

More than a strapline

A brand can give a project an identity and help it deliver extra value, says Donnie MacNicol

“The brand could include a name, strapline or logo – but it is the way of working or ‘being’ that is critical”

The accumulated wisdom of traditional project management provides the basis for winning the *minds* of team members. Winning the *hearts* of the team, and thereby getting the best out of them, requires an emotional attachment to the project. To do this, the project must have an identity.

What is a project brand?

It is the identity created by the project manager for the period of the project. The brand makes a promise that is compelling and engaging and is used to promote and deliver the project.

How do you create a project brand?

First, define the project as fully as possible – but not just using traditional objective definitions. These should include the value each party brings or the expectations of team members, e.g. for contractors that the project will end up as contentious as before, or for architects that they will continue to develop their skills and expertise.

Building on the definition, identify what would motivate team members to put their hearts into the project. Build on the technique of stakeholder management but focus on their individual or collective drivers, e.g. the project needs transparent and open communication channels.

Next, identify the project attributes that may be unique or attractive, e.g. the use of a new technology or an open, supportive working style within an aggressive environment. The latter is at the gift of the project manager.

Then, considering the potential motivators and project attributes, choose the most compelling and achievable set of characteristics that could be moulded to create an identity for the project. Do not attempt to incorporate all attributes as you could end up without a clear identity.

How you present these attributes is the project brand.

Buying and selling

Branding techniques can then be applied, including identifying the difference between what your are ‘selling’ and what people are ‘buying’, e.g. Harley-Davidson *sells* motorbikes, middle-aged men *buy* freedom, excitement and rebellion; surveyors sell services, clients buy certainty; architects sell design services, clients buy hope of improvements. Understanding this will allow you to re-consider what your project is selling to team members.

On the Eden Project (a £134m ‘green theme park’ with biomes housing over 1 million plants and

built, initially, without paying its construction firms), the founder Tim Smit was vociferous about the unparalleled challenges and difficulties his project faced, this was engaging to those who craved this environment in their working lives.

Finally, translate the brand over all aspects of the project, e.g. if you promise it will challenge then it must challenge. The brand could include a name, strapline or logo – but it is the way of working or ‘being’ that is critical.

Culture – the most compelling brand

The most powerful project brand is a supportive and challenging culture where values or principles are agreed upon, communicated and worked to. Read the list of principles below and ask yourself: “Do we do this? If not, what would we have to change? What principles would I set and apply consistently?”

- Environment – supportive working practices, a project space that is conducive to productive and harmonious working.
- Consistency – commitment to nurture a consistent sense of team throughout the project. People know where they stand and what is expected. Equality is a given.
- Accessibility – doors and minds are open and there is access to resources, time and decision-makers. Communication is free and open.
- Clarity – each team member knows the goals and strategy of the project, their role, the results being achieved, and believes they can make a difference.

What are the risks of not using a project brand? The same old same old: knowing that you will never get the very best out of the team thereby failing to fully deliver or not ensuring the maximum value to the customer. By applying motivational principles designed for your project incredible things can be achieved.

We don’t all have an Eden project but we can apply the principles that will attract and engage people. Project managers must be the manifestation of the brand and therefore must live and breathe it. But remember, keep it simple – your brand is your promise and you can do more harm by over-promising.

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