



## OFFICE BRANDING

FMJ has a recognised role to play in supporting technical expertise in the FM market.

As part of this, we offer FASTFacts — a series of specialist summaries that give no-nonsense information on topics of importance with signposting to further sources for the expert reader. **John Sulzmann**, managing director of Artworks Solutions, gives his take on branding within the office environment.

### BRANDING IS ESSENTIAL IN THE WORKPLACE

For most organisations, conveying a clear brand identity is an essential part of their operations. It is used to evoke an emotional attachment to a group of products or organisation. It can convey a sense of quality or express values associated with a particular firm. Successful branding builds strategic awareness which means that people not only recognise your brand but also understand what it stands for. Branding is more important today than ever due to ever-increasing advertising clutter, media fragmentation, the commoditisation of products and the limitless choices we are offered. Branding is most commonly associated with traditional forms of marketing, but it is also essential in the most obvious public embodiment of the organisation — its offices.

### BUT CHANGE ISN'T ALWAYS ESSENTIAL

It can be hard to predict what will happen when firms rebrand themselves. But they will often learn a lot about their relationship with customers when they do. Recently Gap was forced to back down on its rebrand in the wake of fierce customer hostility to a new look. The campaign attacking the logo is indicative of the way that strong sentiments can be channelled through consumer led internet campaigns. On the plus side for Gap, at least it shows their customers care. One firm that refused to bow to customer might was Ikea. In 2009, the company changed the font in its catalogues from Futura to Verdana provoking a backlash from a group of irate customers. Ikea concluded that most normal people wouldn't care or even notice and that this was the reaction of militant graphic designers. The sort who go into a blind rage when they see Comic Sans. Ikea stuck to its guns and the furore soon died down.

### BRANDING IS NOT JUST FOR THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Sending the right messages to employees about the organisation and its values is at least as important as communicating the brand to the rest of the world. This is not

just an issue for the front of house. Employer branding is important in two ways. Firstly, because employees must understand the brand if they are to play a role in communicating it to customers. Secondly, it is important in the recruitment and retention of the best people. The CIPD recently reported that over a third of employees are planning to change jobs once the recession is over. Already, the proportion of UK workers resigning from their jobs has increased from 7.7% to 10.4% in the past year. Communicating with people through the workplace can play a key role in retaining these people.

### BRANDING IS SOPHISTICATED

Workplace branding used to be relatively unsophisticated, consisting largely of the use of corporate colours, branded carpet and comparatively simple manifestations of identity on walls. But things are more sophisticated now, partly because the people towards whom the messages are aimed are more sophisticated (and cynical) but also because the development of new materials and new technology means that we can deliver sophisticated and subtle messages in new ways. Most importantly, it is essential to look beyond the logo to see what the organisation stands for and express that in the workplace. Carefully selected imagery and materials can convey important messages about the values of the organisation with regard to employees, customers, the environment and its products and services.

### DEVELOP A GOOD BRIEF

The first step is to spend some time understanding what messages you are trying to convey, how they should be communicated and to whom. This is likely to involve input from a number of professionals, not just people from marketing but also those from HR, IT and senior management. Sophisticated results will depend on a sophisticated

brief that takes account of every facet of the organisation.

### USE THE TECHNOLOGY

As always it is new technology that is the catalyst for a new and sophisticated approach, both in terms of the designs it makes possible and the equipment and materials needed to deliver them. Indeed this technology is moving so rapidly that it can be hard to keep up with just what is possible so always work closely with suppliers and designers to ensure that you are aware of all of the options. New digital printing techniques, design software, CNC machinery, and new materials provide a new way of addressing the needs of an intelligent approach to workplace branding. They also make certain things more cost effective, which is good news anyway but can also mean that it is possible to update branding in the office more regularly, possibly in parallel with external marketing campaigns to ensure a consistent and holistic message across the entire organisation.

### KEEP IT REAL

According to the famous designer Dieter Rams, 'most think of design in terms of putting lipstick on a gorilla'. So the important thing is to make sure that any manifestation of your identity in the workplace is true to the actual image and values of the organisation. We are all sophisticated when it comes to unpicking marketing messages so will soon see through anything that doesn't ring true, especially when it comes to issues like the environment.

### KNOW WHAT IS POSSIBLE

Working closely with designers and suppliers will open up new possibilities. Be sure when you meet with them that you are able to not just discuss and see what results have been achieved for their other clients but also what other ideas they may be able to implement based on their offering.

### ...BUT THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Don't just see the options on offer as a fixed menu. The sophistication of materials and technology coupled with individual creativity means that what you are offered by a supplier can be seen more as a box of ingredients. The interplay of colour, imagery, texture and materials offers almost limitless possibilities so keep your mind open to them.

### Contacts & Sources

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