



Visual Identity Management Best Practice

Edition Three

Foreword

Continuously managing and challenging brand performance

Our world is entering an era of great progress and prosperity. People will live longer, enjoy better health and an increasing standard of living. The population is set to grow from seven billion today to over nine billion by 2050.

Progress is positive, but it means increasing pressure on food, water and energy resources and with these pressures come great challenges to organisations and brands – what we stand for and the way we behave. Increasingly, people don't buy what we do, they buy why we do it.¹

As we know, successful brands make the emotional connection. The expression of this connection through an effective visual identity system is an essential component for brands to be successful and valuable. But how do we achieve this?

In a large and diverse company like Shell, the management of the brand is often the glue that holds the many different pieces of the company together in a coherent and consistent way. We've achieved this through the development of clear brand and visual identity policies cascaded through the organisation for implementation. But how do we know if we implement effectively and why is it important?

Our experience is that through brand assurance systems, research and benchmarking we are able to constantly measure and challenge our brand performance against our standards and those of our competitors. In this brand led process we often discover business improvement opportunities, leading to greater commercial profitability. Businesses want our insights. Through a remorseless approach to brand consistency, Shell brand value has steadily increased for our customers, shareholders and staff, and we take great pride in being the most valuable brand in the energy sector.²

Tim Hannagan, Global Brand Policy, Standards and Compliance Manager, Shell Brands International

¹ Simon Sinek – Ted Talks 'How great leaders inspire action'

² \$29.8billion – Brand Finance Global 500 2013

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the most challenging issues confronting brand identity managers and to distinguish the common areas of best practice and illustrate new trends. We have conducted this study twice before, in 2005 and 2008. The landscape for brand managers has continued to change and has become more challenging.

Although brand management and visual identity are separate disciplines, they are becoming more and more intertwined. It is increasingly important to ensure that the visual manifestations are consistent and reflect the brand intent as well as supporting the strategic ambition of the business. As more of the brand is exposed, it is easier for stakeholders to see the flaws and imperfections. Visual identity compliance remains a key priority for brand owners, with most leading brands striving for 100% compliance at all times.

The growth and influence of social media is having a dramatic effect on the challenge of managing and protecting the brand as an asset. Not only is greater transparency required, but also greater consistency, both visually and in terms of brand content. Managing a brand and its reputation through real time social media channels has never been more important. Visual consistency across all delivery platforms, physical and virtual, has become more critical as stakeholders experience brands from every direction and multiple channels simultaneously.

This is the third time that VI360 have investigated visual identity management best practice. Each new study has revealed new insights and trends, while reaffirming the importance of the fundamentals. Just as brand owners cannot afford to become complacent about their brands and how they are perceived, we do not assume that we have all the answers. By reaching out beyond our own experiences and learning from each other, we are all better equipped to meet the new challenges of tomorrow.



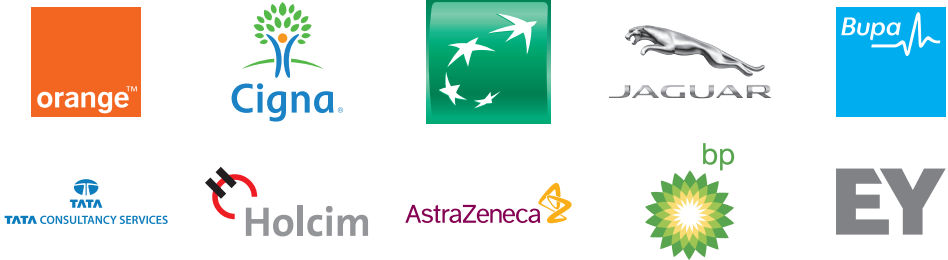
If you get your visual identity right, it reflects your corporate promise to your stakeholders.

Corporate Communications Director. **AstraZeneca**

Contributions to this study

This research is based on contributions from a select number of leading brand owners across a wide range of business sectors and geographical bases. The following companies were interviewed for this study:

NAME	SECTOR	HEAD OFFICE	REMIT
ASTRAZENECA	Pharmaceuticals	London, UK	Global
BNP PARIBAS	Banking and Insurance	Paris, France	Global
BP	Energy / Oil	London, UK	Global
BUPA	Healthcare	London, UK	Global
CIGNA	Healthcare	Connecticut, USA	Global
ERNST & YOUNG	Professional Services	London, UK	Global
HOLCIM	Building Materials	Zurich, Switzerland	Global
JAGUAR	Automotive	Coventry, UK	Global
ORANGE	Telecommunications	Paris, France	Global
TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES	IT Services	Mumbai, India	Global



The link between visual performance and customer opinion has a direct effect on the perceived quality and likelihood to pay a premium for products.

Brand and Communications Manager. BP

Best Practice in visual identity management

Best practice is not the same for every organisation, nor does it remain static. The brand and visual identity management team must blend together a number of complementary elements that will define their management approach. This will be shaped by resources, demands from the business and the expectations of external stakeholders.

The visual identity proposition is one of a number of equally important and interdependent brand management disciplines, all of which are constantly evolving as the business moves forward to meet new challenges.

At the outset, brand owners need to develop and implement a well-conceived visual identity proposition which supports the brand positioning and business strategy. There must be a comprehensive set of brand and visual identity policies and guidelines that allow the visual brand expression to be displayed to stakeholders via communications materials and brand carriers.

The brand owner is the guardian of the brand and trademark, both valuable assets of the company. To protect and develop these assets, the brand team should define and comply with a brand governance policy, connected to and endorsed by the board. The brand governance framework enables the brand team to set expectations for the business, drives development aligned to corporate strategy and provides a mechanism for dispute resolution.

Brand team

The brand management team should be knowledgeable, accessible and credible, and have the mandate of the senior management team. They should operate in an open and consultative way to engage and enable stakeholders to leverage the brand to maximum effect. This flexibility must be balanced with a strict advocacy of compliance with the fundamentals of the trademark and visual identity.



The process for enforcing compliance usually starts with negotiation and influence and ends in compromise.

Senior Brand Expression Manager. **Bupa**

Central brand teams are getting smaller with responsibilities far beyond visual identity. By earning the respect and trust of their colleagues, they can establish a reliable network of advocates that allows them to leverage additional manpower within the business. This is a two-way relationship and cannot be taken for granted. The brand team must ensure that the information, direction and advice they offer is constantly updated, easy to understand and fit for purpose.

Responsibility for the implementation and on-going management of the visual identity is shared across the organisation. Adequate budgets are required to sustain it and keep it performing. In addition to central and local funding, good supplier relationships (designers, manufacturers, researchers and project managers) are an essential resource for the brand team, especially when they become trusted long-term partners.

Management systems

The brand management system should be configured to meet the culture and demands of the business, enable the brand team to oversee the consistent delivery and development of the brand and integrate effectively with the other management systems used by the business.

A complete brand and visual identity management system should include:

- Policies and agreements – clear policies mandated by the Board and trademark use agreements
- Communications and explanation – practical and relevant to different stakeholder groups
- Tools and digital resources – guidelines, templates, libraries, access to approved suppliers
- Training on brand and visual identity management – face-to-face and virtual
- Help and support – Timely responses to requests, providing direction and approvals
- Audit and compliance – ensuring a consistent and compliant visual impression for stakeholders
- Performance and measurement – gathering and understanding feedback, to allow insightful management and evolution of the brand



While we have developed a good process and system, we are always on the lookout for improvements that will fit and enhance our brand management model.

Senior Vice President, Commercial and Marketing. **Holcim**

Brand governance

A good brand governance policy provides the framework for the brand management team to deliver the overall brand strategy.

Brand governance is now more formally recognised as an essential aspect of management to ensure that business and brand strategies are aligned. Many businesses have a senior steering group or 'Brand Council' to provide oversight and guidance and gain involvement from a broader base of senior management. These councils are increasingly made up of people outside of the traditional marketing functions and provide a platform for visual identity and branding issues to be raised, guidelines and principles to be discussed, and new direction to be ratified.

Beyond the cliché that 'the CEO is ultimately responsible for the brand', brand owners have found that anchoring the brand amongst the senior leadership team gives them a mandate to operate more successfully.

Brand architecture and partnerships

The business and commercial environment is constantly shifting. Changes in business direction often require alliances to be formed with other companies and brands resulting in joint ventures, acquisitions and mergers. These lead to technical developments, social/cultural evolution and any number of organisational and managerial changes. The brand team must continually react to the fierce demand for high quality advice and support as to how to handle these alliances while protecting the integrity of their own brand.



The way you manage visual identity has to be in tune with the culture of the organisation. Ideally you need a system that is consistent but also constantly evolving.

Global Marketing Director. **Ernst & Young**

Measuring visual identity compliance

The interpretation and consistency of a brand is a major priority for any brand owner. As the number of communication channels increases, the visual representation of a brand must be rigorously enforced to ensure compliance across a wide variety of applications, both online and physical.

Organisations with a strong, central brand team take overall responsibility for measuring compliance. The brand team is responsible for all aspects including setting expected levels of compliance and resolving any disputes around interpretation of brand identity guidelines.

Although the majority of brand owners measure compliance to some degree, there is room for more rigorous and robust measurement procedures around visual identity compliance. Despite the varied levels of measurement approaches, brand owners still have a very clear idea of the compliance levels they ideally want to achieve.

Brand owners are unanimous in their rejection of the label of ‘policing’. The term ‘brand police’ comes up time and again in discussions about compliance, but negative connotations of enforcement without support and collaboration are seen as damaging to the overall management approach.

The target level for visual compliance is higher than it used to be. Brand owners expect more. This is aligned to the increased level of internal training, more stringent brand and visual identity guidelines and the improved companywide understanding of the role that brands and other intangibles play in the value of an organisation.



I dislike the term ‘brand policing’, and much prefer ‘brand enablement’. If you annoy or disappoint people by acting like an authoritative police officer it is extremely difficult – nearly impossible – to get them back.

Brand Director, Europe. **Tata Consultancy Services**

Impact of visual performance on stakeholder opinion

There is a recognised link between visual performance and customer or stakeholder opinion. Visual identity has a direct impact on perceived quality, trust and overall credibility. Stakeholders consider the perception of visual performance of the brand to be a reflection of the corporate promise.

When customers are asked about brands, the initial response is often about colour and logo. Only then do they identify the values and propositions that they associate to it. This clearly indicates that a consistently reinforced visual identity connects customers to the brand proposition.

Management accountability and reporting tools

Brand owners agree that it is important to understand the visual performance of their brands.

Visual identity data is typically combined with other brand performance information to help senior level decision makers realise the wider benefits that successful brand and visual identity management bring to an organisation. Tangible metrics help demonstrate and justify activity, which in turn helps reinforce the importance of on-going investment.

There are opportunities for brand owners to engage more effectively with senior management to bring brand and visual identity to the forefront of the agenda.

Organisations have made significant progress towards recognising brand and visual identity as a valuable asset. As with Sustainability, which was once seen as a fluffy and unimportant subject but is now widely reported, organisations are becoming more educated about the benefits of successfully managing these intangible assets.



A well-presented visual identity will affect customer opinion, as it will give them an improved impression of the approach, attention and professionalism of the company and its employees.

Chief Marketing Officer (US operations). Cigna

The best of the best: who is admired and why

We asked brand owners to identify three companies they feel manage their visual identities well and explain why they admire them. They were then asked to comment on how they feel they compare to the brands they had chosen.

Brands from a broad range of sectors were selected. Perhaps not surprisingly, Apple was the most admired brand for the second time running. Coca-Cola, GE and Orange were referenced more than once. Other brands that were highlighted included Dulux, Mercedes, Nike, Stella Artois and Virgin.



Attributes that were most admired included:

Global consistency

Clever evolution of a brand over time to maintain relevance

Presenting a unified visual identity to represent multiple offerings



There is a definite link between visual identity management and other brand management activities. Visual identity is the foundation on to which a broader brand experience is built.

Global Brand Director. **Orange**

The future of visual identity

Every day, we experience innumerable brands from the widest range of sectors and channels. Brand owners that have been leading the way in terms of maximising their brand continue to set the bar ever higher through messaging, presentation, experiences and products. The challenge for the brand and visual identity manager is to maintain this level of engagement and adapt to the changing environment.

When evaluating specific products or services, organisations have benchmarked themselves against competitor brands in their own sector. While this is still the main focus, brand owners now also have to measure their performance against brands from other sectors as consumers reference brand attributes from an increasingly diverse range of organisations. Absolute brand compliance, on message, every time is the minimum expectation for the leading brands.

The holistic visual experience for stakeholders now includes or is led by the online experience or social media. The virtual and physical expressions of the visual identity coexist and interchange as the consumer experiences the journey from awareness to completed transaction. Aligning all the visual experiences of the brand will become essential. Expectations will be set by the strongest element and performance measured by the weakest.



With a brand like ours, we can't win. If it's 100% perfect, it's expected. If it's less than 100%, we would be criticised.

Primary Brand and Identity Manager. **Jaguar**

Social media, search engines and real-time news mean that there is no hiding place for businesses or their brands. It was considered best practice for some companies to minimise branding of corporate offices or industrial installations to limit adverse publicity in the event of an incident. Now that ownership and corporate responsibility can be confirmed in seconds, there is no benefit in hiding or minimising brand exposure. Overt branding can add value to the brand when all is well and, should a crisis occur, represent responsible leadership in adversity as the organisation will inevitably have to deal with the media interest.

Brand owners that have developed enough equity in their core identity and visual language are now able to push the limits of design and communication without jeopardising brand recognition and awareness. Use of the brand icon without the company name or wordmark is a classic example, but companies are now confident enough to rely on colour, font, product and pack design or part of their logo or graphic device to anchor innovative and attention grabbing campaigns.

Conventional visual identity applications are becoming brand applications. Delivery vehicles, buildings, passenger planes and product packaging are being looked at as ‘opportunistic and promotional media’ where this visual real estate not only reflects the identity of the operating company but is also being used to add something more about their brand. These applications will no longer be just static reflections of the brand identity; they will be used dynamically with tactical messages to support, explain and refresh the brand personality and values.



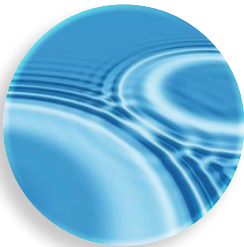
We’ve moved on from the term ‘Visual Identity’ and we now use ‘Brand Identity’ to refer to all brand and visual identity elements.

Advertising and Brand Identity Manager. **BNP Paribas**

About VI360

VI360 is a visual identity management consultancy. We specialise in helping clients implement, monitor, measure and control all visual elements of their brand identity. Our overall objective is always to maximize the value of visual identity as a business asset and to ensure that the holistic visual impression leads to a comparative advantage. Our results show a direct relationship between seamless visual identity and improvements to the bottom line.

360.Insight



We invest time in understanding a brand owners current and future VI needs, so we can help identify potential improvements to ensure optimum performance

360.Action



We guide brand owners through the most common challenges of VI creation, development and implementation

360.Vision



We provide the expertise to help brand owners manage and control all aspects of VI and maximize its value as a business asset, both now and in the future

About the author



Adam Newall is the founder and Managing Director of VI360. He established the company in 2003 to help brand owners leverage maximum value from their brands.

Adam has spent the last twenty years supporting global brands through all parts of the visual identity process, from conception through to implementation and evaluation. He believes that the way a company manages its visual identity is a tangible reflection of the way it manages its business.



vi360
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