



Topic: How does branding fit within your strategic plan?

Taking part:

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- o Dave Ellis, Director, Absolute Design
- o Sarah Farrand, Marketing Manager, Rothera Dowson Solicitors
- o Carley Ferguson, Marketing Manager, Harvey Ingram LLP
- o Pauline Nicholls, Marketing Manager, Deloitte & Touche
- o Kate Rudd, Marketing Manager, Freeth Cartwright LLP
- o Mandi Short, Partner, The Progressive Business Group
- o Mat Slade, Partner, Head of Business Development, Fidler & Pepper
- o June Smallwood Rose, Client Services Director, Shoosmiths
- o Carol Smith, Regional Marketing Manager, Savills

Organisers:

- o Maggie Taylor, Principal, Prima PR & Marketing
- o Brigid MacDermott, Partner, The Progressive Business Group

Scene setting:

- We have an opportunity to develop the Oracle Forum into a network where we share best practice and knowledge – a chance to learn from one another to increase value for all.

Maggie Taylor, Principal, Prima PR – Topic introduction and PR practitioner’s perspective:

- Research shows that brands have a cash value that can make a difference to the balance sheet with brand-aware businesses outperforming other businesses by up to 20% over a 15-year timescale.
- How can you differentiate your firm and reap the rewards of a clear and coherent brand that brings benefits in a competitive market?
- If we’re talking about branding what do we mean? Not just talking logos – it’s about core branding that penetrates every aspect of business and contributes to business growth and improved performance.
- A carefully managed brand that is truly embodied within a firm’s culture, reaches into recruitment, training and employee performance as much as generating new business, securing news coverage and all other external communications.
- It’s usually easy to see the extent to which any business is truly integrating brand development within their ethos. Integrated communications needs to be embedded in attitudes
- As PR practitioners, there is a need to reflect the key messages and core values, whether working to generate media coverage, writing copy for the

corporate brochure, drafting an executive's script or devising an event for customers. Each must reflect the messages and values, but that isn't possible if the messages and values aren't clearly defined – a hollow vessel.

- If firms are vying for coverage in the Nottingham Evening Post business supplement against peers, then the PR practitioner will use wiles to devise the most newsworthy angles, but also need to set the firm apart - if you don't know yourselves, then PR cannot be effective.

Dave Ellis, Director, Absolute Design – the creative agency's perspective:

- Brand is all about perception. It's clear that people buy on brand e.g. Sony over Yamaha...
- Can you control branding or not? With the service sector there is no physical product and so it becomes much more difficult to build a tangible impression.
- Potential clients will draw their impression from the website so brand must be on message, carefully considered so that it will resonate with the target audience. There is only one chance to make the right impression with those 'active customers' looking to build an impression from the website.
- The brand must reflect the true culture of the firm. The positioning should be defensible – something to 'hang hat on'.
- What differentiates a firm? Can be as simple as perception
- Internal branding is the key, ensuring that the internal culture of the firm is embodied in the brand. The physical manifestation of the staff being ambassadors for the brand is crucial.
- There are different drivers which induce a firm to undertake corporate identity work. It may be political or economic, or perhaps the ethos of the business has moved on...
- When asked to undertake re-brand design work, designers need to understand that there are often political undertones. That account handler must be responsible for building an understanding and correctly interpreting the dynamics of the firm.
- The starting point is definitely internal communications but careful consideration must be given to the external audiences. The re-brand is often about new business drives.
- That first impression must be the right one and make clear sense so that it resonates with the intended audience.
- Ultimately people buy people so a great logo is only a small part of the brand. A well designed logo helps to position the firm as progressive but the people of the firm and its culture are what really make it work. Staff can create the trust with clients and ultimately build that familiarity and comfort factor.

- Firms should take care when electing a design agency – design is about confidence and a re-brand which focuses just on aesthetics and doesn't reflect the core values of a firm can be damaging. The designer should build a rapport with the firm and truly understand its dynamics. There has to be a clear business rationale behind the branding decision.
- The verbal portrayal of messages is also key – the tone of voice used on the website and in corporate literature. The importance of copy is often understated. Worthwhile using the analytics on websites to learn more about where customers are spending most of their time and ensure that part of site stands out and says the right things i.e. likely to be on the 'people' section of the site.
- It's important to get all in firm on board with the re-brand, and only go external with the message when this is the case. Useful to set target dates for activity and be completely open and transparent with staff about the process.
- Good design combines a robust business process with creativity.
- Consistency of the message is the key to building trust.

Roundtable debate:

Discussion point 1: *Why and when to rebrand?* – what is the reason, is there a clear strategy, how do you create an effective brand identity and values v simple name / logo change? ***How can you differentiate yourself?***

- The logo is a 'necessary evil' – focus is on living that brand – trying to get across the key messages to customers – e.g. that they demystify the law and are nice people.
- The branding process can be expensive but, if done right, the benefits can far outweigh the cost. There has to be impetus with the focus on adding value in everyday actions.
- For one firm, their successful re-brand saw a steady increase in fee-earning income and others experienced an increase in share price.
- Branding is a stage on from corporate identity – the brand is the promise that must be delivered consistently long after new logos, colour schemes etc have been introduced.
- Branding is about building faith e.g. the Marathon to Snickers transition – the quality and consistency of the brand is never questioned.
- How do you justify a re-brand to senior partners who do not wish to spend the money? Need to rationalise why there is not buy-in across the board.
- The answer is perhaps undertaking research because there has to be a reason. Whilst difficult to evaluate, some firms have used an agency (helps objectivity) to carry out research to assess the real reason behind the decision to re-brand – whether political, economic, to drive new business or change their perception.

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- Fee-earners are perhaps more resistant to re-brand – in some cases branding is not seen as important so this is a challenge for the marketeers to overcome.
- The age of the partners could have a bearing on views about whether to re-brand – e.g. in some instances younger partners can see the benefits while older partners prefer to wait.
- If growth is the aim of the re-brand, firms must have a plan about how they grow - whether by client base, geographically...
- A full brand audit is crucial. Internal research amongst staff, and also with existing and prospective clients to build a rounded picture. Once clear, can then appoint a designer.
- Poor designers will only give surface treatment to firm's brand so the audit is crucial to determine the real culture.
- There is increasing pressure on the service sector to justify and evaluate. There has to be a rationale and demonstration that the objectives set are being met and this applies with branding activity – there must be a continued evaluation process in place.

Discussion point 2: *Internal communications* - How do you get buy in, how can you build an appreciation of what your branding really means and get everyone to "live" the brand and reflect core values?

- Important to consult and consult full range of stakeholders throughout the branding process.
- Getting it right internally is key. For some firms no compromise is made on training – all staff are trained on the firm's values and as a result the organisation is living their values.
- Important to get staff on board and deliver on promise. Firms should put together a professional plan to achieve this to address all areas of the brand – internally.
- One firm brought everyone in the firm together in the same room and brought in external support to develop an objective viewpoint. They came up with 22 commandments – the key values and strengths of the firm which formed the basis of their brand identity.
- For a successful brand – the change must be top down. If it can be done in a fun way involving all staff there is a higher chance of success and consistency.
- Firms are also thinking about the layout of offices as a representation of their brand – making the look and feel identical across all locations so customers experience uniformity.
- It is so important to get buy in at every level and stand by the brand promise e.g. if a firm states that it will answer the phone in 3 rings then it must be living up to this.
- The staff need to be accountable for the brand so, as well as training, there could also be an aspect of their appraisals which assesses them on how they

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live the firm's brand.

- Some firms identify the type of behaviour they want to reward and offer financial incentives to motivate staff.
- The successful approach should be 'top down, bottom up'. Worth spending the time and effort to get it right - a long but worthwhile process
- Staff should feel part of the firm's brand. One example is the use of a competency framework that staff work through in order to progress and the process is very transparent. Staff, even directors are tackled if under-performing.

Discussion point 3: External communications – can your brand create an emotional connection with your clients? How do you reinforce the differentiation and how is the brand being perceived?

- Consistency is a key issue – some firms concerned that the key messages being given out are different from partner to partner so this needs to be addressed.
- Firms need to control the re-branding process so that they are able to deliver on that initial promise. There should be a standardised 'mantra'. Worth internally communicating in writing the key values and messages of the firm's brand to all staff so that all are clear and have a reference point.
- Firms have experienced a challenge in managing their messages – they need to be seen to be progressive and forward thinking and yet retain those traditional values. It's about balancing both perspectives.
- Reputation is built on personal relationships. The customers who have been with a firm for some 20 years are not the issue – it is the new business where brand identity is most critical.
- The website is a vital tool for a firm and so its personality must be apparent on the web. The outward manifestation is the people and the culture of the firm – actively living and breathing its brand values.
- The brand strap line must be realistic and must be delivered in the true customer experience.
- Passionate leaders are a key part of a firm's brand.
- Important that firms test the perception of their brand e.g. for one firm, staff were given branded items from their competitors and asked their perceptions. The same test was carried out with an external group to see how results compared.
- Consider example of Mazda – from 'zoom zoom' to 'now that's zoom zoom'. They used brand days where the brand is taken out of context to test and challenge messages.
- Firms considering whether there is a need for separate branding for different client markets – need to carefully consider the messages that will resonate

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with the different target audiences.

- Analytics are an essential tool to understand how the business works and this should be mirrored on the website. Important, however, to be subtle about how those analytics are used so as not to appear invasive to customer who are unlikely to respond favourably if they feel they are being too closely observed.
- With Web 2.0 upon us, there has been a quantum shift in the way customers are using the web. Websites need to be far more interactive to cater for consumers who are in the driving seat.

Summing up:

- A brand should truly reflect and embody the culture of the firm and firms should identify truly what differentiates them.
- An external objective perspective is useful in the process.
- Challenges include the need to control the brand. There should be a person in firm responsible for managing this, and if necessary in each region.
- The creative agency deployed to re-brand should be focussing on reflecting what is unique about the firm, ensuring that the brand identity is defensible.
- From a design perspective, the dynamic needs of the firm to be fully understood and reflected – a successful process is about confidence and trust.
- Careful consideration must be given to the firm's key messages – in both internal and external communications - if the news stories, website and literature are saying that the firm is different, progressive, the fastest-growing etc then this has to be underpinned by action and evidence.
- The process must start internally and be launched externally in structured manner to avoid mixed messages. Must be done concurrently and consistently.
- The key decision makers need to buy in to strategy.
- The staff need to be ambassadors for the firm.