

Category 3: Internal communications

Our new brand

Strategy - from the inside out

Teesside University has undertaken a major rebrand to re-position the institution. A major part of brand execution to the external market was a planned internal campaign to strengthen our message, internal buy-in and foster pride in the institution.

It provided an opportunity to communicate to both staff and students corporate achievements and our ambitions for the future.

Objectives

1. Introduce a new brand to staff and students positioning the university as a confident, dynamic and innovative institution (6 – 12 months)
2. Portray a positive message about change so the University community can signal to external stakeholders we are an institution they should engage with (12/18 months)
3. Ensure internal buy-in by staff and students to minimise any negativity regarding transition, cost and acceptance

Consideration to the market size and dynamics were an important factor in the rebrand campaign. Internal communications needed to address external risks if we did not re-position the institution.

- Declining North East demographic 16-20-year-olds
- Regional institution
- 70% applicants from North East.
- Low participation and aspirations (core market)
- Poor visibility: lack of distinct message
- Reputation issues from out-of-date perceptions

Campaign took into account the fragile financial climate, with a 'soft launch' strategy to minimise negative reaction.

Generate loyalty and pride

The brand launch also had internal factors as a new Marketing and Recruitment Department was formed from two separate teams. An internal department objective was to encourage cross-team working highlighting benefits of integration.

Our primary aim was to engage staff to instil a sense of ownership. ***We did not want to take the position they must switch over rather a position they will 'want' to.***

Creatives needed to work across all marketing and communication platforms including new social networking and digital mediums. The creative brief also highlighted 'innovative' and 'confident' in the approach to web, publications, point of sale and merchandising.

Key messages:

Internal: Your brand, your choice
External: We are a confident and dynamic university
Applicants: You've applied at the right time

Implementation:

Winning hearts and minds

Research was conducted into how other universities approached rebranding and concluded staff and students were confused as to the reasoning behind rebranding. Some used the internet to protest with online petitions and blogs about cost justification. To combat this it was essential to communicate sound business reasons.

Our Vice-Chancellor hosts bi-annual staff meetings; we chose this date to launch the brand. **The message was clear from senior management - the brand, mission and vision set the pace for change.** On the same day we sent 'gifts' (rebranded goodies) to departments to generate excitement and demand.

Over 40 internal presentations were conducted before the launch to express how the University is positioning itself to the outside world.

Microsite www.tees.ac.uk/teessideuniversity gave staff and students the opportunity to find out more. It was used to reaffirm the brand personality, change and confidence. Students and staff were filmed portraying a positive reaction.

Creativity

Brand Ambassadors

Staff, students and alumni were recruited to be brand ambassadors taking part in a series of communications including viral marketing and social media networks.

Promotional Merchandise

We developed a working group to identify new merchandise items to reflect brand: **www.tees.ac.uk/merchandise**

Awareness was achieved through a series of events, point of sale techniques and digital communications - email updates and updating the microsite with progress, feedback and video content. A series of on-campus statements including large wall banners, recoil stands, a blimp and staff wearing new merchandise and an exhibition of stationery, publications and 'concepts of campus signage'.

Teesside on tour campaign encourages staff and students to be 'seen' with or wearing the logo.

http://www.tees.ac.uk/minisites/merchandise/teesside_on_tour.cfm

Signage was changed across campus and is bold, confident more visible. Brand identity was also applied to all vehicles.

Innovative approach

Our graduation ceremony in November gave us the opportunity to maximise press coverage with the key message of the first graduation from the University of the Year and to showcase our new brand to past students and parents. A promotional campaign was launched in the weeks before graduation with a fun, celebratory video released through social media channels 'let's celebrate'. It portrays what appears to be an official graduation ceremony.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrOQUObAeJ0>

We also pushed the boundaries of university merchandise moving away from traditional scarf's and mortarboard teddies to bespoke footwear, footballs and key message clothing.

Evaluation and measurement

New brand introduced to all staff and students between May and Sept 2009. Our initial objectives were met and achieved an overwhelming positive response to the brand both internal and externally.

Staff and student survey resulted in:

96% stating they felt pride in the institution and felt that the university expressed confidence.

100% brand reflects the university in a positive way

83% believe the brand has improved external perceptions

95% said the switchover was well communicated and visible

4000 web hits on the new brand site www.tees.ac.uk/teessideuniversity over the first week of brand launch. (Source: Google analytics)

Our viral 'Let's celebrate' YouTube viral has over 12,000 views.

Following re-brand launch date the institution has seen:

- Web hits increased by 47% compared to 07/08 time period May – December
- Open Day visitors increased by 33%
- Applications increase by 37% overall and a significant increase of 53% from target competitor areas
- Merchandise sales increased 65%, an increased visual impact of staff and students wearing the brand.

Cost effectiveness

Considering the external factors of recession and job losses in the region the university has received no criticism on spend.

The project was delivered on time and within budget, final price bracket including staff time is between £100k to £500k

Final result against objectives

External accolades: University of the Year Oct 2009

Overall the rebranding project has been a remarkable success. Internal buy in has exceeded all expectations. We have generated a sense of pride, excitement and a will and acceptance of change and a desire to portray a confident 'Teesside University'.