose in life. So the theme of the heart is part of the firm’s “creation story,” and very personal. The heart also stands as a metaphor for an essential infrastructure element behind every successful development: parking.

A note on the mailing list: Considered one of our most valuable assets, the list has been cultivated by president Tim Haahs since the inception of the firm. It has grown as the firm has grown, and each employee is responsible to add to that list in a concerted effort to expand TimHaahs’ list of clients, colleagues, and friends. None of the efforts described for brand or marketing would have been successful without it.



Trifold front and inside spread



Above Left: 09 Construction, Above Right: Exhibit
Left: 15th anniversary logo

Expanding Services, Expanding Web Site

The firm’s rebranding efforts repositioned the company as a prime design firm, performing both architecture and engineering for parking and mixed-use structures. TimHaahs’ specialization and focus on mixed-use continued to evolve, addressing more complex mixed-use elements and structures, as well as a keen interest in shared-use analysis and sustainable design—two formidable industry trends. As these trends took shape, TimHaahs’ key messages expanded to include multiple key elements:

- Parking master planning as a unique discipline
- Creating people places through the proper integration of parking
- Sustainable design as a true consideration for mixed-use structures
- The Extra Mile concept, a running theme for our internal material drawn from the firm’s mission statement

TimHaahs’ semi-annual external newsletter updates clients on trends in the industry; the marketing team aims to create a newsletter that always goes in the “keep” file, versus the circular one. These pieces supplement our brochures and e-mail marketing efforts to keep the firm’s name in front of our clients while providing information of value.

The new Web site also integrated each of these key messages. As many readers know, Web redesign can be a particularly rewarding or agonizing activity, and for us it was both. Internal staff and management expectations (as well as design standards) set the bar high. Specific goals for the site included:

- Accurate characterization of high-level planning and design services
- High level of design for the site, without being weighted down by graphics
- Creation of a vehicle to draw visitors back to the site on a regular basis
- Ease of access, use, and update

The development took well over a year, but the site reached the expectations of most (if not all) invested in it. It features a visually appealing introductory animation, showcasing what parking and mixed-use structures can be, with the right design approach. Many site visitors don't realize the structures are for parking, but the animation leads them to the realization that we have a different and unique view of planning and design for an "ordinary" project. The back end is simple and easily accessible, allowing regular updating by staff to keep the pages fresh and new.

The final site launch initiated the firm's strategic approach to e-mail marketing and building momentum with regularly scheduled publications. E-mail marketing efforts link back to various updates to the site, drawing clients and friends back for another look.

Internal Marketing

From its inception, the firm involved staff in the rebranding process. Collecting feedback and input from staff added days to each timeline but ultimately captured the character of the firm and its work. The small decision of "what color to select for my business card" created investment in the design process.

The marketing team recognized that internal marketing is as critical as any advertisement planning or rebranding mailer. Project managers, designers, and engineers gain far more intimate access to clientele, and each staff person should and would be able to discuss the firm's key messages and specialized approach to parking planning and design.

The marketing team and firm leadership echoed and reinforced these messages at selected opportunities. Marketing provided milestone updates and presentations to all staff, to raise awareness as well as garner feedback. Major company events, such as the annual firmwide retreat and Christmas party, featured the company video, collateral, logos, and presentations that built on the desired key messages. The "Family Newsletter" is an additional resource to promote our branding and messages within the team.

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TimHaahs seeks employee feedback and investment in marketing collateral. The firm initiates an annual Christmas card design contest with the challenge to feature parking and Christmas—not an easy feat, but staff always finds a way to create a fun, memorable card. Marketing teamed with human resources to create a staff handbook, called "The Extra Mile," further relating the key messages to staff as a way to develop their own career path with the firm. Finally, the home of "TimHaahs University," or THU, on the firm Web page encourages staff to visit the site, check it out, and recommend additional material or ideas.

An Important Birthday and a Look Ahead

Fifteen years is young as far as engineering firms go; many proclaim 50, 75, or even 100 years of service. Fifteen years will be a milestone year for our young firm. Despite a difficult economy, the firm is still poised and planning to use our brand and reputation to grow as a leader in the industry, and to renew and further our mission statement in the communities where we work and serve.

Our birthday activities include a logo update, albeit a temporary one, on selected materials; a significant client dinner themed around 15 years of service; and a special Christmas party to honor our staff and clients to close the year. Our next external and family newsletters will feature the firm's mission, founding principles, and key messages.

Most importantly, the firm will focus on the mission statement to help those less fortunate. Mission-related activities for various charitable organizations have been, and will continue to be, organized for staff throughout the year. These activities are offered to staff, as well as employees' family and friends, both on and off company time, and staff are encouraged to bring their passions and particular mission efforts to the office to share. At the completion of any event or activity, those involved create a short presentation for all staff at the Monday morning meeting to further publicize the event and share the experience with the whole team.

Planning Beyond 15

Planning for marketing and rebranding beyond 2009 seems somewhat more difficult than planning beyond 2003, or 2007. TimHaahs will pair strategic marketing initiatives with more impromptu efforts to be as responsive to our clients as ever. To reduce waste, the plan integrates extensive use of e-mail marketing and development of an "e-brochure" as well as a firm intranet and a client extranet. Each of these elements will be designed to reinforce our brand and image, and extend the perception of TimHaahs as a leader in the marketplace.

In conclusion, the rebranding effort for TimHaahs has been a rolling one, with multiple milestones and strategic initiatives. The flexibility gained from a phased process allowed the integration of evolving key messages and concepts, to match the firm's growth and changing course. Internal marketing efforts will continue to reinforce themes and key ideas to all staff as they develop new and more challenging clients and projects. TimHaahs will continue with the marketing and mission-related activities planned for 2009 and beyond and continue to develop marketing ideas and concepts to support our clients, projects, colleagues, and staff. ■

About the Author



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