

# Brand Identity

## Strategic Brand Identity Management

Edition 4



As visual identity matures into strategic brand identity management, VI360 takes a look at the emerging trends across the discipline.

As brands reinvent themselves to stay relevant, we investigate the governance challenge in the context of digital game changers.

# Foreword

## Brand assurance in tumultuous times

From politics to the weather, we have all been surprised by unprecedented events in recent times, some which have had significant repercussions on corporate and global economies. It has been a time to take stock of our corporate ambitions and examine our brands in a changing global context.

Such times create uncertainty, and this is the very moment that brands with clear identities can command a platform of reassurance, reminding customers who we are and what we stand for. Never has the case for a relevant and meaningful brand identity been so strong. When our brand is thrust into the spotlight, that is also when our brand values will be tested for their authenticity, so we had better be ready to stand up to scrutiny. In short, troubled times provide opportunities for strong brands to be the voice of stability.

In a diverse multinational like Tata Steel, we understand that brand recognition and brand understanding is critical to stakeholder decision-making and we invest in securing the resources we need to deliver robust processes to manage our brand identity. Our aim is to ensure the absolute consistency of both our visual and written brand expression as well as the way we behave across all our stakeholder touch points. In the dynamic conditions around us, it is clear that we can take nothing for granted.

As the steel market itself continues to evolve, the power of our brand and the reassurance it offers has never been more valuable.

*Sytske Seyffert, Director of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs, Tata Steel Europe*

# Introduction

This study explores the current challenges confronting brand and communication managers. It aims to highlight the areas of best practice for brand identity management and identify emerging trends. This is the fourth time that VI360 has undertaken this research. Previous studies were conducted in 2005, 2008 and 2013.

The role of visual identity has now become almost synonymous with that of brand identity, and the way we manage brands has irrevocably changed. The importance of brand compliance in all parts of the business is now taken as read, which has resulted in more collaborative relationships based on a platform of trust. The maturity of the brand management discipline has brought about a new-found confidence, a feeling of greater empowerment, and a genuine desire to do the right thing.

This confidence has liberated the brand manager from rudimentary policing to adopt a more strategic role. Brand managers are now looking to align brand with business strategy and demonstrate tangible brand value. As their time is less consumed with day to day administration of brand standards, they are focusing more on governance, and the brand management role seems to have evolved into one of a trusted and respected adviser to senior management.

Brand identity management has “come of age” as a respected and valued discipline, recognised at all levels of management.



Local understanding is one of our critical success factors. Managers wake in the night thinking about brand. This is what holds us together.

Atlas Copco

# 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
ATLAS COPCO	Industrial	Hemel Hempstead, UK	Global
BRITISH STEEL	Steel	London, UK	Global
BURGER KING	Fast Food	Miami, USA	Global
CARILLION	Construction	Wolverhampton, UK	Global
ENI	Energy / Oil	Rome, Italy	Global
GE	Conglomerate	Boston, USA	Global
HEINEKEN	Beer	Amsterdam, Netherlands	Global
JUVENTUS	Football	Turin, Italy	Global
KIER	Various	Sandy, UK	Global
O2	Telecommunications	London, UK	Global



Branding is in the DNA of the company. We understand what brand building is: we invented international premium beer.

Heineken

# Structure of brand identity management

Brand is securely positioned at the heart of nearly every modern business. Business strategy and brand strategy are intertwined and mutually dependent.

The brand exists in the minds of stakeholders based on their experience of the business. The brand components that we experience – logo, tagline, house style, tone of voice, imagery, video or sound – are the initial points of reference that introduce us to a product or business, and become shorthand for it. The brand association is reinforced every time the product, service or experience lives up to the promise sparked by the sight of a logo, the shape of a packet or the sound of a voice.

The brand owner is responsible for delivering and managing the core brand components. This process requires resources, a team of people, creative support and suppliers, guidelines, policies, digital capability, and much more. These are the principle tactical and executional elements of brand and visual identity management that pave the way for stewardship and strategic development.

## Organising brand resources

In order to be effective, the structure of brand and visual identity management needs to reflect the size, structure and culture of the business. For this reason, there can never be one solution to meet all needs. Some brand owners have large, multidisciplinary teams at the centre, which allows for direct implementation as well as advisory roles. Others may experience pressure to reduce headcount, and find other ways to meet the demands of resourcing the brand such as relying on trusted partner agencies or suppliers.



We tightly control our suppliers. If we see examples of poor quality, we do not tolerate it and they are out.

Burger King

Successful companies mandate central brand standards for visual identity management. The standards for brand expression are periodically reviewed and updated, typically because of a new business strategy, a merger or acquisition or personnel changes. Rather than printed hard copies, brand guidelines are now typically shared on intranets as electronic documents, or through increasingly sophisticated brand portals, allowing them to be updated with ease. Modern systems track user preferences and activities, allowing collection of data that helps to inform the brand manager about the popular features and information or areas of low interest. This in turn can be used to plan the development of new content or functionality.

### **Brand culture emerges**

Company culture plays an important role in aligning the brand internally and externally. Historically, departmental divides sometimes prohibited brand from filtering through the organisation, but there is now a far greater understanding of the benefits that come with an integrated approach to branding and communications. Connecting organisations internally and building powerful networks can unleash a collective responsibility and lead to a greater sense of shared purpose.

### **Internal brand partnerships flourish**

Mutual interdependence between functions and departments has resulted in greater collaboration and improved working relationships. The procurement function is more likely to have a greater understanding of brand requirements and take them into account, rather than always choosing the lowest cost supplier. Property managers, fleet managers and human resource managers are other high frequency brand users that are now more likely to seek advice from brand owners, leading to more compliant solutions. Leveraging the resources and expertise within central functions helps to extend the reach of the brand owner and align managers in those disciplines with the overall principles of brand standards and management. The result of these improved partnerships is that the brand and visual impression is now better understood by the many internal stakeholders who influence it. This nearly always results in a more enjoyable working experience and a natural propensity toward brand alignment.



For a brand strategy to work, you have to get buy in. People must come on the journey with you.

Kier

## Central brand team is more valued

Brand owners are investing in quality support and advisory systems to provide timely advice and approvals services to colleagues around the world. As other departments and functions come to realise the value of the brand, they also begin to recognise the importance of the brand management function and the benefit it brings them. Brand helpdesks are now common; advisory services for signage and brand checking services that review and approve communication collateral are all part of day to day brand support.

Group brand policy making and the legal framework associated with trademarks and license agreements usually reside at the corporate centre. There are close links between the brand owners and Intellectual Property and Trademark teams to ensure that the brand is always considered in commercial decisions. This allows for intervention and guidance where necessary to help avoid potentially costly mistakes.

## Brand empowerment

As the importance of brands has now become more embedded in all aspects of life, brand owners feel more able to trust the business to deliver and protect the brand, thus creating a sense of empowerment. The consequence of this is the growth of innovation and creativity within carefully observed boundaries, as well as a reciprocal respect for the brand manager. There is also a move towards delivering a more cohesive experience across all brand touchpoints rather than a singular focus on consistency. This progress has liberated the brand manager to focus on the more strategic challenges of building and extending brand value.



We have an arrogant belief in our brand. Whoever you are and wherever you are, the only brand that matters here is GE.

GE

# Evolution of brand identity management

A consistent theme across this and all previous studies has been the desire of leading brand owners to constantly improve, innovate and evolve the way they manage their brand. Technology is the recurring game changer, creating new channels and online tools that are helping to improve brand engagement, brand training and brand communications. As customers become ever more discerning, successful businesses are the ones who respond quickly, with brand as the key differentiator.

## Brand refresh

Dynamic business environments require brands to respond swiftly to a change in strategic direction. Brand guidelines therefore need to be adaptable. A brand refresh is an exciting opportunity to reposition brand, but there is a balance to be struck between generating excitement around creating something new while respecting the core recognisable visual identity. Brand refresh programmes are now commonly used as a tool to engage stakeholders with a new strategy or simply to keep pace with the market. They also present opportunities to streamline processes, reallocate budgets, rebuild teams and underline the importance of brand.

The challenge for brand owners is to keep the brand stable and distinctive while responding to the need to be agile and flexible. Rearticulating the non-negotiable core visual elements is critical; once these are understood and accepted, it is possible to evolve with greater confidence. Reassurance that the visual foundation is in place helps brand owners to push brand boundaries in innovative ways, knowing that the sacrosanct basics are safeguarded.



We restart the story every 1<sup>st</sup> July. A new season, level on points with some old and new players. You could say that every year we write a new page, but the story remains the same.

Juventus



## Respecting the core brand essence

The creative disruption of innovation and reinvention can provide timely opportunities for heritage stories to reinforce a proven track record, which adds credence to the brand story. Corporate storytelling around culture, history and social responsibility credentials remain an important way to gain third party endorsement. It gives customers a sense of reassurance and employees a sense of pride.

If brand identity is the hard-earned expression of culture, heritage and strategy, underpinned by values and narrative, it should not be jeopardised for the sake of a short term promotion or marketing campaign. As ever, the brand owner must judge the balance of reinvention with remaining true to the core essence.

## Rise of the employer brand

Smart companies recognise the value in the “employer brand” as a means to attract the best talent. Where companies previously put effort into building reputation and trust to attract customers and investors, there is a growing understanding that the same effort is required to attract the best talent. More collaboration between functions is the order of the day and it is now common for brand owners to provide strategic advice at the outset of recruitment campaigns. That said, the understanding of employer branding has yet to excite senior management generally, and this is likely to be an area where we will see further development.

## Brand training is making a difference

Whether as part of the induction process or as part of continuous development, investment in brand training is becoming integrated into company training. Workshops and online tools are now common and brand owners are playing a leading role in upskilling the organisation. This has been highlighted in previous studies and is an area identified for further improvement by many.



We are an older company but a new brand. We have to live this and show we can deliver. Our new brand gives us that energy and optimism. It is like a new lease of life.

British Steel

## Imagery is the next big challenge

The 'Instagram effect' is changing the way individuals use imagery and brands are following suit, moving away from over-lit, over-staged and generally over-edited photography, and instead favouring a more authentic look and feel. Social media channels continue to change the way we interact with brands. Less dwell time means impactful images have become more important than words. Marketing and communications teams are constantly searching for 'thumb stopping' images that grab our attention and tell their story. The challenge is to define a style of imagery that embodies the core essence of the brand.

Brand owners concede that whilst it is possible to define imagery that is not on brand, it is virtually impossible to define a style and look that is instantly recognisable and distinctive and that customers will immediately associate with their brand and no other. The focus therefore is on setting out a clear vision for photography and accepting only those images that support the brand direction.

## Brand rejuvenation

Experiential branding is how businesses are creating engagement. This is about making connections, rejuvenating customers and employees and invigorating brand awareness. Through interactive technologies, innovative use of retail spaces and online brand communication methods, consumers can now see, touch, hear, taste, and smell brands in ways they never could before. Where innovation and technical know-how can be combined with a creative energy, a wow factor moment is unleashed. Experiential branding has emerged as a more sustainable and memorable alternative to short-term promotional activities for building brand awareness.

## Surprising brand associations

Co-branding is an increasing phenomenon and we are seeing mighty brands such as Nike and Apple, Starbucks and Shell, Uber and Spotify, Red Bull and Go Pro join forces to claim a particular brand position. These sometimes surprising alliances successfully attract new audiences and allow a clever entry to a new market. The visual identity challenge for the brand manager is to ensure that both brands benefit from the collaboration and that neither brand is compromised.



Brand training is vital, and relationships and networking are key.

Carillion

# Strategic brand identity management

Perhaps the most consistent theme emerging from our research is a newfound confidence among brand owners borne of a dawning realisation that brand can deliver strategic value. To the brand professionals, this is old news, but to senior decision makers it has taken a while. The maturity of the discipline has brought about a greater respect and authority for brand owners and they in turn have placed greater trust in the businesses to behave responsibly with the brand.

## From tactical action to strategic thinking

Senior management are taking a more active interest in branding and the value it delivers. Many had previously taken brand for granted because it just works, but they are now starting to overtly recognise its value. Whereas historically brand managers struggled to get the senior team to perceive the value of the brand, there is now a greater emphasis on aligning brand to strategic direction.

Commercial drivers constantly influence the size and shape of organisations and brands are frequently thrust into the boardroom spotlight as a result of acquisitions, mergers or joint ventures. Leaders realise there is complex intellectual and organisational value in their brand and look to brand managers to advise on how to leverage brand potential.

The ability to bring a rounded and holistic perspective on the brand, and how it may impact on commercial decisions, gives the brand manager the opportunity to offer high quality strategic advice from a respected position of authority. They are now more likely to become involved in key decisions at an early stage rather than late in the process when time and resources are running out.

## Naming architecture

Once the preserve of the corporate directorship or the businesses, brand owners are now commonly asked to lead or advise on many aspects of business strategy, such as divisional naming ahead of a restructure, or new product branding. Depending on the approach taken by the business, business names, product names and service names may all have some sort of association to the master brand. Developing detailed policies to deal with requests as they occur and maintaining an up-to-date portfolio of names and sub-brands both contribute to a coherent proposition for multiple stakeholders.

High-profile branding of joint ventures and co-branding with other businesses brings together a disparate group of professionals with a wide range of skills and interests from within the organisation and third parties. The quest for a solution that allows the business to make the most of partnering opportunities, while protecting the long term strength and positioning of the brand, is a key moment when the brand manager is able to add business value.

## Brand Governance

Best practice brand management has always included governance as a discipline. This provides a strategic framework for managing brand that helps to elevate its credibility internally and facilitate decision making. A combination of policies, procedures, standards and guidelines, supported by audit and compliance processes with clear KPIs and risk measures, helps to ensure that brand is consistently applied across all carriers. Understanding the causes of noncompliance allows the brand manager to update policies or processes so it happens less frequently. Brand audits can provide the evidential data, and better reporting helps to make brand metrics visible to management, whilst performance tracking keeps them engaged and onside.

Tighter controls help to avoid dilution and infringement and also help defend against counterfeiting. Clear standards and policies on trademark management, and contractual rigour around franchising and licensing, help to mitigate risks to the brand asset in the hands of third parties and go on to build future value.

The majority of brand owners seem to monitor their visual identity on an ad hoc and anecdotal basis. Typically, only businesses where there is a contractual licensing, franchise or distribution agreement choose to invest in more rigorous monitoring and evaluation. Data is typically collected through internal feedback and third-party suppliers. Specific compliance audits are used to monitor the most important brand carriers or to verify information received through other channels.

Our study found that the use of brand audits is becoming more widespread. However, what seems to be more systematic is the process of tracking brand reputation to determine how stakeholders perceive the brand over time.



The Executive had to be on side to ensure successful implementation. Their support was critical as it set the example at the top.

Carillion

# Looking ahead

Increasingly, brand has greater currency in the boardroom where CEOs are paying attention to what the brand can do for shareholder value. Brand is gaining ground in business strategy discussions, be it about business growth and acquisition or its value as an employer brand to attract talent. The key point is that brand now plays more of a strategic role and sits above the well-established tactical processes.

We have seen how the role of brand identity has matured as it has become a more widely understood discipline. Its value is assuming a much greater importance as leading brands become more energised and take bold decisions. As consumer expectations rise, brands are responding with creative and entertaining expressions as they strive to secure a competitive edge. The challenge is to be relevant and appealing while retaining the core values which provide familiar recognition.

Technology will continue to turn traditional thinking on its head, and brand owners need to embrace the disruption and change afforded by new tools and channels. Brand management apps will become core to the brand plan. Data capture and interpretation will be continuous and immediate.



We control less from the centre now and things are so much better. We trust the business to act responsibly with the brand, and they do.

Eni

Brands are no longer a static application, which has implications for brand governance and the way we measure and evaluate performance. It is possible that the traditional command and control tactics are too rigid and out of date. We have seen how brand managers are learning to let go and a newly empowered brand community is emerging. While this community professionally respect the core brand elements, they may also want to challenge the way they are applied in order to keep their offer relevant. This emerging dynamic may further challenge traditional compliance behaviours and prompt new innovations in brand management strategies.

The extent to which it is possible to own an image style is still being debated, but it is clearly possible to define what is not a particular brand style. If imagery is a challenge to own, it is an even greater challenge to govern. Unlike logos and words, there is so much that is open to interpretation. Some companies are appointing senior managers to look after imagery style and ensure it reflects the company and the brand.

As the role of visual identity is now synonymous with brand identity, we can observe with some satisfaction that the discipline has come of age. There is newfound respect for brand management and while not all businesses are there yet, the direction of travel is set.



The brand runs this business. The business does not run the brand.

O2

# About V1360

V1360 is a strategic brand identity management consultancy, part of the Brand Finance Group. From creative design and detailed cost planning, through launch and implementation, to care and evaluation, we work to protect, enhance and add value to your brand identity. Our objective is always to maximize the performance of the brand as a business asset and to ensure that the holistic visual impression leads to a competitive advantage.



## Brand Identity Management

*Strategic consulting designed to meet brand challenges, improve processes and facilitate effective decision making*



## Brand Transition

*Guidance and support through all phases of a brand transition, be it a small refresh or high impact global rebrand following a merger or acquisition*



## Brand Compliance

*Proven audit and evaluation processes to inform strategic brand decisions and equip managers with the tools they need for strong brand governance*

# About the author



Adam Newall is the founder and Managing Director of V1360. 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 brand identity management 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.

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