

# Corporate and personal identity

Every broker and their business is unique, and in a bid to stand out from the crowd it's critical that you make that identity strong and prominent. As Jon-Michail, Image Group International CEO, asserts, it must be clear in everything you do and become the yardstick against which your service, behaviours and actions are measured

**I** dentity cannot simply be a slogan or a collection of phrases; it must be visible, tangible and all-embracing. Everything that the organisation or individual does must be an affirmation of its identity.

The products and/or services the company or individual produces, markets and sells must project its standards and values.

The buildings in which a company trades, the location and how they are furnished and maintained, are all manifestations of identity.

The corporation's or individual's communications material, from its stationery and business cards to instruction manuals, must have a consistent quality and character that accurately and honestly reflects the whole organisation or individual and its aims.

All these are visible; they are designed – and that is why design and style is a significant component in the identity mix.

## Everything that the organisation or individual does must be an affirmation of its identity

### Importance of behaviour

A further component, which is just as significant although it is not always visible, is how the organisation or individual behaves – to its own staff and to everybody with whom it comes into contact. This is especially true in service industries that have no tangible products. Here too, consistency in attitude, action and style underline the company or individual identity.

In small, medium and young companies the management of identity is intuitive. It is a direct reflection of the founder's obsessions and interests. In a sense it is often easier to develop, manage and maintain, as there are less tiers involved in holding back the entrepreneurial spirit.

In the sprawling, complex companies where there are innumerable interests (each supported by individuals) such as conflict and competition for power and influence, the company's

long-term purpose, its values and identity must be managed consciously and clearly, or it will be overwhelmed and disregarded in sectional infighting.

### Keeping focused

When companies or individuals lose sight of their individuality, their real purpose and strengths, they get deflected – often through peer pressure – into making mistakes. They make inappropriate acquisitions, diversify into blind alleys and make or produce inferior copies of other companies' products.

In my experience this is very common, especially in large firms or in individuals where the advice they may be receiving as clients, from their internal teams or outside consultants, is incongruent with the vision, goals and objectives of the organisation's overall business strategy or the individual's 'life' management plan.

That is why identity, image and brand management in major corporations must be the job of

the chief executive or senior board member, supported by an in-house team and, where appropriate, by outside professionally certified image advisors.

The person in charge must be in a senior position where advice received will not be sabotaged due to personal interests.

### How identity is expressed

Identity is expressed in the names, symbols, logos, colours and rites of passage that organisations or individuals use to distinguish themselves, their brand and constituent companies, interests etc. At one level, these serve the same purpose as religious symbolism, chivalric heraldry or national flags and symbols: they encapsulate and make vivid a collective sense of belonging and purpose. At another level, they represent consistent standards of quality and therefore encourage consumer loyalty.

Sometimes names and symbols



need to be created. Traditions and rites of passage may have to be invented and re-invented for corporations or individuals.

I'm primarily concerned with how the verbal (auditory) and non-verbal (visual) style of an organisation, its people or individuals affect the overall feeling (kinaesthetic), of the brand and its positioning in the market; and how the corporate or personal purpose is made visible through design, style and behaviour.

### Looking at structure

An integral part of this process is the corporate or individual structure and how acquisitions can be absorbed; how brands (corporate and personal) are developed, extended and cultivated. The corporation's or individual's actions are indivisible: how it behaves, what it says, how it looks, how it treats people, and what it makes and sells are part of a single whole.

The corporation in particular is,

whether it likes it or not, becoming more closely integrated into society, and society is becoming increasingly judgmental about the behaviour and actions of corporations. Enron, Arthur Anderson, Worldcom etc come to mind in evidence of this.

We are entering an epoch in which only those corporations or individuals with highly competitive products or services will survive. This means in the long term that products or services from major competing companies or individuals around the world will become increasingly similar. This is already common for many companies and people. Inevitably, this means that the whole of the company's or individuals' personality, identity, image or brand, will become the most significant factor in making a choice between one company's products or services and another. ■

See issue 2.19 for part II – your guide to successful branding.