

Brains Brewery:
a positively different approach
to transforming a brand's
reputation and company's
performance

How a brewery and pub company transformed its reputation and performance by conducting a comprehensive review of the way it was perceived, articulating a new vision of what it stood for and engaging its staff, trade customers and consumers with a motivating new visual identity and marketing campaign.



BRAINS BREWERY

KEY INSIGHTS

- **Extensive research** with both internal and external audiences was key to the success of the company's change programme and to monitoring progress against its defined vision and brand values.
- The response of the company's leadership to the negative aspects of the research findings was not to evade or justify them, but to **listen and respond** proactively to them.
- The research was coupled with **creative insight** to produce an engaging brand and marketing campaign that motivates staff, trade customers and consumers.

BACKGROUND

SA Brain & Company (Brains) is a family-owned company founded in 1882. A brewer and pub operator; it has a brewery in Cardiff and over 250 pubs in Wales and southwest England. In 2011 its turnover was £113m and it has over 2,000 employees.

In 2001, Brains recognised that the company was underperforming and needed to transform itself to meet the demands of a fast-changing and ever more competitive market place for beer and pubs. A new Chief Executive and senior management team was recruited to drive the company forward. The starting point was to take a comprehensive look at how the company was perceived by its key stakeholders.

PERCEPTION RESEARCH – THE GOOD NEWS AND THE BAD

An extensive programme of research was undertaken to understand the current perceptions of Brains. Employees, trade customers and consumers were canvassed to gain a full picture of how Brains was regarded by each key stakeholder group.

Several recurring themes came out of the consumer research, showing that Brains appealed to a proportion of its market, broadly older beer drinkers, but was alienating others, especially younger people.

The themes were:

POSITIVES

- **Tradition, heritage**
- **Familiar, warm**
- **Local affinity**
- **Good beer**
- **Appeal to older drinkers**

NEGATIVES

- **Old-fashioned, conservative**
- **Uninspiring, predictable, 'neutral'**
- **Cardiff-centric**
- **Basic boozers**
- **Alien to younger audience**

The employee and trade research revealed a similarly mixed picture. On the positive side, Brains was seen as a company that was well-established and as an employer with integrity, but there were reservations too. It was seen to be punching below its weight; staid and risk-averse; a follower rather than a leader; and unenterprising in its approach to branding and marketing. However, this set of negative views was tempered by some optimism for the future, generated by the arrival of the new management team and its new ambition to develop the business.

ACTING ON THE FINDINGS

Brains' leadership responded to these uncomfortable research findings by committing to bring about a substantive change in the company's reputation and performance. The first step was to articulate a vision of where they wanted the company to go. The company's key goals were identified as: to increase distribution and popularity of its beers beyond the Cardiff area, across Wales and beyond; to improve the quality, increase the variety of trading styles and expand the geographical spread of its pub estate; and, crucially, to improve the internal culture and increase the motivation of Brains' staff.

The new vision was summarised in the following statement:

'To be Wales' leading independent brewing and hospitality business, increasingly recognised by consumers throughout the UK.'

To turn the vision into reality, the management team embarked on the process of building a new brand that would sum up what Brains stands for as an organisation, ie not just its beers, but its pubs, its ethos, its people and the way that they behave. The objective was to develop a brand that would resonate amongst both internal and external audiences. Externally, the brand had to engage with consumers and trade customers to help make Brains beer and pubs more popular; whilst also raising the profile of the company and generating positive publicity. Internally, the objective was to enhance employees' sense of pride and belonging, improve morale and help drive change.

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As John Rhys, Chairman of Brains, explains:

“Branding is not just about advertising and marketing. To deliver a successful and identifiable brand, employee understanding and buy-in is vital. A successful branding process will not just inspire effective marketing communications; it will also bring about a change in employee behaviour, both in terms of the internal culture of the organisation and the interaction with its trade customers and consumers.”

DEVELOPING A DISTINCTIVE NEW BRAINS BRAND

The first task was to develop a core brand proposition, for which a number of ideas were developed and researched. The solution eventually chosen was inspired by both the spirit of Brains as a company and its immediate trading heartland in Wales. Whilst within the company, the appointment of the new management team had created a mood of optimism amongst employees, outside the company a more confident Wales was emerging born out of devolution; developments such as the Millennium Stadium and the Wales Millennium Centre; and the success of contemporary Welsh bands, including the Stereophonics and Manic Street Preachers.

The new Brains brand would stand for 'positivity', a highly relevant positioning in the drinks and hospitality market that worked across the business.

A summary of the qualities is as follows:

COMPANY:

positive culture change; a can-do attitude

PUB STAFF:

positive welcome; strong customer service ethic

SALES FORCE:

go the extra mile; never say 'no'

ADVERTISING AND MARKETING:

an engaging platform, summed up in the slogan 'more positive thinking from Brains'.

Crucially, by adopting a core brand proposition of 'positivity', Brains was able to align its internal and external communications.

Looking back at the original research findings, the company then agreed a set of desired brand values, each of which represented a significant transition from a negative perception that came out of the research. Progress towards these brand values was then to be tracked on a regular basis, **focusing on the following concepts:**

CURRENT

- **Neutrality**
- **Old-fashioned**
- **Conservative**
- **Unadventurous**
- **Cardiff-centric**
- **Uninspiring**

DESIRED

- **Positivity**
- **Contemporary**
- **Forward-thinking**
- **Imaginative**
- **Genuinely Welsh**
- **Engaging, optimistic, sense of humour**

THE INTERNAL LAUNCH OF 'POSITIVITY'

Recognising the importance of employees to the effective establishment of the new Brains brand, the new brand proposition and visual identity was launched first within the company, with an extensive internal communications programme. This included face-to-face presentations to all employees by the Chief Executive, and through 'half full sessions' – employee workshops highlighting positives, identifying issues, and drawing out suggestions for positive change. These were followed up by feedback from directors, who informed employees how they were going to address the issues and champion the initiatives.

The key areas of focus following the 'half full sessions' included increased recognition of positive behaviour and a focus on training and development. Further, improved employee communication was prioritised, to explain and secure buy-in to the company strategy, provide updates on business performance and set key objectives by department and by individual.

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ESTABLISHING THE NEW BRAND EXTERNALLY

There were several key elements to the marketing campaign:

- consumer research into the positive new brand positioning
- successful engagement of the media to generate positive publicity
- an advertising campaign to engage both consumers and trade
- several significant new product development initiatives
- a range of new pub formats
- sponsorship of the Welsh rugby team.

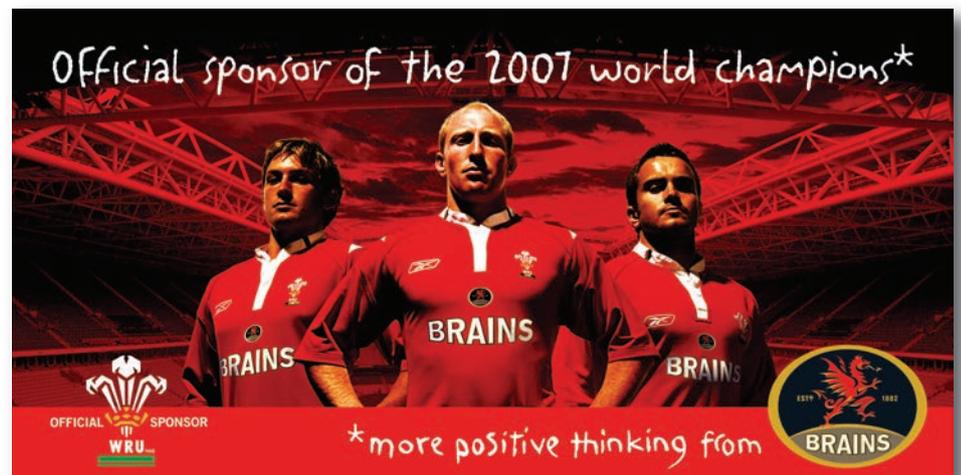
Brains commissioned consumer research to discover Welsh attitudes to positivity generally, which found that 78% of Welsh people saw 'the glass as half full'. This then became a debating point in the Welsh media asking whether Welsh people really are more naturally optimistic and positive than other nationalities. The launch poster capitalised on this, by including an image of a 'half full' Brains pint glass with the beer surreally in the top half of the pint, its revitalised dragon logo and the 'more positive thinking from Brains' slogan, which underpinned the new brand and all the communications around it.

As well as poster advertising, the integrated campaign included TV and press advertising, viral marketing and point of sale support. The 'positive thinking' campaign not only helped raise the profile of Brains, but it captured the imagination of journalists and broadcasters, resulting in significant valuable additional media coverage at no additional cost.

The brewery then became the first Welsh brand to sponsor the Welsh rugby team and the resulting promotional and advertising campaign continued to amplify the core brand proposition of positive thinking as illustrated in the playfully optimistic sponsorship launch poster that ran in 2004.

The marketing team worked hard to generate publicity for the brand around the Welsh rugby sponsorship. For example, when Wales played France in Paris in the 2005 Six Nations International Rugby Tournament, 'Brains' had to be removed from the famous red jersey due to a ban on alcohol advertising in France. The team saw this as an opportunity rather than a problem, and replaced 'Brains' with 'Brawn'.

This stunt created huge publicity, including an article on the back page of the *News of the World* newspaper and an unprecedented explanation of the Brains-Brawn switch by the BBC TV commentator in the opening minutes of the match, reaching an audience of over five million people.



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THE RESULTS

As well as monitoring sales and market share figures closely throughout the brand revitalisation process, Brains has used a number of different evaluation techniques on an ongoing basis. These include quantitative consumer research in the form of a bi-annual brand tracking study, regular qualitative research through consumer focus groups and annual employee surveys. This constant monitoring of progress has enabled them to understand how well target audiences' perceptions of the company are moving towards the brand values and attributes set out at the beginning of the process. During the past five years, the organisation's success in transforming itself and its brand has also been recognised with a series of prestigious awards.

SALES AND MARKET SHARE

By the end of 2011, the brewery's turnover had increased by 47% since the brand relaunch. It is now Wales' leading brewer and pub company, with market share having grown by around 1% per annum over the past ten years. Brains cask ales have consistently outperformed the market, with latest figures showing sales up 3.7% in a market which is down 0.7%. In the take-home market, sales have doubled in the last four years and total beer sales outside Wales are up 25%.

QUANTITATIVE CONSUMER RESEARCH

Awareness of Brains in Wales is now higher than any other beer brand, with significantly higher numbers of consumers agreeing with the following statements about Brains:

- **It's a forward thinking company**
– increase of 24%
- **Brains beers are more popular nowadays**
– increase of 25%
- **It has a high quality pub estate**
– increase of 14%
- **Brains is not Cardiff-centric, it's genuinely Welsh** – increase of 38%

QUALITATIVE CONSUMER RESEARCH

Awareness of Brains in Wales is now higher than any other beer brand, with significantly higher numbers of consumers agreeing with the following statements about Brains:

- **It delivers** on the desired brand values
– "it gets Brains away from the spit and sawdust image"
- **It's engaging** – "it's insightful and humorous
– it grabs your attention"
- **It has stature** – "slick and professional
– it's what you'd expect from a top flight drinks brand"

EMPLOYEE SURVEYS

Annual employee surveys have shown the following significant movements:

- **Clear understanding of business strategy**
– increased from 53% to 90%
- **Told when I'm doing a good job**
– increase of 49%
- **Training and development needs met**
– increase of 40%
- **Morale**
– increase of 23%

AWARDS OVER PAST FIVE YEARS

- **The Marketing Society Award for Excellence**
– Brand Revitalisation
- **The National Business Award**
– Marketing Strategy of the Year
- **The Hollis Sponsorship Award**
– Sponsorship Continuity
- **The Publican Award**
– Regional Brewer of the Year

KEY LEARNING POINTS FROM THE BRANDING PROCESS

Looking back on the process to date, John Rhys highlights the following key principles underpinning Brains' success:

- Listen to the views of staff, trade customers and consumers
- Set out a clear vision for the company
- Develop a single-minded proposition for the brand
- Make sure it resonates internally and externally
- Establish supporting values
- Build from within, starting with employees
- Be consistent and take a long term view
- Constantly evaluate and measure progress.