

Branding the International Space





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Station

The work to create a successful strategy for the commercialisation of the International Space Station (ISS) has reached a critical juncture. The International Partners in the ISS - NASA, CSA, RSA, NASDA and ESA - have recognised that one of the platforms for a successful commercialisation strategy is the development and exploitation of a coherent, powerful and global ISS brand.

Why have its Partners decided that the ISS needs to be marketed in this way and why is branding important for commercial success? This article seeks to answer these questions and to describe the process and organisation that two of the Partners, ESA and the Canadian Space Agency (CSA), have already initiated.

What is a 'Brand'?

A quick rummage through the on-line bookshelves of Amazon throws up more than 60 articles with the words 'brand' or 'branding' in their titles. Through this fog of often-conflicting guidance one single truth emerges. This is that brands are different things to different people. Now, this may appear rather trite, but contained within this conclusion is the key insight to revealing the answer to the question, 'What is a brand?'.

Before going on to reveal what this insight is, perhaps we should start by saying what a brand is not. A brand is not a logo or a slogan, although these are important tools for communicating about a brand. A brand is not a static commodity, product or idea. It evolves constantly, as frequently as consumers change their minds, their opinions and attitudes, which is frequently. A brand is not an advertising campaign, although advertising and other forms of brand communication are essential tools for building and maintaining a brand's presence in the minds of consumers.

So if a brand is none of these things, what is it? There are many definitions, but two of the best known will give us the start we need to answer the question. The first is that 'a brand is a promise delivered', and the second is 'companies make products, but consumers own brands'.

A 'promise delivered' seems pretty clear. The essence of what a brand is concerns the trust that is built up over time between consumer and manufacturer or service provider, and the belief that this trust will be 'repaid' each time the two interact. As

someone who enjoys a non-alcoholic, sugary, fizzy drink you know that 'Coke' will deliver this experience each time you buy a can. For the car driver who prizes safety, reliability and engineering expertise, the chances are that buying a 'Mercedes' will deliver what you expect. And in the non-commercial world which is perhaps more relevant to the ISS, we instinctively know what the Red Cross is for, we have a feel for its values, and maybe even empathy with these values also.

But it isn't that simple of course. There are tens if not hundreds of other non-alcoholic drinks that are just as sweet and fizzy as Coke and there are now many other car manufacturers with equal claims to Mercedes' safety, reliability and quality engineering. Even in the non-commercial world, the Red Cross needs to compete with other organisations for people and funds. This means that the successful brand must have other qualities and, perhaps more importantly, a special

communicated. A brand is also defined by consumers' impressions of the people who use it, as well as their own experience."

What Has All This Got to Do with the ISS?

Successful commercialisation of the ISS means that the Station will need to have demonstrated its unique value as a research and development platform vis-a-vis other, earthbound R&D facilities.

But, as several market research studies have clearly indicated, the ISS is relatively unknown amongst the audiences it will need to connect with if commercialisation is to succeed. The research has also indicated that even when people are aware of the ISS they too frequently cannot say what it is for and why it is relevant to them. These are fundamental barriers to the ISS's commercial success.

The feedback from this research has also indicated that the ISS has great potential value as a vehicle for sponsorship, which, if fully exploited, would contribute to the ISS commercialisation process.

believable and relevant brand positioning for the ISS is essential. It is not enough, as has been the case until now, to communicate about the ISS from the owner's perspective. The brand positioning will provide all of these potential audiences with their own reason to believe. It will enable communication about the ISS to be user-focused, and in doing so the ISS will be able to compete successfully for the time and money that its commercial audience has available for the sort of investment that it seeks to attract (see accompanying illustration).

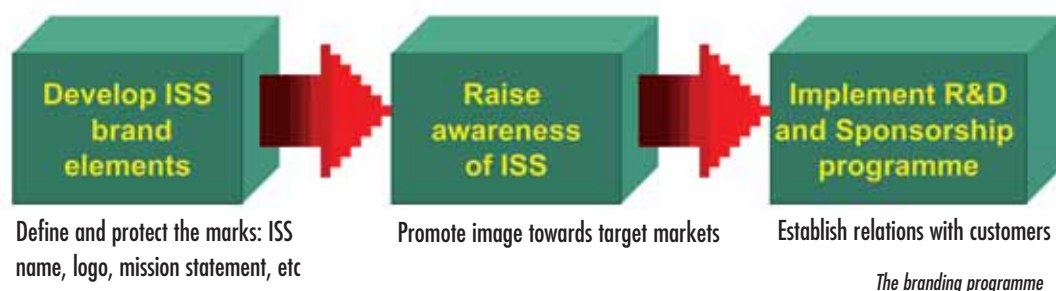
The ISS Branding Programme Content

The creation of a strong brand requires not only a smart brand definition, but also time and skilful planning. The International Partners, working together in a Multilateral Commercialisation Group, have agreed to create a global ISS Branding Programme, and have initiated the creation of an ISS Brand Management Plan, which addresses the legal, financial and organisational issues surrounding this programme.

The foundation upon which the ISS brand is built includes the creation, protection and evolution of the basic symbols and statements that encapsulate the values of the ISS, such as the logo and name.

The name of the station will remain as we know it today – 'International Space Station – ISS' – until approaching assembly completion. On the other side, the Partners are well advanced in the selection of a logo, which they will register and trademark worldwide to protect its usage, thus creating one of the platforms for the global ISS brand.

But the process of brand development doesn't stop there. The ISS brand is more than the logo, the name, descriptions and images of its physical infrastructure in space. The brand positioning must incorporate the qualitative and the emotional values of the ISS. It must also express the values of the Agencies involved. So, the process of brand creation is centred on the identification and



relationship with the people it interacts with.

All of us use our own experiences and knowledge to form the mental picture of what we see and experience, and we do this in wildly or mildly different ways. My chilled 'Coke' is about refreshment and energy on a hot day; your 'Coke' is about being hip and cool. Consumers therefore 'own' brands. Perhaps there is one definition that can bring all of this together. Even though it was written in the 1960s, the insight that it contains probably remains the best and most succinct answer to our question:

"A brand is a complex symbol. It is the intangible sum of a product's or service's attributes, its name, packaging and price, its history, reputation, and the way it is

Building a unique brand positioning for the ISS is an essential first step in the commercialisation process. Potential customers in the R&D markets need to know why they should divert limited resources away from the traditional recipients of their budgets to the ISS. They need to know clearly and succinctly what the ISS is 'for' and what competitive advantage it will offer them.

Potential sponsors probably have different needs. They need to believe that the ISS has values with which they would wish their own brands to be associated. They are also looking for the competitive advantage that will accrue to their brands if they link themselves with the ISS, as opposed to, say, the Olympics.

For all of these reasons, a compelling,

definition of these values and their relevance to the potential markets (see accompanying illustration).

Very few brands have attained the position where one message, one voice, one image works everywhere and with everyone all the time. So, whilst the ISS brand will be a global platform for all of the Partners to exploit, communication of the brand will be the responsibility of each Partner in their own territories. Even in the globalised economy, local relevance is essential.

Of course, economies of scale will accrue if Agencies choose to work together and pool resources behind particular actions. And in this spirit of cooperation, ESA and the Canadian Space Agency have already agreed to collaborate, sharing experience, funds and resources to jointly develop and manage the ISS brand in Europe and Canada by using a specialised communication company, Ogilvy Public Relations, selected on the basis of competition.

The Process

The process of Brand Definition followed three steps: Research (Brand Scan), Analysis (Brand Audit) and Development (Brand Print).

The Brand Scan helped to identify, through review and analysis of a wide range of background research material, interviews with the general public as well as Agencies' internal and external stakeholders, the key findings from which to derive the potential positioning of the Brand.

Following extensive research, a Brand Audit was performed. Three potential positioning areas have been identified and competitively tested with representatives of the R&D and corporate world – with the sorts of people who are the decision makers in relevant markets for R&D and sponsorship of the ISS.

The three positionings that were field-tested had been developed to appeal to risk-taking, idealistic, entrepreneurial leaders – who could be enticed with a



and to guide them to concrete investment prospects.

Also, concrete opportunities for R&D in space will be communicated in order to attract the R&D community in the private sector to space research. To this end, ESA will expand its collaboration with the aerospace industries being part of the Cooperation Agreement, implementing a series of events and participating in commercial exhibitions dedicated to markets such as biotechnology, health and new materials. The Cooperation Agreement partners will also provide comprehensive 'end-to-end' services to customers under promotional conditions.

In addition, Brand Protection must be institutionalised, in order to prepare the ISS brand to face the challenges of illegal competitive exploitation.

Conclusion

The development of an ISS brand is an essential tool for implementing any commercial activity related to the ISS, both for commercial R&D and for innovative markets such as sponsorship. It is necessary to brand and to protect the image of the ISS in order to ensure that a coherent and consistent image is presented across all activities and that the image and brand are not diluted or unfairly exploited.

The promotion of the brand will be performed with a sound communication plan whereby the potential customers will partner with human spaceflight and the ISS to explore the benefits of commercial activities in space. ESA will also leverage on the promotion and service capabilities of its Partners in the Cooperation Agreement.

The implementation of this programme is a new endeavour for the Agencies partnering in the ISS. By collaborating in this programme, the International Partners have the opportunity to open the ISS to global markets and to maximise the possibility of fully utilising the Station to perform world-class research to the benefit of the whole of mankind.



product as innovative and unusual as the ISS.

The final process (Brand Print) led to the identification of a single brand positioning area, which appeals to both R&D and sponsorship targets – an ideal combination of emotional and rational values, focusing on what humans can do in space, the sense of exploration and discovery, suggesting that only human spaceflight and the ISS can offer a place beyond all boundaries.

The Brand Print was then used as guidance for developing the creative concepts, the visual identity architecture and the key messages. And the final step of this process has been the identification of the communications strategy and the tactical plan that will be used to promote the ISS brand into the market where it could compete successfully for R&D and sponsorship.

From Brand Print to Brand Presence

The core objectives of the communications strategy are to establish the ISS as the global brand of private/public partnership for the exploration of space, to create demand for that brand, and to establish ESA and CSA as the 'gateway' to the ISS brand in Europe and Canada.

Human spaceflight will be positioned as a long term strategic issue by a top-level debate about the future of human spaceflight, initiated and led by visionary business leaders, in order to attract private-sector company strategists and marketeers to the opportunities of space exploration