

1881+, American Red Cross SmartWear

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1881 (ARCF) is a line of functional apparel and lifestyle consumer goods created to revitalize the brand image of the American Red Cross (ARC) with the message of “**ACTIVE CARING**”.

ARC has close to 130 years of disaster response and preparedness since it was founded in 1881. However, ARC has faced challenges in reaching young generations, especially Generation X and Millennials. To help these generations practice the mindset of preparedness, ARCF engages them in a new movement, “being in control of my life”. The products are focused on daily safety and emergency readiness, so the consumers can be in control when unexpected events happen: emergency contacts / personal medical information on sleeves, scarf / gloves with flat whistle attached, handkerchief / bandana with CPR instruction illustrations, etc.

The problems ARC is facing

Despite 130 years of service, the ARC’s identity is merely nominal. During World War I, II and postwar times, they had strong associations with the American public by educating them with various programs that reflected their needs: taking care of wounded, veterans, and families. However, the connection to the American public today is significantly weaker. The ARC tries to deliver the message of preparedness, but this uncertain, dark future scenario has not resonated well with the American public because of the lack of an appropriate messaging channel.

> The American Red Cross has lost the exclusive possession of its logo: the red cross is used everywhere in the medical

field, on first aid kits and products, not to mention services related to the hospital industry.

> Few young people associate themselves with the American Red Cross: the brand image is limited to blood donations in most cases, and the ARC’s preparedness campaign is not delivered efficiently nor effectively to young generations.

> The ARC defines disaster victims as “clients,” but most of these clients do not have purchasing power nor do they have high impact on ARC’s exposure.

> Remaining independent from public media while retaining a strong place in American culture is one of the ARC’s biggest challenges: they rely heavily on media coverage of their activities which is limited to catastrophic disasters, only some of which do media pay attention to. The ARC does not have enough coverage of its activities, donation channels, and PR.

> Feedback channels to hear what the public thinks, what they expect, and how the ARC’s message is accepted is limited; there is one-way communication with an unclear message.

> Many of the American Red Cross products are not differentiated from other products in the current market: the ARC’s educational content is unique and top of the line, however, most of the products they sell are private-label catalogue products, since ARC cannot afford its own manufacturing facility.

The design solutions

This is a new branding strategy for the American Red Cross which allows them to build a new mythology, eventually becoming the symbol of “active caring” and “independence” through trusted quality apparel and life-style goods.

> The new brand identity (1881) differentiates the American Red Cross from the rest of the organizations that use the red cross logo (or even the white cross on a red background) as their identity, and establish a “cause-marketing” channel to communicate directly to the public. The ARC will become a symbol of “active caring” and “independence.”

> The existing preparedness kit tackles catastrophic events that most of the public, in fact, does not associate themselves with. 1881 helps the ARC to guide the public toward practicing a mindset of preparedness in their daily lives: a tag with crucial personal medical information and contacts in case of emergency, a self-defense whistle, basic CPR instructions, etc. This allows people to be in control of their their lives and/or surroundings and understand the message of the ARC: be prepared for emergencies / disasters and save yourself, your family, and your community.

> Embedded features allow consumers to become familiar with the necessity of carrying first aid kits or self defense tools, and help them to handle emergency situations better. The minimal form of each feature allows consumers to be less overwhelmed, since the appearance of most preparedness/first aid kits are not compact, portable, nor daily-life appropriate.

> The ARC benefits from this new channel by speaking directly to young generations not yet familiar with their message and/or activities: Gen X and Millennials are great potential customers since they spend money for high quality products with lasting value, and have high brand loyalty.

> The ARC can have a dramatic increase in exposure: in retail stores, ARC shops, to customers, and with participating design schools. The ARC does not need to rely solely on media coverage, most of which only happens during disasters.

> The ARC can build a market of returning customers who are exposed to the ARC’s message and can be potential volunteers or walking advertisements of ARC products: apparel has a continually-refreshed life-cycle because of materials and fashion trends.

> The ARC will own the intellectual property and copyrights, enabling them to have control over a consistent line of products and cultivate a group of exclusive manufacturing and distribution partners who can eventually co-brand products with the ARC.

> By stopping the use of catalogue products with private labeling, ARC can establish an identity of trusted quality. This project is the result of two terms of research, design, and collaboration with the American Red Cross, and has been presented to ARC leadership with an enthusiastic reception. There is a plan to continue development of the idea with the goal of eventual execution.