

# A brand apart

With an ever-increasing number of charities competing for attention, how successful an organisation is in this environment comes down largely to its brand. If that brand isn't getting the job done, explains Professor Ian Bruce, it might be time to change it.

**W**hat I call identity most marketers would call branding – but hey, what's in a name; it's the thought that counts. The identity, or the brand, is the very essence of a charity – its personality if you like, as viewed through the eyes of your customers. If your brand, for whatever reason, is not what you want it to be, there are things that can, and should, be done about it.

The value of a strong brand becomes evident if we look at the commercial world and what is called "brand equity". Nestle, for example, paid far more for Rowntree than the strict value of its assets, because it wanted to purchase the individual Rowntree brands. While this seldom appears on the balance sheet, a strong, well supported brand is one of a company's most enduring assets. This is even more true in our charity world and our brands need to be nurtured and grown if we are to achieve maximum success, not only with our donors, but also our beneficiary customers.

On the latter point, if our potential beneficiaries have not heard of us, or if they have heard of us but do not have a high opinion of our services, then this is obviously a problem which needs to be resolved. But the solution is not spin; it has to be genuine change combined with credible and well targeted communications to convey this change. This means to our customers, namely our beneficiaries, supporters, including donors, our stakeholders, especially staff, and to our regulators.

#### Importance and constituent parts

The most obvious and probably the most important part of the brand is the name, but there are other visual, and sometimes sensual, symbols as well. These include strap lines, logos, publications, buildings (and their design) staff and their presentation, attitudes and behaviour etc. All need attention and all need to flow from your charity's purpose and philosophical base.

The name is so important because it is shorthand for everything you do and stand for. If I say "NSPCC" to you, you will have an image and understanding of what

it is, does and stands for instantly. This speed, and holistic experience, that the brand name triggers is crucial in keeping a large charity successful nationally and small charities strong locally. This is because customers have a bewildering array of charities in front of them and a strong brand, with its well known brand name, makes choosing easier for the customer.

#### When would you change your brand?

Market research, or even sensitive trustees and staff, can provide a good indication of when the way your charity is regarded is at odds with how you wish to be regarded. Depending on how out of line this is, it may be necessary to do, in marketing terminology, a re-launch.

There came a time when the National Old People's Welfare Council had to change and it became Age Concern, when the Spastics Society had to change and it became Scope, and the National Schizophrenia Fellowship had to and it became Rethink. It is worth noting that if you are going to be as radical as changing your name, be careful! It was easy for me to recommend the name change to Age Concern when I headed up communications there, because very few people had heard of the National Old People's Welfare Council. But it was a non-choice when I was at RNIB because of the huge brand equity built into the name.

That being said, if a re-launch is to involve a name change there are a number of steps to be taken and considerations to be made. To put it basically, after getting a number of options from your creative people, you apply four selection criteria to those options – ensuring that the name is distinctive; relevant; memorable; and flexible. Once you draw up a shortlist from the ideas that meet the criteria, you then test it out with your customer groups through market research.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that your customers must have the major say once you have an acceptable short list. With my previous example, on our shortlist my then chief executive wanted Age Link, I wanted Age Action but over 75 per cent of the 1,000 older people we interviewed preferred Age Concern. The rest, as they say, is history.

If I had known as much marketing then as I know now, I'd have said that we probably shouldn't have allowed Age Concern onto the shortlist. Although it is

relevant, memorable and flexible, it is weaker on distinctiveness and, as with the cancer and children's cancer charities, people confuse the major players.

If we look at other examples, Guide Dogs for the Blind as a name is distinctive, relevant, and memorable but not flexible, which has caused havoc on occasions when donors have found out that they do "more than dogs". The British Red Cross fulfils all the criteria except relevance. But no name is perfect, and it all comes down to what you do with your brand, how well you live up to it and how well you communicate it. The British Red Cross does that very well, and hence it is a strong brand.

#### How do you know you have a strong brand?

As I said earlier, sensitive staff and trustees who know who their key customer groups are, and what they think, will be able to form a good judgement; but there are more scientific ways which are becoming more widespread. First we can measure prompted and unprompted awareness. An example of unprompted awareness is where, say 1,000 or 2,000 people are asked through a regular omnibus survey, e.g. NOP, which charities they have heard of without giving the interviewees any hints.

In such surveys the top scorers tend to be Cancer Research UK (high end of 30-40%) and Oxfam, NPCC and RSPCA in the 20-30% range. With prompted awareness, where the interviewee is asked "Have you heard of Oxfam, NSPCC etc", the scores are in the 90% and above range. In a sense, though, the absolute levels are less important than the trends: is your charity going up or down over time? While less well known charities and local charities may only register on prompted awareness, the trends are still significant.

But that's just number play; it doesn't tell you what people think about your brand. Asking a smaller number of people (because of cost) how they regard you can be very valuable. A good way can be to give the interviewee a list of descriptors of the charity for them to agree or disagree with: e.g. modern/old fashioned; trustworthy/very trustworthy; helps partially hearing people or only deaf people (or an appropriate segmentor for your market); does research only or provides services etc. In this way the charity can build up a picture of how it is regarded, and its strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of its different customer groups. Provided the research is done by people independent of the charity, and the interviewees are assured correctly that their views will remain confidential and un-attributable, the charity will have a rich set of indicators which will help it to do a couple of things. First it will define the charity's strengths and weaknesses through customers' eyes, which will provide an agenda for change. Second, when it has changed, it will indicate who needs to be told what, and will provide the basis of working out how to tell people through appropriate communication channels. This is the very stuff of a re-launch and shows itself through staff briefings and

involvement by word of mouth, email, videos etc; and external customer communication, which can be as resource intensive as TV advertising to the general public, through to letters and telephone calls to smaller target audiences.

And remember that there is one golden rule of re-launches – make sure they are genuine. If you say you have changed and you haven't, you'll get caught out and the charity's reputation will be severely damaged in the process. Reputational damage is bad for any organisation but for a charity, which depends on trust to survive and do good, it is absolutely critical.

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