The rise of the recovery strategy

Rescuing the re-brand

A new dilemma stalks the sector: the off-track re-brand. Just what can organisations do when the re-brand process spins out of control?

Re-branding is a major preoccupation for further and higher education in the current political climate. With the sector on the verge of major upheaval, brand, positioning and competitive differentiation will become an even greater critical success factor for both further and higher education institutions. Against this canvas, Stamp Consulting is increasingly called upon to "rescue" organisations that have embarked on re-branding projects, but have been left adrift with unrealistic approaches to strategic vision or little practical project management support.

If an organisation is merging, developing partnerships or wishes to establish its differentiated position in its markets, a brand development process may become a strategic necessity.

In tackling the re-brand process, the attention required to manage effectively fundamental issues from the strategic through to the basic cannot be underestimated, but very often are. **Key imperatives include:**

- Reputation management
- The development and delivery of a new brand
- Brand launch strategy
- Corporate proposition and mission
- The impact on relative market positioning
- The assessment of new factors of competitiveness
- The basic practicalities of managing, for example, the first merged prospectus to on-site signage change

The tasks involved in the re-brand process are both complex and immense in range and especially so if merger is in the air. They must be planned and project-managed with clinical expertise and care.

The Stamp Consulting experience of such project management determines that, inevitably, a damage limitation plan plus a specialist corporate PR strategy is required to manage the organisation through the new brand development process. These elements are critical success factors, vital in pre-empting, deflecting or managing any potential negative media attention.

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Marketing and communications imperatives are the "iceberg" of the merger or re-brand process. Not only can issues lie in wait to snare the unwary and unprepared, the relative scope of the marketing and communications planning required within a merger can appear to be almost beyond calculation.

While mergers themselves may succeed operationally in the sector, a greater majority fail to maximise the opportunities for new market positioning and brand equity development. Organisational marketing and communications functions will often be the most visible aspect of the merger process, with a core responsibility to manage the relevant corporate communications to key stakeholders. While this can provide a major opportunity for visible success, it also delivers an onerous level of accountability and, of course, a very public stage should the marketing and communications management process fail to go to plan.

"VANITY" VISUAL IDENTITY PROJECTS

Major problems occur when marketing priorities stray from the logistical and pragmatic, with too much emphasis, and often budget, placed on strategy sub-elements, such as visual identity, at the expense of a truly integrated communications management process.

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Stamp Consulting is experienced in developing and delivering recovery strategies to help organisations get back on track in such situations. For example, organisations can be seduced into taking on expensive "vanity" visual identity projects. These may appear, initially, to be alluring, but they may fail to be integrated into a merger marketing and communications strategy and subsequently fail to deliver upon any of the accepted critical success factors.

The repercussions can be significant:

- Financially: A shortfall of cash means that the organisation cannot implement the required pragmatic communications strategy.
- Reputation: Inappropriate emphasis placed on visual identity draws negative media attention, especially when there is limited substance behind the development process.
- Lost profile opportunity: The organisation may need to settle for a brand roll-out plan rather than a robust brand launch strategy.
- Unclear brand equity: If a strategic brand development plan is neglected in favour of an emphasis on visual identity, the newly merged organisation's competitive effectiveness will be severely compromised and the legacy of the reputation from both merging organisations seriously limited.

BACK ON TRACK

Stamp Consulting has been called in to "rescue" a number of re-brand projects. It has also successfully managed the brand assessment and development programme that enables an organisation to communicate its new proposition effectively and competitively. The company has worked with staff and other internal stakeholders to develop the newly merged organisation's defining mission, positioning statement and proposition.

Experience shows that realistic project management is vital and Stamp Consulting has developed total marketing communications schedules that will take the organisation from initial discussion about re-brands or merger through to a public launch campaign. The development of a corporate PR strategy plus damage limitation plan is essential to an organisation's ability to manage potential problems effectively or to respond to or pre-empt negative media interest.

Often the tactical issues are simply overlooked in the rush to develop and deliver a new visual identity: Stamp Consulting has been called upon to recover and manage the brand communications change process to ensure that everything is addressed from the first joint prospectus to on-site signage and the brand launch strategy.

Obviously, brand recovery strategies do work, but they are a distress purchase: preliminary consultation and full process strategic development will always deliver a more effective plan.

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