

# Not-for-profit branding

Maximizing chances for success

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# Not-for-profit branding

## Maximizing chances for success

by Graham Hales

The prolonged period of austerity over the last few years has led to an increased need for organizations to effectively manage their brands as assets, keeping them relevant and attractive. This is especially true for not-for-profit brands, which have an income that is almost entirely discretionary. Indeed, more and more non-profit organizations are thinking long and hard about how they present themselves to the world, frequently resulting in dramatic changes. So what does it take to make sure the brand refresh is a success? And how do you get such a diverse set of stakeholders to align around a common vision?

### Success factor #1: Anticipate and manage resistance

Brand-building initiatives, particularly among charities, have been a subject of much debate. Critics argue that such initiatives represent a diversion of precious funds away from core activities and claim that branding is merely an aesthetic and superficial undertaking. As a result, not-for-profit brands often treat branding as a cost item rather than an investment in the organization's future, based on a misunderstanding of how branding creates sustainable value.

That's why, when embarking on a brand refresh, non-profit brands should be prepared for resistance, both internally and externally. From the inside, employees, volunteers and even the core management team, such as finance, are likely to challenge the initiative. The same is likely to occur externally with donors, the general public, and the media unless the benefits associated with the changes are clearly conveyed. If the internal and external parties are not managed carefully, such scrutiny can undermine the entire brand-building effort, reducing internal commitment to the cause and generating negative publicity that could threaten future donations and volunteer support.

### Practical suggestions for managing resistance:

- **Have a compelling story:** First and foremost, there needs to be a clear and consistent logic behind the branding activity. What are the main drivers behind the change? What is at risk if you do not review your brand? What will the main benefits to the organization be in the medium-term and long-term? What will be different? Be specific and use tangible

examples. The strategic rationale should be simply articulated and disseminated internally and externally to all stakeholders prior to launch.

- **Tailor your message:** Naturally, each stakeholder group will have different questions and concerns, all of which should be anticipated and considered in advance. Donors, for example, will want to know how much of their money is being consumed by the brand-building activity. Meanwhile, political groups will want to understand what the change means in terms of the organization's future focus and activities. Each audience should receive targeted communications and support material throughout the launch period.
- **Be flexible and available:** One-on-one meetings, seminars, workshops, conferences and online channels are all valid mechanisms for communicating the story and rationale behind the brand refresh. Each has its pros and cons. It is important to choose a mix of channels that provide full coverage of all target groups and serve to maximize

engagement with the brand most effectively.

- **Listen and respond:** To cope with the plethora of questions that will surface both prior to launch and post-launch, a process should be established to map, consider and respond in a timely and professional manner. Some questions can be addressed with a generic response, but others will need tailored answers. Managing consistency and quality of response is critical, so is ensuring there's a cross-functional team ready to anticipate and answer questions across HR, Marketing and Operations .

### Success factor #2: Keep loyalists on your side

Not-for-profit organizations rely on strong emotional commitment to the cause from a range of stakeholders. Frequently, trustees, employees, volunteers and donors provide their time, energy and commitment because they feel a genuine, close emotional attachment to the vision and mission of the organization. The brand encapsulates all of these attributes, which is why it is critical that any change is managed in a way that maintains the loyalty and support of those key stakeholders.

A substantial shift, or a change of direction can disengage individuals — at worst causing them to re-evaluate their relationship with the organization. Therefore the challenge is to guide internal and external stakeholders (the lifeblood of the not-for-profit organization) through a journey of change. Stakeholders should be able to see in the refreshed brand more of the things that they always wanted and

liked and less of the things that they didn't want or like.

### Practical suggestions to keep loyalists on your side:

- **Build on existing truths:** It is imperative to have a clear view of what your stakeholders value and to demonstrate how these aspects will continue to feature (and be reinforced) in the future. Communications activities should reassure all parties that any change is born out of a genuine desire to better deliver on what stakeholders want and need. Whereas the brand refresh implies a shift in emphasis to new ideals, values or ways of working, a plan should be implemented to explain the reasons in clear terms.
- **Keep an open dialogue:** Internally, all stakeholders need to feel as though they are part of the new organization; that they are actively shaping it, rather than it being imposed on them. Having in place feedback mechanisms, either online, through seminars, or even via an internal helpdesk will provide them with an outlet to voice any concerns they may have and more importantly, to collect valuable insight into how the brand positioning should be implemented in a way that maximizes their commitment. In fact, brand loyalists should even be encouraged (and rewarded) to blog on social networking sites on behalf of the organization to express the great work being done. This is a much more honest and convincing way to build brand advocacy.

### Success factor #3: Maintain momentum post-launch

Defining the organization's brand is the first step in the process. The real change comes

post-launch with the introduction of new initiatives, activities and ways of working that serve to create substance in the brand's positioning. The challenge is to maintain sufficient momentum to bring the brand promise to life. Internally and externally it needs to be seen as more than just a visual identity change. The risk of failing to build momentum after launch is that the organization is also likely to fail to live up to its new ideals and instead fall back into old, established working patterns. Launch day is not the end of the brand refresh process, but in fact day one of the effort.

The need to maintain momentum post-launch is not specific to not-for-profits; commercial organizations face the same challenge. The main difference is that in a not-for-profit context, a significant proportion of the change will need to be enacted by volunteers who are not formally employed on contract. Accordingly, behavioral adjustment cannot be so easily incentivized through amendments to job descriptions or contracts. As a result, the job of driving cultural change becomes all the more difficult.

For larger not-for-profits, there is often a further obstacle in that many employees and volunteers work in remote locations, with limited contact with the head office driving the change. The challenge is to ensure that everybody is engaged in the process, especially those working in front-line roles that represent the face of the organization to the outside world. Indeed, Rachel Murphy, Head of Brand Management at Shelter felt that this was one of the most difficult concepts to grasp. She explains, "The

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absolute biggest learning is that you've got to first go back to the fundamentals of what your brand is about and then be crystal clear with everyone that they have to live and breathe the brand and all that it means. It needs to be reinforced at every opportunity."

## Practical suggestions for maintaining momentum post-launch:

- **Develop hallmarks:** A hallmark is a proof-point or hook that captures the essence of the brand idea. Oxfam, for instance, transformed its charity shops from being purely second-hand stores, to points of distribution for products originating in developing countries (such as jewelry, stationery and crafts). These stores are a strong hallmark for the brand because they reinforce Oxfam's commitment to fair trade and the economic development of local communities. The City of Edinburgh wanted to raise its international profile and chose to coincide the refresh of its brand with an international exposition. This reflected the city's core ethos of being an inspiring place to work, live and do business in. By establishing hallmarks that cut to the very core of the brand, be they activities, campaigns or events, you will help stakeholders to understand what the change is really all about, signalling a shift from the past and building a positive momentum for further change going forward.
- **Engage and empower:** To win the support and buy-in to the brand refresh effort internally, it is important to engage employees and volunteers in its development. Co-creating initiatives, activities and ways of working that reinforce the brand idea will help to cement the shift. Greater ownership will not only overcome any initial resistance to the change, it will create momentum of its own. This is particularly important for

volunteer and part-time workers working in remote locations, who may otherwise feel removed from the process.

## Principles for success

In brief, there are three core principles that should be followed, that will maximize the chances of success when refreshing a not-for-profit brand:

1. **Anticipate and manage resistance:** Anticipating, understanding and dealing with the questions and concerns that emerge before and during the brand review is critical. Stakeholders need to be seen and used as supportive of the change, rather than as obstacles to it.
2. **Keep loyalists onside:** Loyal stakeholders are crucial to ongoing success and the brand refresh needs to be carefully managed, so as not to disengage them. Understanding what drives commitment and keeping communications channels open with them throughout the process is essential to maintaining their support.
3. **Maintain momentum post-launch:** Momentum can be cemented behind the change by quickly establishing proof-points that capture the essence of the refreshed brand. Encouraging ideas and suggestions from those involved in driving the change will create buy-in and ownership which will help to prevent the effort from stalling. Remember that launch day is not the end of the brand refresh process, but in fact day one of the effort. ■

## Relevant Case Study

### The Petroc rebrand:

#### A case study in managing resistance, keeping loyalists and maintaining momentum

North Devon and East Devon Colleges provide academic and vocational education to students from 16 upwards. Following a merger, the newly combined institution had no overarching character to help differentiate it against the region's many competing colleges.

To raise the profile of the new college and reposition it as a leading institution above and beyond the reach of the immediate region, the school decided to radically rebrand the newly formed institution.

A vision that asks for radical change is never going to be easily accepted, so the school insisted on a collaborative process, heavily involving the staff and students in the actual brand creation.

A series of audits and interviews revealed the core strength underlying both college experiences: The ability to open people's eyes to the raft of opportunities out in the world. This insight formed the foundation for the brand: "Opening Eyes."

To ensure that the new brand remained meaningful and relevant to already loyal stakeholders, the school solicited staff, students and other stakeholders to help generate the new name in naming and language workshops.

The final name selected through this collaborative process was Petroc. As the sixth Century Celtic Christian Saint, who ministered in Devon and Cornwall, the name has equity throughout the area – and yet, it also sounds contemporary. It signals one single college, and coupled with a fresh and dynamic visual identity, truly helps demonstrate radical change. The supergraphic, which is distilled from elements of the region's topography and colors, also redefines traditional notions of Devon.

While the change created quite a stir within the local community, it has ultimately proved positive. Said David Shuttleworth, Head of External Affairs at Petroc: "Despite the extensive consultation process to developing a new name, we were taken aback by just how ferocious the reaction would be. The biggest learning is that when it's all kicking off, is that you have to have faith in the journey you've been on and hold the line. With hindsight it sounds easy. It's not; but hindsight has also shown that the controversy fell away as time wore on. And what we've been left with is a fantastic new brand. We started with two wholly different colleges. Now – a year on – we are one.



### **Graham Hales**

Graham Hales is Interbrand London's CEO. His work for Interbrand's top clients has taken him across a diverse range of business agendas, geographies and cultures.