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Branding of UK public libraries

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Abstract

Purpose – Evidence suggests that misconceptions and negative stereotypes of the image of public libraries still prevail today despite libraries diversifying and offering a range of services to their local community and contributing to key local and national priorities. The purpose of this paper is to report on a case study-based research project that sets out to explore how public libraries in the UK are using branding in order to create a more positive and effective image, as a basis for proposing the key factors that contribute to an effective public library branding strategy.

Design/methodology/approach – In total, three case study organisations were selected for the study, on the basis of their reputation for innovation in branding. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key staff associated with each of the three public libraries, in order to gather an understanding of the branding processes and strategies that they had adopted, and how they had negotiated some of the challenges in branding in the context of public libraries.

Findings – The three case study organizations bear testimony to the fact that branding can be successfully used to change brand image, and in turn, the perceptions of the library service amongst key stakeholders. The following factors are key to successful branding: clear positioning and identity, advocacy and influence, co-branding, staff buy-in, brand communication, evaluation, and national marketing campaigns.

Originality/value – This study offers insights into branding process and strategies in innovative public libraries, and on this basis develops recommendations to support information practitioners to develop a positive image of their service and to engage effectively with stakeholders in what are challenging times for public libraries.

Keywords United Kingdom, Public libraries, Brands, Marketing communications, Stakeholder analysis
Paper type Research paper

Introduction

There is an increasing recognition that the future for public libraries looks bleak, and that a major contributing factor is their failure to change the image or their “brand” as their identity (what they are and what they do) has evolved. This problem is not just prevalent in UK libraries but emblematic across the sector globally. For example, Thorhaug (2007, p. 3) writes that in Denmark “the public image of libraries does not reflect realities” and that “many users have never even heard of the new services”. So, although, there are 3,469 public libraries in the UK today, attracting over 328.5 million visits in 2007/2008, more than cinema and football match attendances, with around 52 per cent of the population holding library membership (Cooke, 2009) public libraries are, some would argue through poor branding, failing to attract the usage and public support necessary for survival. Investment in UK public libraries for new library buildings (supported by the governments private finance initiative and the BIG Lottery Communities Libraries Fund), such that many libraries now have galleries, performance spaces,



cafes, free WiFi technology, longer opening hours including Sunday opening, 24/7 access to online resources, wide programmes of events, reading groups and a host of learning packages and classes from IT to knitting, has not been accompanied by a change of image in the eyes of the public and other stakeholders. A need to invest in branding has arisen, due in part to continued concern about falling usage, the success of aggressively branded rivals such as bookstores and to a lesser extent government policy initiatives intent on promoting a more user-focused service (Hood and Henderson, 2005).

Many commentators suggest that the issue is one of identity. For example, Thorhaug (2007, p. 3) suggests libraries “do not have a clear cut vision for the new library”. As comments from staff in the Hood and Henderson’s (2005, p. 17) survey summarise “you can’t brand a service that doesn’t know what it wants to be”. A recent debate on lis-pub-libs forum highlights the challenges around branding the future of public libraries:

[...] where librarians went wrong is simple. We have failed to agree on a simple message that encapsulates the complexity and value of the universal library offering to society. Lacking that simplicity of concept, we have failed to promote what we do (Elspeth Hyams).

Public libraries are already absolutely brilliant at providing customised support to individuals. In fact they are so good at it that it impedes the ability to relay a simple national message. Yet a simple message is what’s needed to convey the role and value of the service to everyone else (Liz Dubber).

If public libraries cannot clearly articulate the value of public libraries, the danger is that politicians will continue to use simple base line visitor figures such as those published by the Taking Part survey (DCMS, 2010) that shows decline in usage as ammunition for library closures.

This article, then, offers some insights into how branding can be used to make a difference to the identity and image of public libraries through a study of three public libraries that have engaged with branding in different ways. The next section discusses the nature of branding and summarises some of the previous research and commentary on branding in public libraries. Then, the methodology for this study is outlined. A section on findings first gives a brief profile of each of the case study libraries, and then surfaces the factors that are key to successful branding. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are offered.

Literature review

This review first introduces the nature and purpose of branding, and then summarises recent research and discussion about branding of public libraries.

Branding

Branding is a complex concept, and has been defined in a number of different ways, many of which have a variety of different emphases. A traditional, and widely quoted definition, is that offered by Kotler (1994, cited in Rowley, 1997, p. 244):

[...] a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of these, which is used to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from the competitors”.

However, in modern practice and especially in service industries it is important to dispel the misconception that branding is just about name, logos, strap-lines and colour schemes.

Definitions that explain the nature of branding more fully focus on the following attributes:

[...] a promise to deliver a specific set of features, benefits and services consistently to the buyer (Kotler, 2003, p. 420, cited in Hood and Henderson, 2005, p. 20).

[...] expression of a relationship between the consumer and the product (Rowley, 2006, p. 105).

[...] consumer's perception of the offering – how it performs, how it looks, how it makes one feel, what message it sends (Rayport and Jaworski, 2001 cited in Walton, 2008, p. 771).

Traditionally, branding was associated with products and the commercial sector but the application of branding techniques and the internalisation of brands and their management, particularly within the service sector (including both private and public sector organisations) where the employee is pivotal in delivering customer satisfaction has grown. Organisations of all types are recognizing the value and importance of using their brands to improve their performance and build deep relationships with their customers. In an age where the proliferation of competitors and products and services are easily duplicated or replaceable, brands become an important means of simplifying the decision-making process for consumers. Brands create difference, relevance and affinity (Singh, 2004). A strong brand will increase the trust a person has in purchasing a service and will allow the customer to visualise the nature of a service before purchase. A strong service brand becomes a promise of future satisfaction with a service and demonstrates the value of a service to the prospective user (Walton, 2008).

The library brand

In the library and information professional and academic literature there is widespread recognition that branding could be used more effectively to enhance the profile of public libraries. Discussions revolve around four key themes: the legacy brand image, the need for a new and clear brand identity to help to re-shape brand image, the role of staff in delivering the brand, and the contribution of a national branding campaign. Each of these is discussed in turn.

The first step in effective branding is to establish the existing image and perception of the library and recognising the importance of aligning the image (public perception) with the identity (internal view). It is therefore important to understand the various stakeholders' current images of what a public library is and does. Unfortunately, libraries are not seen as exciting and interesting places to visit; they are seen as places for quiet and individual study, with old dusty and tatty book stock. For example, McNabola (2008) highlights that qualitative research shows that non-users' reasons for not visiting libraries are based on the negative perceptions that they hold of libraries which are deeply entrenched. Research conducted by Lilley and Usherwood (2000) revealed that these negative perceptions are formed not only by the users' library experience but also by internal and external factors ranging from family influence to the media.

A study published by Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), "Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources" in 2005 interviewed 3,300 people from the UK, the USA, Singapore, India and Australia to find out about their use of libraries and their perception of the "library" brand. The study revealed that the "book" is still the global library brand and that many respondents clearly do not know what their libraries currently offer (Tennant, 2006).

In summary, deeply entrenched institutionalised images and perceptions are slow to shift and change (Evjen and Audunson, 2009). This is one of the key challenges facing libraries.

The second key challenge facing libraries is the development of a clear and positive identity, and the communication of that identity through marketing and branding communications, towards changing the image of libraries, and aligning the image more strongly with the service experience delivered. However, this issue seems to be intractable. For example, at a national level, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in the “Framework for the Future”, stated that “there is no single vision for the future image and branding of public libraries [. . .]” (MLA, 2008, p. 4). Further, the Benton Report (Weiss, 1996) indicated that whilst users showed great trust in the library they were unsure how the public library would fit in an increasingly digitised society. The heart of the problem would seem to be that libraries offer a range of complex, quite individual experiences, and the sheer variety of possibilities makes this very difficult to summarise and could be one reason why libraries find it difficult to communicate what they do.

The third aspect of branding that has been discussed in the literature relates to the need to deliver on the brand promise. There must be a “reality” behind the brand. Branding means caring about, measuring and understanding how others see you and adapting what you do to take account of it, without abandoning what you stand for. All great brands are built on trust and delivery of the organisation’s promise. In service organisations, the role of the staff is crucial in delivering the brand promise. How employees understand, engage with and enact the brand values is crucial in ensuring the brand delivers on its promise and is sustained (Schroeder and Morling, 2005). However, Hood and Henderson (2005) claim that whilst branding may be at the heart of the UK public library marketing plans, often marketing and branding are seen by staff as a function of only the marketing department. In addition, their survey found that librarians gave very low importance to the impact branding can have on retention and recruitment of staff.

Successful branding involves:

- *Leadership*. Library managers and leaders have a pivotal role in developing the brand, acting as brand champions and fostering a culture that will allow staff to promote and nourish a strong brand.
- *Embedding the brand*. Embedding the brand through library staff “buy-in” and ensuring that key brand messages are central to service development.
- *Brand consistency*. Brand consistency at all points of user contact. Buildings, staff behaviour, printed materials and library websites should also be aligned to the brand identity.
- *Internal branding*. Internal branding using the brand as a means of raising morale and encouraging ownership of the service at the staff level is one potential method of improving service quality and reducing staff turnover (Schroeder and Morling, 2005).

Finally, another topic that has received much debate is the value of a national public library re-branding campaign. There is evidence of support for such a campaign, For example, Hood and Henderson’s (2005) survey of the UK public libraries found

that over 50 per cent of respondents agreed that a national branding approach would be more effective than a local one. And, Adeyoyin (2005, p. 506) concluded that a “major marketing campaign is necessary to increase awareness and educate the library users’ about available library resources”. In the USA OCLC’s recent study “From Awareness to Funding: A study of public library support in America” argues that “[...] a large-scale library support campaign [...] with the right messages and programs, will increase support for the public library” (OCLC, 2008, pp. 73-5). The research shows that it is not people’s age, gender, education level or household income that determines their funding support for public libraries, but rather their perceptions and attitudes about the library and the librarian. The case for a national campaign is supported by the success of national campaigns, such as “Happy Days” supporting Welsh libraries, and the National Year of Reading. Indeed, The National Year of Reading 2008 report concludes that “libraries still suffer from negative media perceptions [...]” and recommends that “a national brand for libraries be developed which can be used to counter negative perceptions and reporting about libraries in the media” and argues for “an annual library campaign to raise awareness” and a “national on-line presence” (Libraries and the National Year of Reading, 2009, pp. 3-4).

Research methodology

The present study used a multiple case study approach to investigate branding in public libraries (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The case study approach is especially appropriate when conducting exploratory research in previously under-investigated areas (Yin, 2003). The case study approach has the potential to gather insights into successful branding process and strategies, and the challenges and key factors in their management.

This research focuses on three case study organisations that have been innovative in public library branding:

- (1) *Devon library service*. A rural public library service that has relatively recently undergone a re-branding exercise.
- (2) *Tower Hamlets idea stores*. An urban public library service, that initiated a major re-branding exercise over ten years ago.
- (3) *Happy Days*. A Welsh national marketing and branding campaign funded by CYMAL and representing public libraries, further education college and university libraries.

Data on the case study libraries were gathered through a combination of desk research, based on documents and web sites, visits to libraries, and semi-structured interviews with nine members of staff. This included:

- five interviewees in Devon libraries (three senior managers who had responsibility for marketing, branding, and communications, and two branch staff);
- two interviewees at Tower Hamlets idea stores (one senior manager who had responsibility for marketing, branding, and communications and one library manager); and
- two interviewees at Wrexham libraries (Wales) in respect of the Welsh Campaign, “Happy Days” (two senior managers who had responsibility for marketing, branding, and communications).

Given the limited previous research on brands and branding in this sector an inductive approach that used semi-structured interviews to generate qualitative data was deemed appropriate (Saunders *et al.*, 2003). Whilst the research aim was to investigate strategies and initiatives relevant to branding, it was recognised that it was important to be open and to provide respondents with the opportunity to present their understandings of branding strategy and tactics. Consequently, although at one level, the interviews could be viewed as “fact gathering” exercises, there was also an element of gaining an understanding of the meanings that the respondents attached to branding strategies and initiatives. Hence, the qualitative research design adopted, based on semi-structured interviews, provides in-depth insights, is flexible and exploratory (Bryman, 2001; Bryman and Bell, 2003).

An interview schedule was designed and piloted. The main sections in the interview schedule related to semi-structured interviews with senior staff followed by visits to community libraries where the brand had been implemented including informal discussions with front line staff. At Devon libraries and Wrexham libraries, the heads of service and senior staff responsible for marketing and branding were interviewed collectively with the interviews lasting approx one-and-a-half hours. This was followed by visits to two re-branded libraries in Devon where informal discussions with library staff were conducted during the tour of the library buildings. A senior manager responsible for branding and a library manager at Tower Hamlet’s Crisp Street Idea Store were interviewed separately for approximately 45 minutes each.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. First, a summary of each of the case study’s branding initiatives was developed, as presented in the first part of the findings section. Next, thematic analysis was conducted across all transcripts. In this process, the transcripts were first read to identify the key themes that recurred in accounts of the respondents’ experiences of branding. Next, comments were collated under each of the key factors. Any relevant insights from desk research, and visits were also integrated into this account, and used to inform understanding the context in which the branding strategy was executed.

Findings

This section first offers a brief profile of the branding initiatives in each of the case study libraries, prior to proposing the key success factors for branding in libraries.

Case study profiles

Case study 1: Devon library service. The re-branding programme in Devon libraries was driven mainly by the arrival of a new Head of Service, Ciara Eastell in 2008 and supported by the libraries twenty-first Century Modernisation Programme that had capital monies secured to rebuild and renovate six of the county’s libraries. Branding the extensive network of 52 libraries across the county, based mainly in rural settings serving a largely elderly population, as a modern twenty-first century library service is an ambitious undertaking.

A modest budget of £15k was allocated to contract Bissett Adams to work with staff on their branding philosophy. Engagement and consultation took place with a broad range of stakeholders including frontline staff, library managers, director, directorate colleagues, and cabinet members. A series of road shows in supermarkets were also conducted to test out the proposed brand with the public.

The main objectives for the new brand for Devon libraries were:

- (1) to examine the service internally and what it provides, to make sure it reaches the widest possible audience and offers the best possible service tailored to the needs of Devon's people;
- (2) to ensure the value of Devon's libraries is understood by staff, council decision-makers and by the public; and
- (3) to communicate what Devon libraries offer and how they can play a major role in the lives of local people.

Senior staff identified that branding was about articulating to stakeholders (staff, decision makers and users) their aspirations and vision of the organisations' core values.

Following consultation, the core brand values identified for Devon libraries are:

[...] looking to the future' as a large, ethical and modern organisation.

"Looking to the future" implies a continuum and allows the brand to be rooted also in the present as well as respecting the past. It was recognised that this was very much a service that was in transition and the message was that they are on a journey to becoming a twenty-first century library service. The branding concept was developed during 2009 and is being phased in over the county over the next few years with the initial phase focusing on the six refurbished/new build libraries.

Case study 2: Tower Hamlets. The re-branding of Tower Hamlets Library Service in 1998 was an attempt to rescue an underperforming and under used service. The Head of Service and Director for Culture recognised that there was an urgent need to invest in a radical approach to delivering the public library service to ensure that it remained relevant to people's lives.

An extensive piece of market research was commissioned with users and non-users to find out what they would want from a future library service. Following this research Bissett Adams were appointed to work with Tower Hamlets Library service to help develop their branding philosophy. In 1999, a ten-year strategy, to replace libraries with "Ideas Stores", was written that included the merger of the library service with the council's Lifelong Learning Service. The concept of the "Ideas Stores" was developed after findings from the users'/non-users' research highlighted the need to completely re-brand the council run library service which was perceived as a poor second class service. An investment of £20 million of capital monies was secured from central government with an additional £10 million from local government from savings that would be achieved by closing existing small libraries and learning centres.

The branding for the staff was very much about how the whole service is delivered via its core values: engage, empower and enrich. This meant not just a name change, but providing an extended high-quality service, through iconic buildings located in accessible settings, with excellent customer service. This was about a mind set change in the way the service was invested in and delivered.

Case Study 3: Welsh national campaign "Happy Days". The third case study focuses on the "Happy Days" Welsh national marketing campaign delivered in 2008. The campaign forms part of the national strategic plan 2006-2011, for the marketing of library services in Wales as part of the Libraries for Life Programme (a Welsh Assembly Government initiative to support bilingual library services to meet the needs of the twenty-first century). The Welsh campaign is not a national re-branding of libraries

in terms of one logo, or one set of core values for all Welsh libraries. It is however included in this study because the Welsh marketing campaign is underpinned by the recognition that the “library” brand is shown to have great equity in terms of awareness and perceived value, but is dogged by negative associations. The aim of the strategy is to make recommendations that build upon the high-perceived value and to re-position the brand to challenge the negative perceptions. Supporting this, all public libraries in Wales have signed up to a “core entitlement offer”, which includes a national web presence (<http://library.wales.org>).

The core objectives of the Welsh Happy Days campaign were:

- (1) to demonstrate ways that libraries can make people happy;
- (2) to demonstrate to non-users/students/key influencers the added value of libraries;
- (3) to encourage people to take a fresh look at libraries;
- (4) to utilise emotive marketing to shift public/student perception;
- (5) to generate anecdotal evidence from library users and staff;
- (6) to increase library visitor/usage figures;
- (7) to get the media “on-side” and generate interest in library stories;
- (8) to ensure entitlements are embedded in the campaign (public only); and
- (9) to drive traffic to <http://library.wales.org>

Key success factors

Seven key factors emerged from the thematic analysis as contributing to successful brand management. All of these factors are equally important, and it is essential to take a holistic approach. This section discusses each of these factors in more detail.

Clear positioning and identity. A clear identity, supported by appropriate positioning, is pivotal to a successful brand, but, as indicated in the literature review, this has eluded public libraries in an increasingly technologically developed world where access to information and documents are readily available via the internet. All staff interviewed recognised that in terms of positioning, libraries are not in direct competition with bookshops, but need to position themselves within the wider cultural and learning offer that is accessible and integral to people’s lives.

As Devon County Council (DCC) is a non-unitary council, it has been difficult to position libraries within the wider cultural offer and currently libraries are very much fighting their own battle for survival. There are opportunities and possibilities of working more collaboratively with museums, art galleries and other cultural providers, however, political tensions often make that difficult. Currently, libraries sit in one directorate and culture in another directorate, so the opportunities and synergies for working together are, at present, few. Looking to the future, opportunities to reposition libraries regionally may be explored as part of the Museums, Libraries and Archive Council/Local Government Association’s Future Libraries Programme that Devon libraries have been selected to participate in (MLA/LGA Future Libraries Programme, MLA web site, accessed 20 September 2009).

The market research conducted in Tower Hamlets highlighted that libraries were not a destination that solicited a special visit. What people wanted was a library service that was accessible, could be combined with a visit to the shopping centre and where a wider

range of services including books and information could be accessed. By addressing these issues and merging with the Lifelong Learning service and working to deliver cross government targets a successfully repositioned library service has emerged offering an extended service that is integral to people's daily lives.

Similarly, the Welsh marketing campaign aimed to position libraries back into the heart of people's lives by highlighting through its five key messages the integral values and benefits libraries contribute to people's lives. The media was targeted through the high-profile celebrity events, as the main medium to relay positive messages about the library service.

Advocacy and influence. Library branders need to be sensitive and responsive to the wide range of stakeholders. Respondents identified users, non-users, politicians, and senior executive members as key players in how the brand would be shaped and perceived; they also acknowledged potential tensions and conflicts between these groups. They were aware of the need for advocacy and the exercise of influence in negotiating with these stakeholders.

The management team at Devon libraries were very conscious that the term "branding" would not be acceptable to all stakeholders and so avoided its use. Instead, the focus was on creating an "identity" for Devon libraries. Traditional connotations associated with the term branding are that it is wasteful, expensive and unnecessary. Such connotations make it difficult to argue for spending on branding in difficult economic times.

Another potential area for conflict is the relationship between the library brand and the corporate council brand. Both Devon and Tower Hamlets library services argued strongly for their brand image to be distinct from that of the corporate council brand image. This is contrary to what many other UK authorities are doing, where library services are adhering to strict corporate branding guidelines. Working closely with DCC, Devon libraries complied and incorporated the DCC logo into all of the branding, however a strong and distinct brand image was established. In the early phase of re-branding, the previous Director for libraries was very supportive, but with current changes in administration, changes in political priorities, and changes in directorates, future challenges lie ahead. For example, recent concerns have been raised by a local councillor over library signage that does not fit with the council's corporate brand image.

In Tower Hamlets, market research highlighted that a service associated strongly with the council was potentially seen as a second class service. With this in mind a very distinct brand image for Idea Stores was created that eliminated any sign of the council's image or even logo and most controversially the removal of the word "library". After the opening and success of the first Idea Store in Bow, politicians wanted acknowledgment that this was a service that is financed and run by Tower Hamlets Council and subsequently the strap-line "created and managed by Tower Hamlets" was included.

As the Welsh campaign did not affect individual authority's branding there was no conflict in terms of using the national marketing branding alongside corporate branding. Shared key messages were developed through joint meetings as well as through opportunities for more detailed discussions at single sector meetings.

Co-branding. Discussion of the relationship between the library brand and the council brand is one aspect of brand relationships, or co-branding. Co-branding with other agencies or organizations can be beneficial, in terms of transfer of brand image, but despite the importance of collaboration to innovation in the public sector, little work

has taken place around co-branding in public libraries. Opportunities to work in partnerships are driven mainly by government priorities and savings agendas rather than seeking positive brand associations that would enhance the brand of the library. For example, the Idea Stores have cafes. However, the sub-contract will largely be driven by budget rather than by strategic branding association decisions, though quality of service is seen as an important deciding factor.

In both Devon and Tower Hamlets senior management expressed reluctance to allow other council services to use their brand, for fear of damaging or diluting the library brand. With two new libraries planned that are shared buildings with other services in Devon, there is a recognition that careful consideration needs to be given to ensuring that the library brand remains strong but is flexible enough to co-brand with other brands.

Similarly, in 2002, when Tower Hamlets were asked to incorporate a one-stop shop with their Idea Store, the Idea Stores brand was not yet properly established and therefore was reluctant to incorporate additional brand associations. Ten years on, now that the brand is strongly established, the Watney Market Library due to open in 2012 will include a one stop shop, but will be built and delivered very much on the Ideas Store branding philosophy. A strong successful brand allows the service to dictate partnership terms and can be flexible to accommodate co-brands without diluting or damaging the core brand image and values.

The Welsh campaign's strongest "co-branding" was through celebrity endorsement. Celebrity endorsement was important in establishing the right brand image and in attracting different target audiences, but factors such as budget, celebrity availability, and the requirement that the celebrity be able to speak Welsh restricted opportunities. In addition partnership working with the BBC, as a brand that is trustworthy, was further strengthened when a regular slot on BBC radio was awarded for staff to promote what's happening in Welsh libraries.

Staff buy-in. Before the brand is marketed to its users, it is critical that the conceptualisation and consumption of the brand is undertaken by one of the library services most important stakeholders, the staff. If staff do not understand, accept or live the brand, the brand will fail in its delivery.

Significant staff training was invested in by Tower Hamlets, which included shadowing the retail sector to focus on improving customer service skills and attending a training programme to understand how the brand values would help staff develop themselves and to assist them in shaping the service.

In Wales, members of staff at all libraries were encouraged to develop and deliver events linked to the Happy Days campaign. A Marketing Innovation Award for staff, with a £250 prize, provided added incentive and buy-in to the campaign. It was recognised early on, that high-profile regional events would need to be supported by a programme of local events to capitalise on publicity and deliver on the promise branded by the campaign.

Brand communication. The biggest criticism of public libraries is that they simply do not sell themselves enough, "All Gold, but no glitter!", once branding values have been conceptualised it is essential that a marketing campaign to communicate the message is implemented. Budgets, timescales and key service priorities were all factors in how the branding concept was marketed through the three case studies.

As part of the modernisation programme in Devon a series of outreach community engagement programmes were delivered in the areas where the six new libraries were

being built/refurbished. This included targeted work with deprived communities via a full page advert in a local paper and use of social media. In the initial phase, printed materials produced with the new branding focused on targeting the younger market, under five's and five-12 year old's. There is still more work to do in segmenting the adult market.

A much higher profile marketing campaign was masterminded by Idea Stores. This included the production of a high-quality glossy magazine that was published four times a year. Two years prior to the first Ideas Store opening 20,000 copies were distributed via key points including one-stop shops, schools, libraries and community venues. Advertisements on the public transport system, including the underground and buses, were also used as well as adverts and articles in the local press. However, this level of investment was not required for future Ideas Stores, as press coverage and word of mouth spread after the hugely successful opening of the first Idea Store.

In Wales, the campaign started with a user and student survey to identify the top ten things that make people happy from using their library service and to gather evidence and personal stories. On this basis, five key messages targeting different segments of the audience were drawn up, and genuine local people and their stories were used in the marketing materials to sell the message. The marketing messages variously targeted older people, families, teenagers, primary aged children and students. A national high-profile launch event followed by four regional events using Welsh celebrities was co-ordinated to target different markets and engage national, regional and local press.

Evaluation. It can be difficult to measure the impact of investment in marketing and branding, and there will always be some debate about the source of any enhancement in service performance. Nevertheless, it is important that public libraries seek to measure the success of their branding initiatives.

For all three case studies, performance statistics; membership, visitor, issue figures, and computer usage are used as indicators of success. In Tower Hamlets, usage at Bow Idea Store went from 550,000 in 1998 to 2.1 million in 2009. In 2008/2009, Welsh libraries reported an increase of 3.7 per cent in visitor figures and book borrowing up by 6.8 per cent compared to the previous year. In addition, the number of visits to the <http://library.wales.org> web site increased from 17,394 in August 2008 to 29,723 in December 2008.

Staff retention and recruitment were also seen as important indicators of brand success. Devon will be conducting electronic snap surveys with staff to capture how they feel about working for the service and how they relate to the brand once it has been established. Idea Stores have invested heavily in staff training and are providing opportunities for staff to exploit their potential and diversity of interest and skills through the core values of engage, empower and enrich. An evaluation questionnaire to all library staff and to the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) was conducted for the Welsh campaign. Over 60 per cent of SCL respondents agreed that the campaign motivated library staff and 79 per cent of library staff strongly agreed that they clearly understood their role in promoting the campaign.

The Head of Service for Devon libraries identified that within the current economic and political climate, the true test of brand success would ultimately lie in brand continuity. Management need to ensure that they can evidence that the branding work is essential to the future delivery of the service. The Ideas Store brand has been established over the last ten years and is, as identified in the 2009 strategy review, still proving popular for the residents of Tower Hamlets.

National marketing campaigns. As mentioned in the literature review, there has been a call for national marketing campaigns to help shift deeply entrenched negative perceptions of the library service. Staff interviewed at all three organisations argued that libraries would benefit from national campaigns, however that two conditions would be necessary to ensure its success. First, that the national campaign has a clear remit with identified aims for what it wants to achieve. Second, to achieve maximum impact, local library services need to be ready to support and deliver the national campaign locally. Interviewees cited the National Year of Reading Campaign 2008 as an example that demonstrated the success that a national campaign can have locally when library authorities invested time and resources in supporting the campaign. However, some services, due to lack of awareness, time and support were unable to capitalise at a local level from the national campaign. The Welsh Happy Days campaign encouraged local buy-in and delivery of the campaign through the offer of incentive schemes, high-profile events in all of the four regions and marketing and branding support. The Welsh campaign used the <http://wales.library.org> web site as a one-stop portal for communicating with staff; supplying simple downloadable marketing and branding tools, press releases to use with local media and a forum for libraries to upload and share content, fostering a sense of ownership of the brand and campaign. Over 70 per cent of library staff surveyed from the Welsh campaign strongly agreed that it was important to have a national all-Wales library marketing campaign each year that would help with advocacy, staff morale and increase visitor numbers and active borrowers.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study of the branding strategies adopted by three UK public libraries demonstrates that branding can be used successfully to drive up borrowing and visits to libraries, and arguably to change brand image and perceptions of the library service. Whilst, as demonstrated by the case studies, context is important, and opportunities and challenges vary between libraries, this study identified seven recurrent themes whose management were seen as key to successful branding. These factors are: positioning and identity, advocacy and influence, co-branding, staff buy-in, brand communication, evaluation, and national marketing campaigns. On the basis of these factors we offer some recommendations for development of branding in public libraries. These recommendations are clustered into two groups: those for practitioners, and most likely to be relevant to specific libraries; and, those for the information profession more widely, and most likely to be relevant to professional associations and other advocacy groups, and researchers.

Recommendations for practitioners

This set of recommendations is intended to assist library managers with branding and marketing strategies. A number of the issues that need to be tackled and resolved are, if not intractable, difficult. This is because branding is not an “add-on” that can be outsourced. Rather branding goes to the heart of what the library is and its vision for the future. Specifically, library managers need to:

- Develop an understanding of and a vision for the identity and position of their library, and the specific services within their portfolio. They need to articulate and communicate that identity in terms of benefits to users, rather than relying on statements of the service offered. Persistence is essential to shift entrenched

images (Evjen and Audunson, 2009) and refresh perceptions of what the library offers (Tennant, 2006).

- Take steps to ensure that the library brand is “owned” by a range of stakeholders, including users, employees, politicians, and senior council executives. This will only be achieved through the exercise of advocacy and influence.
- Choose and shape co-branding relationships with associated local authority brands and other brands that might either endorse or dilute or damage the library brand’s identity and/or image.
- Recognise and communicate the importance of staff “living the brand” in achieving services that deliver on the brand promise as suggested by Schroeder and Morling (2005). Resources need to be allocated to training staff on their role in the delivery of the brand.
- Promote the library brand through explicit, planned and ongoing marketing communication activities designed to communicate the brand message to identified audiences. This is essential in order to counter negative images of libraries (Lilley and Usherwood, 2000), and uncertainty regarding the role of public libraries in a digital society (Weiss, 1996).
- Develop and use a range of evaluation measures and approaches that can be used to inform management decisions, and act as evidence in political and funding processes, associated with branding, marketing, and service delivery.

Recommendations for the information profession

There is evidence of enthusiasm for national marketing and branding initiatives. In this study, the Welsh “Happy Days” campaign certainly had a number of positive outcomes. In addition to an increase in borrowing and library visits, there was evidence that the campaign helped with advocacy, and increased staff morale. In addition, the campaign offered an opportunity for participation in development of a library brand identity, and promoted a range of innovative approaches to communicating with users and other stakeholders. Such national initiatives indicate the potential value of working together on aspects of evolving and promoting the library brand, and are likely to involve advocates for library and information services, and innovators and researchers. A case can certainly be made for consideration of similar national campaigns, which, for the UK, might cover Scotland, and England, respectively.

Another issue that seems unlikely to be fully explored and resolved by individual libraries working alone is the articulation of a clear identity for the library brand. At the core of branding is a shared understanding of the corporate and brand identity. Achieving and articulating a clear identity and positioning that identity both in relation to other services offered by local authorities, and other providers of books, information and digital resources, is widely recognised as a complex challenge. In addition, any identity needs not only to be unique and relevant to various stakeholders, but it needs to be sustainable, or at the very least capable of evolution in an increasingly digital age. There is scope for further open debate in forums in which it is possible not only to generate ideas, but also to develop and move towards implementation. For example, in the UK, branding might usefully be explored and implemented as part of the MLA/LGA Future Libraries Programme, which is looking at shared services, shared governance

models across regions. In this area, then, exchange of ideas across the sector is also potentially valuable.

Finally, it is important that any investment in branding initiatives can be justified and therefore attention needs to be directed towards the evaluation of branding campaigns. The libraries in this study tended to justify their investment in branding in terms of borrowing and visits. This is sensible in the short-term, because the use of such measures examines the effect of branding initiatives on key performance indicators. However, in the longer term, with increasing digital access to resources, and the engagement of public libraries in an increasingly wide range of activities, such measures may be both very limited as indicators of performance, in general, and of branding, more specifically. Furthermore, there was limited evidence in the case study libraries of engagement in evaluation focussed on the brand image or brand experience. It would appear, then that there is scope for more in-depth, sector wide benchmarking and research on brand evaluation.

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Further reading

McMenemy, D. (2009), *The Public Library*, Facet, London.

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