

CORPORATE BRAND MANAGEMENT AND REPUTATION



RESISTING WARWICK OF THE FUTURE

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MASTER CASES

Corporate Brand Management and Reputation: Master's Cases

The "Corporate Brand Management and Reputation: Master's cases" is a case series for applying the case method of teaching and learning in higher education. The cases are relevant to brand strategists in private and public sector organizations, as well as academics and students at universities, business schools, and executive education.

The cases are written by groups of master's students as a course project. The specially developed case format is defined as: *"A management decision case describes a real business situation leading up to a question(s) that requires assessment, analysis, and a decision reached by discussion in class. The alternative approaches and recommendations from the class discussion are followed by a description of the choices made by the case company. This description is then discussed by the class."*

The student groups select the topics of their case providing updated and relevant insights into the corporate brand management. The cases can be used as "written cases" (handed out and read in advance, later to be discussed in class) and/or as "live case" (presented by the teacher following a discussion in class). Each case includes teaching notes, visuals with speaker's notes, learning objectives, board plans, and references.

The mission of the series is *"to develop cases for discussion providing insights into the theory and practice of corporate brand management and reputation, with the intent of bridging the gap between academic teaching and managerial practice."*

The series is a result of co-creation between students and teachers at the elective course Corporate Brand Management (BUSN35 – five-credit course/eight-week half-time studies), part of the master's program International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund School of Economics and Management, Sweden. The cases represent the result of the intellectual work of students under the supervision of the head of course.

Although based on real events and despite references to actual companies, the cases are solely intended to be a basis for class discussion, not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. The cases are free to be used and are to be cited following international conventions.

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RESISTING WARWICK OF THE FUTURE

WRITTEN CASE

The authors prepared this case solely as a basis for class discussion and not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. Although based on real events and despite occasional references to actual companies, this case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

MANAGEMENT DECISION CASE

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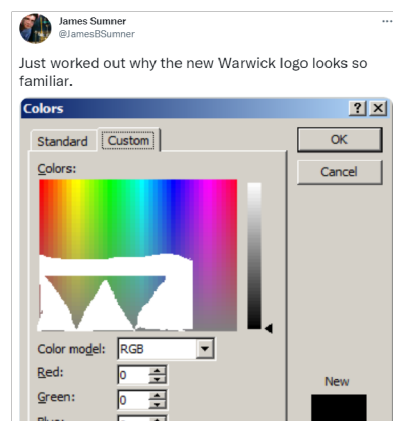
Background

Rumors of a Rebrand

Rumors about a rebranding were circulating around the campus of the University of Warwick when Mélissa was about to start her bachelor's degree in 2015. Rumors are only rumors she thought and did not therefore pay much attention to it. Not long after, the flood of notification beeps in her friendship group chats, Twitter and Facebook Groups, showed that it was not just a rumor. The University of Warwick had indeed decided to rebrand at a staggering cost of £80,000 and as a response students started a petition to stop the rebranding. This rebranding sparked resistance and criticism among students as they did not feel it represented them according to Mélissa.

“There were memes circulating about the new logo saying that a five-year-old could've done it on paint. It made us look quite tacky as a university and not reflecting the high-class establishment that we are.”

Mélissa, Student



We invite you to embark on two walks down the academic memory lane. Firstly, we dive deeper into the history of the University of Warwick to see how we ended up where we are today. Secondly, we present the work of Professor John Balmer and the rebranding of the University of Strathclyde from the 90's. Despite the rebranding instances being separated for almost two decades, both show us two very similar stories as they were faced with resistance. Warwick from the students and Strathclyde mainly internal management. Should the strategy of rebranding universities be the same as for corporations? Should universities even be branded at all? To answer these questions, let's take our first walk.

An Academic Walk Down Memory Lane

Shortly after the end of World War II, an idea for building a university in Coventry was born, and twenty years later, a creative collaboration between the City of Coventry and Warwickshire County resulted in the establishment of The University of Warwick. It was founded on 400 acres of land jointly granted by the two authorities in 1961 and enrolled a few postgraduate students in 1964. By 2020, the University of Warwick had a student population of 29,534, with over a third of its students coming from 147 countries.

Mr. Butterworth, Warwick's first pioneering Vice-Chancellor, who fostered non-traditional excellence at the University of Warwick, brought some very unconventional ideas to the table. Butterworth argued that universities must combine academic excellence with a strong orientation to local and business communities, and that non-pure disciplines must be balanced with application areas.

The first Vice-Chancellor firmly established the University on the national stage, laying the groundwork for the University's fundamental strategy and culture, which is still in place today. Dr. Brending succeeded him from 1985 to 1992, during which student numbers doubled, postgraduate students increased by over 250 percent, and University of Warwick firmly established itself at the top of the UK's research universities.

The University of Warwick has excelled in both teaching and research since its inception. University's early success was due to a strong focus on the manufacturing heartland of the West Midlands, as well as organic curriculum planning that emphasized interdisciplinary collaboration. The University of Warwick was a pioneer in seeking the industrial-academic links that are now an important part of its strategy in business studies and engineering. In 2007, The University of Warwick launched a new strategy, Vision 2015, which incorporated a number of ideas generated by the University community, with ambitious goals in research, teaching and learning.

A University full of History



The old Warwick university logo included a heraldry crest full of meaning positioned to the left of the words The university of Warwick on black. Inside the crest a yellow elephant, isotopes and DNA on a black background and white bear could be seen. Above the crest a book can be distinguished and the sentence Mens Agi Tat Molem can be read, which means mass mind. Below the crest a motto on a yellow background can be read, Universitas Warwickensis, which means university of Warwick in Latin. The elephant represents Coventry and strength, on the back of the animal the castle of Coventry can be seen. This symbol has been used in other logos present in Warwick. The isotopes and DNA are aimed to represent science, an area the university proudly wants to highlight. The bear has been a symbol of Warwickshire since 1268 and it has been included in several other crests and coats of arms since then.

The incident

Students of What?

After being named The Times University of the year in 2015 and also being the year of its 50th anniversary, the head of marketing of the University of Warwick made a huge announcement at the Students' Union's Societies Convention. An amount of £80,000 was destined to an entire rebrand of the brand "The University of Warwick".



The reason for the rebranding expenses was that The University of Warwick had a very similar logo to The University of York and to The University of Exeter.



UNIVERSITY
of York



Thus, the announced brand changes would consist of creating a new logo and deleting the “The university of” from the University of Warwick. In addition, a new color named as “Warwick aubergine” would be now used on the new logo. The university openly supported that the written communication of Warwick needed to be more inclusive.

“The new brand tone of voice introduces the language of possibility into our written communication.”

Warwick University

Everything seemed like the perfect rebranding scenario to the head of marketing until he saw the face reaction of his audience, the students.

Clearly, the rebranding of Warwick was not celebrated among the students and around campus the feeling of displeasure was spreading like wildfire. Immediately after the rebranding announcement, the ‘Overheard at Warwick’ Facebook shared students’ negative reactions. Furthermore, an initial 500 signature petition asking to keep the old logo soon followed. Soon enough the petition had 4000 signatures.

"I hate it. It looks like a child has designed it. I fail to see how this represents Warwick at all. How is this an improvement on the last logo? How? It doesn't even say university... it looks like it could be a logo for some mountaineering warehouse."

Alex, Student

"The money could, and should, have been better spent."

Isaac, Societies Officer

The issues with the rebranding of The University of Warwick were two: money and student's involvement. However, Warwick University only communicated that students were asked and formed part of the rebranding process of the university.

"Students were the very first people asked to take part in groups to work with designers to help create the new branding, and the number of students asked to help in that process and specifically consulted so far actually far outstrips the number of staff."

Warwick University

In fact, the university conducted consultations and focus groups to capture students' opinions about the rebranding of their university. The University listened to 160 current students who even helped design the new logo. However, a notably high number of students considered the consultation not optimal. Only 160 students from a total number of 23,570 students were involved in the rebranding of Warwick.

A successful case

University of Strathclyde and John Balmer

Now we invite you to a second walk with the rebranding of the University of Strathclyde. John Balmer, a well-known Professor and researcher within the marketing academia, and is often regarded as the father of the corporate brand concept, was the leading figure in two changes of visual identity/rebranding which took place in the late 1990's. In the first initiative, which took place in the early 1990s, he recommended that the university's shield of arms should be the unifying visual identity symbol for the university. Various audits (visual, corporate communications etc) showed the university lacked a consistent and coherent visual identity strategy and this was seen

to weaken and undermine the university's profile and overall corporate image. An display of the variety of ways the university communicated through different brand marques and images covered the walls of a room so that senior managers could see the problem

"We presented all the material and showed we had numerous different logos. The senior board was shocked as the university lacked a clear corporate communication policy."

John Balmer

However, it was decided to adopt a new shape (a pentagon) for the university so as to emphasize its distinctiveness and for the shield of arms to appear in full colour. As such, the university's symbol was unique and became a unifying symbol. Earlier, the coat of arms was not used in a coherent way and was not prominent. It often appeared in black and white and was superimposed on several slanted planks each of which was meant to represent one of the university's faculties. John recalls there was a discussion for the university to drop the coat of arms and for a new, more modern, symbol to be adopted. He further remembers discussing this with his students and they were in favor of keeping the coat of arms since it was seen to be a sign of the university's quality. Many of the leading UK universities have coats of arms as their corporate brand symbol. With the second initiative, a few years later, at a meeting to consider the bicentenary celebrations of the institution's establishment in 1796, he suggested the university should petition the Crown (through the Court of the Lord Lyon, the court of law overseeing heraldry in Scotland) for a full achievement of arms (a coat of arms having additional design elements including a legally protected motto). A full achievement of arms is infrequently awarded and is seen as a special honour by the Crown.

He oversaw the project but he faced strong internal resistance. In the end the project endured and the Crown gave the university this honour. A key dimension of the full achievement of arms was the granting of a motto. John Balmer suggested that the words, "Useful Learning" should be used. Firstly, because the words came from the institution's founder he wished his university to be "A Place of Useful Learning.

Secondly, this encapsulated an enduring and distinguishing characteristic of the University. As such, it serves a short but powerful corporate brand promise for university students and a reminder of a core institutional purpose for university staff. Rather than explaining what is unique about the university in multiple multiple paragraphs - this motto sums it all up in two words.

Overall, Professor Balmer points out the danger of a logo needing an explanation and this might Explain the students' resistance. Students and staff become attached to symbols and thus there is understandable resistance to change. Asking “why?” in such moments of change is a natural response. However, a corporate brand signifiers are verbal (the name) as well as visual (the logo or marque). As such the esteem in which Warwick University is held has not been changed. A corporate brand at its heart is about the corporate brand covenant: the associations and connotations that come to mind when we hear a corporate brand name or see a distinctive corporate brand symbol. Importantly, it is the corporate identity, what an organisation says, makes, and does, which delivers this promise.

Branding should encapsulate the identity of an organization and For many, he adds on, going to university is a defining moment in young people’s lives. It is a rite of passage and a very important decision to make. Looking into the future for Warwick, Professor Balmer wonders whether this is going to be the defining, and final, corporate brand marque for the university. This is because logos sometimes can be as much about fashion as they are about identity and corporate brand promise. What was fashionable can soon be dated. And what is dated is often changed. Looking into the future of the corporate branding of universities, he expects it to stay and grow. Back in the 1990’s, when he first talked about corporate branding, he was faced with laughter by managers, consultants and academics alike. No one is laughing now. As Professor Balmer mused, “Secretly, I often have the last laugh!”

Conclusion

What now?

In sum, the rebranding of the University of Warwick was mainly done to differentiate from competitors in terms of logos and positioning. Certainly, the management thought they collected enough qualitative information from the students and the idea to rebrand felt crystal clear. Facing the strong resistance from students and facing all types of jokes and memes was not in the planning. Moving forward we invite you to solve the two pressing issues about the resistance to Warwick's logo and to the future of branding of academic institutions.

- After facing the strong resistance and petitions from the students, what should be done now to save the reputation?
- Who do you think are the main stakeholders to take in consideration in the process of rebranding the University of Warwick?
- As brand managers, how would you involve the stakeholders and execute a rebranding of a university with a strong existing identity core?

We have shared two long walks today, so let's sit down and put our bright academic minds together.