City Branding in Western Europe

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About the author

Dr John Heeley is a writer, teacher and consultant specialising in city marketing. His early career was as an academic at Strathclyde University, during which time he helped pioneer tertiary-level tourism education and research.

Leaving academe in 1990, John went on to set up and lead destination marketing organisations for Sheffield, Coventry and Warwickshire, Birmingham and Nottinghamshire. He left his post as Chief Executive of Experience Nottinghamshire in June 2009, setting himself up as Best Destination Marketing. http://www.bestdestinationmarketing.com/

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1 Introduction

Brand as a term originated as a mark of identity, as notoriously in the medieval punishment. As a business discipline, its origins go back to the Industrial Revolution and the rise of national and then global consumer markets. By the early 1880's, Procter and Gamble in the USA was branding its products in recognisably modern ways, starting with Ivory soap and its 'it floats' slogan. In Britain, Lyle's Golden Syrup with its green and gold packaging is reckoned to be the country's oldest brand, boasting of a continuous history stretching back to 1885. By the late 1950's, product branding had emerged as an advertising-led business activity, with logos encapsulating the offer and with 'above the line' advertising being utilised to create customer awareness and generate sales. Audiences were targeted crudely but often effectively by reference to broad socio-economic groupings.

Fashioned by the Internet and the World Wide Web, the advent of Marshall McLuhan's 'global village' in the last decade of the 20th century transformed branding, moving it – as Olins (2008, p.6) succinctly puts it – 'from the periphery to the centre of corporate concern'. He describes how branding has latterly come to permeate contemporary business organisations by reference to four vectors, viz:

1. What they make and sell;
2. The environment within which they operate;
3. How they communicate; and
4. How they deal with their employees and multiple outside stakeholders, e.g. media, community groups, and governments.

Across the four vectors, the brand – be it Orange, Nike, Waitrose, Heinz, Microsoft or Google – is literally the business and is palpable enough to form part of the balance sheet. On this basis the word's most valuable brand is thought to be Coca-Cola, worth an estimated £45 billion. As a rule, brands account for the majority of a company's market value.

The branding of nations, cities and regions – so called place branding – is a relatively recent affair. As Anholt (2007, pxi) remarks, it is only since the 1990s that it has become a discrete domain of activity and study 'with its commercial and academic communities, consulting firms, publications, conferences, research, and a rising number of full-time professionals in national, city and regional administration'. The origins of city branding, however, go back a little further and may arguably be fixed in time and place. In 1977, the New York State Department of Commerce hired an advertising agency to develop a marketing campaign which would accentuate the positives of the area. A graphic designer, Milton Glaser, was engaged on a pro bono basis to provide a logo and slogan with which to front the campaign, and 'I love NY' was born. It went on to inspire several more campaigns and all manner of merchandise. It is a city brand which endures to this day, passing the longevity test where countless others fail. It influenced Europe in the sense that two cities wanted to do something similar. In1883, Amsterdam and Glasgow introduced their 'Amsterdam has it' and 'Glasgow's miles better' city brands. They did so independently of each other, but in both cases 'I love NY' served as the role model. Nowadays, city branding is a much discussed topic throughout Europe, and it has 'moved on' conceptually and substantively from the pioneering examples referred to above.

Chapter extract

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