Are you in the club?
Everyone wants to belong, which means membership brands need to reflect their members. Does yours? In today’s budget obsessed environment, membership organisations need to communicate value. Do you? This, our first brand monitor considers whether your brand is ‘in the club’, whether your members and stakeholders are likely to feel part of it, as well as what to do if it isn’t and they don’t.
Overview

**What we did** - this document captures a review of the brands and, as far as it can be ascertained without access to a comprehensive range of material, the communications of 56 different professional membership organisations, and how well they perform across a given range of criteria. As far as we are aware, no other similar brand monitor exists.

**Why we did it** - in today’s newly post recessionary landscape, professional membership organisations are in the spotlight. Many sectors are reviewing their direction; so many membership organisations are reviewing the focus of their purpose. Many businesses and individuals are reconsidering how they expend their budgets; so many membership organisations are reviewing the value they add. And for many, the need to ‘belong’ is stronger than ever. Therefore how all of this is communicated through the brand is perhaps more important today than ever before.

**How we did it** - we defined a group of 56 organisations. These were drawn predominantly from the group of professional bodies that offer professional qualifications and set standards, where membership is voluntary. So our choice of emphasis was driven by the perceived importance of effective branding and communications to this category of organisation. We augmented our list with some ‘licence to practise’ organisations that regulate entry into professions, as well as groups with a common interest.

We defined our measurement criteria as follows:

**Messaging** – is there a clear articulation of ‘who we are and what we’re for’? Is there more emotive messaging encompassing ‘how we do things and why we exist’? Is the organisation’s differentiation apparent? Is it all well written and easy to find?

**Visual brand** – are there discernible and coherent visual basic elements? Is there sufficient breadth in those defined visual basic elements? Are they appropriate to the stature of the organisation and true to message?

**Consistency** – is the visual system consistently applied? Does it translate effectively across different applications? If applied consistently does this play out flexibly or relentlessly?

**Quality** – is the overall brand and communications execution of a high standard and quality?

**Saliency** – is the overall impression appropriate for the organisation’s key audiences and core purpose?
Overview

Each organisation was scored between 0-20 on their perceived success against these criteria. The scores were decided upon by a panel encompassing our own strategy and design teams, together with a respected professional membership organisation leader. To arrive at the scores we reviewed each organisation’s website, as well as at least one printed document or key downloadable PDF. This focus was driven not only by what was available to us, but also took account of the disproportionate importance that websites have today in terms of making the right impact.

**Shape of the landscape** – the professional membership organisation landscape is not quite like any other and falls into three main areas:

*Licence to practise organisation* – in professions such as the law and accountancy, which regulate entry into those professions. These are regulated by statute and these bodies tend to be monopolies, although in the accounting profession, a variety of accounting qualifications means that there is competition for members at the start of their career.

*Professional bodies which offer professional qualifications and set standards* – where membership is voluntary.

*Emerging interest groups around a profession or sector* – these often represent members in relatively new professions, such as facilities management, or where there is a common interest such as the Portman Group.

All these bodies aim to provide members with very similar services and in practice the extent to which they achieve this is dependent on size – both of the organisation and of the profession that it is representing – elements that are intrinsically linked. Organisations’ services usually span standards, regulation, training, voice, influence, community, knowledge and best practice.

Each body varies in the extent that it pursues any of these aims, and this is often reflected in their brand. With such a wide agenda, it is often the services that are offered that dominate the organisations content and communication as opposed to the purpose of the organisation. The danger of this is that the organisation becomes known for what it provides rather than why it exists.
State of the nation - a membership organisation’s perspective and focus on brand can be as inconsistent as its balance of operational focus. Driven by providing services to members, and to increasing profile and influence, it is often very easy to forget the overall corporate purpose. Many organisations can define what they are providing – but most are less good at why.

Thinking clearly about the organisation’s brand can help crystallise that corporate purpose – and the fact that a brand has to work internally as well as externally. It also highlights the plethora of other brand drivers that matter:

• understanding that brand goes well beyond the logo alone
• defining why you exist/what you stand for and translating it into a set of visual cues
• behaving in line with a core set of values
• engaging with members and finding something that chimes with their own values
• being consistent
• appreciating that the process is as important and rewarding as the outcome
• keeping it relevant and ensuring a brand review is not ‘just another initiative’
## Results: top five and best of the rest

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<th>Membership organisation</th>
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CIMA is distinctive for many reasons, but not least because despite representing management accountants it isn’t blue! So its strength is less because of its obvious saliency and more because it is unexpected. From messaging to logo, from visual language to implementation it is well conceived. Despite not being new, the brand has been kept on track. See pages 10 and 11.

Clearly a very recent rebrand, it’s a job very well done. The messaging is simple but compelling. Though the visual brand is perhaps expected it’s very well executed. All of the details have been implemented faithfully. Let’s see how it rolls out over time and whether they can keep it up. See pages 12 and 13.

Owning the url architecture.com is a great way of owning the sector. The website in particular is a designers dream with an unconventional user experience appropriate to the world RIBA represents. A good balance between contemporary and classic, though perhaps on the verge of delivering style over substance. See pages 14 and 15.

Strong, confident, simple and with a slightly eclectic but coherent visual language. Though elements of the logo are pleasing, the typography lets it down. More importantly the acronym is challenging and confusing, and this is particularly apparent on the homepage of the website. A strapline would do much to resolve this. See pages 16 and 17.

Rich messaging that also plays out well at a headline level, this brand is full of surprises. Interesting visual language, underpinned by strong colour and powerful use of typography and imagery. The overall system is let down by a mediocre logo. See pages 18 and 19.

Nice use of moving image, good quality black and white imagery, a traditional but contemporary look and feel; the overall impression is one of gravitas. Though perhaps lacking a little distinctiveness, it is certainly a brand in tune with its target audience. See pages 20 and 21.

Strong, emotive, crystal clear messaging that is consistently and powerfully applied from the lock-up with the logo, as well as throughout all collateral. In its shorthand, it also forms call to action. The rest of the scheme works pretty well too! See pages 22 and 23.

Communications and brand have clearly been invested in, with a result that is surprising and yet appropriate. An even greater investment has been placed in managing consistency, which is very strong indeed. However, the consistency is applied with a heavy hand and is a little relentless. Pace would provide relief and greater sophistication. See pages 24 and 25.

The visual brand manages a careful balance. It reflects its audience well but is just a little unexpected. It is professional but modern. It’s consistent and has well considered elements in the illustration style, as well as the typographic mark. But there is an opportunity to up the ante further. See pages 26 and 27.

Though perhaps not a designer’s dream, the overall quality of communications is hard to criticise. Consistent and reasonably crafted visual elements, a fair degree of humanity with good quality photography of people from their world. Perhaps what’s missing is a more powerful message about their wider purpose beyond delivery of qualifications. See pages 28 and 29.
## Results: rest of the rest

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<th>Membership organisation</th>
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Notes

Clear but relatively unemotive messaging. Deceptively simple, distinctive logo in 'banker blue'. Reasonably cohesive visual language but defined by gratuitous stripes.

Professional, smart but predictable, with limited visual language and let down by a poorly designed annual report.

Consistent, clear, professional and audience-centric in web design. The visual elements and messaging are functional but lack any richness or texture.

Limited visual language, different logo variants and clear but unemotive messaging. Modern and clean but uninspiring.

Rich and buried 'shaping the world' messaging, but leads with registered charity number information! Some nice but patchy visual elements. Challenges with acronym means name is frequently repeated.

Brand provides a blank canvas for member work. Nice user experience but not especially well crafted visual elements, though some of the printed collateral is more engaging.

Clear messaging. Quite an engaging user journey. Overall, considered and (what feels to be) appropriately understated. Though perhaps greater distinctiveness would help better promote the organisation.

Clear and audience focused in user experience, and messaging. Visual elements very much 'of the sector' but crudely put together.

On the surface the messaging and visual brand promise much, but don't deliver as the system unfolds. This is particularly the case with the annual report that should be 'best in class'.

There has been clear investment in the brand, but the results appear to have been implemented with limited impact. The user experience is also patchy. Confusingly the messaging opens with what the Association is not.

The messaging is highly functional and scant. The imagery styles are poorly considered, inconsistent and together with the user experience suggest a split identity.

Underpinned by awkward, constraining 'swoosh' graphic devices, though considerable effort has been made to deliver consistency, the result is unsophisticated.

Unsophisticated logo attempts to manage an unwieldy name, rather than use an acronym and the crest. A real opportunity to make playful use of language in messaging and visual language has been missed.

Effort made to develop a consistent and modern brand. However, the results fail to deliver on the standards of an organisation whose purpose is to promote best practice.

Online a confusing visual hierarchy, as a result of overly prominent advertising and 'loud' competing visual elements. Imagery style is underpinned by some confusing choices and logo is curiously abstract.

Uncrafted typographic mark. The visual language has been implemented with rigour but applied with a heavy hand. The visual style and messaging is of the sector but not distinctive.

Confusing and schizophrenic brand architecture. Consistent use of colour and graphic language but unsophisticated. Confusing and possibly outdated logo on website.

Confusing user experience. Despite strength of colour palette, a recessive brand. Evasive messaging.

In the logo the challenges of working with acronyms become clear. Has visual pace but this is delivered through too much poor quality imagery.

Overly complex logo comprising a wordmark, crest and purpose capturing strapline. Great animal photography but only in annual report. Visual language that doesn't extend beyond use of 'medical blue'.

Impressive organisation with a brand that lets it down. Lacks focused messaging. Confusing name hierarchy at a logo level. Limited photographic style.

Between third party advertising and undifferentiated hierarchies, it's not clear where you should look first on the website. Dry messaging and the use of red provide the only cohesive elements. Too many fonts and the use of upper case deliver quite an aggressive look and feel.

At first glance, nice messaging but it has the same elements as the Institution of Civil Engineers, a peer body. Relies heavily on great architectural photos for the overall impression but beyond that there is little brand strength.
## Results: rest of the rest

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Notes

The logo and the strapline are confusing and hard to decode. However some nice messaging nonetheless. The brand relies heavily on purple for its coherence but has few ownable elements beyond this.

‘Swooshes’, globes and corporate blue, the brand is rich in visual clichés. An overall feel of Mid Atlantic and feels out of date. Messaging is not immediate.

To an outsider, the shorthand and its use in the logo is complicated and whimsical. The strapline summarises the core purpose simply and well. The overall look and feel is unsophisticated.

Bland, spare and beyond the use of ‘medical blue’ it’s lacking personality and any form of distinctiveness.

Emotive and clear but overly expansive messaging. Though the overall impression is not inappropriate, the quality is poor. Though the user journey is straightforward it lacks basics such as clicking on the logo to return to home.

Effort has been made to develop a brand, but it’s not successfully pulled it off. The logo typography is whimsical. The illustrations and colour provide some consistency but are quite crude. Messaging lacks immediacy.

The naming convention and acronym are confusing. The logo symbol is interesting and well drawn but hasn’t been exploited at all. The organisation’s compelling purpose is not supported by the overall brand.

The logo is considered, refined and well crafted, but this is where those communication principles begin and end. The annual report delivers an overdose of speech bubbles. Overall visual composition is crude.

Lacks any clear messaging. Beyond ‘medical blue’ and a simple wordmark, there are few if any brand elements and certainly little consistency.

Contrived logo, which then plays out in the overall look and feel. Stark brand and poor quality design overall.

Well crafted logo on homepage but different versions of the logo typography seem to exist elsewhere. Functional but over busy, too much content, little visual equity and confusing sub brands and brand architecture.

Beyond the logo, little brand. Presentation fails to reflect the profession it represents. Off the shelf values (honesty, integrity), no visual language and the document that describes creativity is not creative in itself.

Curious and complex logo, and hard to determine relationship with Chartered Insurance Institute. Beyond navy blue there are few communication elements to comment on.

No discernible brand or personality. Another example of an impenetrable acronym that needs to be explained. Curious logo symbol. Little visual language or messaging.

Crass logo reflecting globe and letters from the acronym. Consistent but completely irrelevant imagery. The execution doesn’t reflect the organisation’s commitment to quality.

The much trumpeted rebrand of 2014 disappoints. The representative body of a creative sector makes expansive use of dark blue and the ‘temporary website’ is still temporary. The redrawn crest will continue to divide and its relationship with the CIM symbol is poorly defined.

Dull with a surprising lack of brand credibility for an organisation of import. No attempt to engage or deliver any kind of message. Curious logo that is hard to determine.

Logo symbol and typography is very considered. Beyond that, bland and relying on blue to hold it together. No distinguishing features.

An interesting crest that could have been made more of. Awkwardly spaced typographical mark. Delivers an overall impression of very ‘home made’.

Unusual strapline, unsophisticated ‘pixelated’ logo and an over-trinketed look and feel suggesting little thought has been exercised in communications.

Photographic imagery that delivers the wrong impression, some attempt at a logo that reflects a message of ‘advancement’ but simply lacks credibility. The corporate film online lasts more than 30 minutes and the tone seems wide of the mark.

The logo appears very outdated. The overall impression doesn’t support the strapline of ‘The UK’s leading business organisation’. The messaging is patchy in quality. The brand and communications lack credibility.

Unsophisticated shield with a confusing relationship between BCS acronym and ‘The Chartered Institute for IT’. The use of green is relentless but provides some cohesion. The film is long and irrelevant. Overall a surprising lack of quality for an organisation of its scale and with its focus.
Top 5: joint winner
Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA)

What we say

CIMA is distinctive for many reasons, but not least because despite representing management accountants it isn’t blue! The brave use of magenta really stands out in the sector. This means its strength is less because of its obvious saliency and more because it is unexpected.

From messaging to logo, from visual language to implementation it is well conceived. The bright colour palette has been handled tastefully, being offset against the cool grey means the accent colours sing rather than fight with one another.

The use of graphic illustration and iconography feels fresh and modern, and importantly, is consistently applied across all of its collateral without feeling repetitive. The clever use of cross hatchings in the graphic language is another distinctive aid to help bring uniformity to the design applications.

Overall the visual brand feels modern without feeling inappropriate, and the messaging is clear and succinct. A worthy joint winner.

“Most accounting qualifications train people for private practice, working on external audit and tax issues. CIMA prepares people for a career in business ... inform strategy and redefine how business is done”
REDEFINING HOW BUSINESS IS DONE

THE CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTANTS
2013 ANNUAL REPORT

THE ROLE OF THE CFO ON THE MODERN BOARD

ACCOUNTING FOR NATURAL CAPITAL
The elephant in the boardroom

Messaging: 13/20
Consistency: 16/20
Saliency: 16/20
Visual brand: 17/20
Quality: 15/20
Overall: 77%

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Don't just write reports, sign off reports...

Frank, Bright & Abel Membership Brands Monitor 2015
Top 5: joint winner
The Investment Association

What we say

The Investment Association has clearly recently rebranded and it’s a job well done. The messaging is simple but compelling: the writing snappy, active and engaging. The overall impression is of an organisation that is straightforward, coherent, simple to understand and accessible.

Although the visual brand is perhaps expected, it’s very well executed. The five bar logo device is sophisticated and stylish without being showy and reinforces the sense of a no-nonsense approach. All of the details have been implemented faithfully. Typography is in the service of readability, with text treatments that invite the eye. And the colour palette of bright and cheerful spring colours adds pace and energy to the whole.

Despite looking almost effortlessly simple, design like this is hard to maintain. Is this all down to a good agency, or embedded well internally. Let’s see how it rolls out over time and whether they can keep it up.

“Making investment better … for clients, companies and the economy so that everyone prospers”
**Messaging:** 18/20  
**Visual brand:** 14/20  
**Consistency:** 15/20  
**Quality:** 15/20  
**Saliency:** 15/20  

**Overall:** 77%
Top 5: joint second place
Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)

What we say

Owning the url architecture.com is a great way of owning the sector. The website in particular is a designers dream with an unconventional user experience appropriate to the world RIBA represents. There is a compelling and inviting mix of imagery and moving image. It’s not just about beautiful buildings, which you’d expect, but all aspects of architecture. There’s an invitation to explore, with the use of language (discover, take a look, revealing) supporting this idea and it’s easy to dive in and look around.

There is a good balance between contemporary and classic. The logo is elegant, understated and credible. Colours are vibrant but sophisticated, the typography is simple but considered. And of course the images are great.

In publications, only the logo and use of building images holding things together visually and the lack of consistency between online and print suggests the overall visual brand.

Though the website could be on the verge of delivering style over substance, the publications would benefit from a dollop more of this style.

“Champions better buildings, communities and the environment through architecture and our members”
VENUES AT 66 PORTLAND PLACE

20th Century glamour with 21st Century service

Building a Better Britain
A vision for the next Government

Trustees’ Report and Financial Statements 2012

Messaging: 12/20
Consistency: 14/20
Saliency: 16/20
Visual brand: 15/20
Quality: 15/20
Overall: 72%
Top 5: joint second place
The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB)

What we say

Construction is a booming sector and we would expect the industry body that represents it to take a bullish approach. In this respect the Chartered Institute of Building does not disappoint. The branding is strong, confident and simple, and adopts a slightly eclectic but nonetheless coherent visual language.

Though elements of the logo are pleasing, the typography lets it down: it’s more hard-hat and less breathtaking engineering. More importantly the acronym of the name is challenging and confusing, and this is particularly apparent on the homepage of the website. A strapline would do much to resolve this.

The same point applies to typography throughout the site. CIOB may be a bold organisation but they don’t need to use quite so much bold. There’s a heaviness here that detracts from the messaging. Readability also suffers from too many short and staccato paragraphs, which give the impression of an organisation that finds it difficult to join-up what they are saying. The choice and treatment of images is good, however, and in some cases (for instance in the corporate brochure) borderline stunning.

“At the heart of a management career in construction ... world’s largest and most influential body for construction management and leadership”
Our place in your life

A review of our activities and finances 2007

2013 was a landmark year for CIOB. We took giant steps: transforming the look and feel of the organisation; opening ourselves up to an exciting future. It was the year that our profession came of age: the Privy Council granted chartered status to the role of construction manager in November.

Attaining Chartered Construction Manager is a significant milestone. It establishes construction management as an internationally recognised discipline that can be benchmarked against other professions. It reflects the growing influence of construction managers within project teams. Many members find it a more accurate alternative to Chartered Builder.

This tremendous achievement is built on years of work, kick-started by former presidents Li Shirong and John Bale. This wider definition of construction management, published in 2011, demonstrated that construction managers make a significant contribution at any point in a project's life cycle.

Attaining Chartered Credit must also be given to members, who by their deeds have helped us convince the authorities that construction management is a professional career in its own right. More than 6,000 of you have already registered interest in the new title. Chartership will raise the status of construction managers globally. It will enhance the sector's professional image for the next generation of school leavers and graduates.

There has never been more urgency in attracting bright newcomers to the sector. In our 2013 skills audit 82% of respondents were either experiencing or predicting a shortage of adequately qualified staff. In part this is due to the poor completion rate for apprenticeships — a reflection of a training regime that is flawed.

Tackling the skills crisis was a major theme of our Talk Construction conference in November. This two-day event saw politicians, civil servants and clients debating with construction leaders how best to improve productivity, attract investment and foster innovation for long-term growth.

Attended by 500 delegates, the conference was closely followed on social media. Comments on Twitter reached up to three million followers.

Construction has a valuable role to play in leading the UK out of recession. Talk Construction provided a platform for open discussion and the chance to shape future policy. It brought us closer to government and our discussions with Whitehall are continuing.

Another major milestone in 2013 was moving office: we had outgrown our traditional Ascot home which was costly to maintain and expensive to heat. The building itself had become a barrier in our daily work. Selling the estate, we moved to a modern office in Bracknell before Christmas. As well as being environmentally friendly – our new home has a RICS Ska gold sustainability rating – we went from a 19th Century base to a 21st Century base overnight.

Our new open-plan office is a better environment for collaboration and cross fertilisation of ideas. Crucially we now have the bandwidth to support our fast expanding digital operation, as well as wi-fi and video conferencing facilities. The technology helps us connect better with members, wherever they are in the world.

We have also opened a representative office in Westminster, close to the heart of government, which will become the focal point for many meetings.

Free of the old estate, CIOB has become more agile and able to divert resources into more useful activities. The trend extends overseas where we are shifting from bricks and mortar to virtual offices. Dublin, Johannesburg, New Zealand, Singapore and Sydney came on line as virtual offices last year.

2013 was the year it all came together: we gained a new home, a louder voice in government, higher visibility and international recognition for members.

The built environment sector is changing rapidly and we are keeping pace and ready to meet the challenges of the new age.
Top 5: joint second place
Chartered Management Institute (CMI)

What we say
In many respects CMI is a breath of fresh air; the Institute’s materials are full of surprises. Rich messaging is set off by an interesting visual language. This, in turn, is underpinned by strong colour and powerful use of typography and imagery.

There is a refreshing simplicity to the way CMI communicates, which is augmented by good signposting. If it has a flaw, it is a little light on content. It’s a truism that managers are time poor but the CMI sometimes seems to take this as a golden rule. Treating the audience as if they had an attention-span of more than a few seconds wouldn’t necessarily drive people away and would give the sense of an expert body with much more to offer than headlines can do justice to.

An otherwise good overall system is let down by a rather mediocre logo.

“Creating achievers for over 60 years, we’ve been ahead of the field from the start”
THE VISION THAT INSPIRES US IS A WORLD WHERE WE SEE: BETTER LED AND MANAGED ORGANISATIONS.


MANAGEMENT 2020
Leadership to unlock long-term growth

2014 Annual Report & Accounts

2014 Annual Report & Accounts


MANAGEMENT 2020
Leadership to unlock long-term growth

2014 Annual Report & Accounts

2014 Annual Report & Accounts

THE COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP
JUL 2014

72%
Best of the rest: saliency
The Law Society

“We’ve been supporting the interests of solicitors … for almost 200 years … we lead the debate … we champion the profession … we speak to government … we work directly with you”

What we say

The Law Society visual brand has a traditional but contemporary look and feel; the overall impression is one of gravitas. The bold use of black and green is quite unexpected in the sector, and certainly stands out from similar organisations.

Though perhaps lacking a little distinctiveness, it is certainly a brand in tune with its target audience. The use of the classic crest, including the figure of Lady Justice is entirely appropriate for a society representing solicitors. The tab device for the logo is generally consistently applied, although some of the printed reports let down the overall quality.

The clear, no-nonsense tone of voice is as you would expect for this audience, but the messaging lacks a ‘hook’. The visual brand elements are relatively simple and not hugely creative, but they are consistently applied. There is a nice use of moving image, and good quality imagery used across the brand.
Best of the rest: messaging
Homeless Link

What we say
Homeless Link have strong, emotive, crystal clear messaging that is consistently and powerfully applied from the lock-up with the logo, as well as throughout all collateral. In its shorthand, it also forms call to action. It feels like a strong rallying cry that the public can get behind. The key areas of messaging are easily found on the website, stating their vision, mission and manifesto right at the top of their homepage. In their ‘About us’ section they also succinctly capture who they are and what they do in a straightforward tone of voice, without ‘dumbing down’. They also apply the tone and messaging consistently in printed collateral, where appropriate.

The rest of the scheme works pretty well too! The brand still looks contemporary, even though it was done over 7 years ago, and it has been fairly consistently rolled out across all media.

“Our vision is of a country free from homelessness, where everyone has a place to call home … let’s make the difference”
Needs to know
Including single homelessness in Joint Strategic Needs Assessments
By Sarah Hutchinson, Luke Plant and Terriana Rhame
Published by St Mungo’s Broadway and Homeless Link

YOUNG AND HOMELESS 2013

HOMELESSWATCH
YOUNG & HOMELESS
A SURVEY OF SERVICES AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES
DECEMBER 2011

Messaging: 15/20
Consistency: 13/20
Saliency: 14/20
Visual brand: 14/20
Quality: 14/20
Overall: 70%
Best of the rest: visual brand
Royal Society of Chemistry

“‘We promote, support and celebrate chemistry … advancing excellence in chemical sciences’”

What we say

Communications and brand have clearly been invested in, with a result that is surprising and yet appropriate. The logo and related graphic language are bold, contemporary and feel appropriate. The colours are sophisticated and balanced, the imagery is strong and the typographic style is simple but distinctive. The messaging needs to be considered in the same way. It is clear, but lacks the vibrancy of the visual language.

An even greater investment has been placed in managing consistency, which is very strong indeed. The graphic device works well with different kinds of imagery and colours, in varied arrangements. However, the consistency is applied with a heavy hand and is a little relentless. In places it is so strongly used it is in danger of becoming distracting. A degree more flexibility and pace would provide relief and greater sophistication.
Advances in science have improved lives in many ways. Medicines have increased life expectancy, we have been blessed with computers and televisions, and flight has opened up the world for travel. Cosmetics, the ‘science of looking good’, is no exception. In ancient times, women applied crushed bugs directly to their skin. Nowadays, there is a huge array of products that variously promise to abolish wrinkles, destroy dandruff and restore vibrancy to worn out hair.

Nail varnish has evolved, too. Good old nail polish, which chips easily and has to be constantly reapplied, has been superseded by durable varnishes such as Shellac, which can endure two weeks of hard knocks before they look worn. But just how do these work?

The two styles of varnish are very different. Classic nail polish is essentially the same as paint. The three main things needed to make it work are a pigment, which provides the colour, an adhesive, which sticks the pigment to whatever you are painting and a solvent, which keeps the paint in a liquid form until it has been applied to the surface, where it can dry out and solidify into a permanent finish. This is different from Shellac, which is an example of a light-cured gel varnish. This means that ultraviolet (UV) light is used to create a polymer on the fingernail.

Coating and curing

Let’s start with what happens when you put on gel varnish nails. The first step is to prepare the fingernails so that they are ready to be coated. This means they should be cleaned, disinfected and buffed. Next the base coat is applied. This is painted on using a brush, just like normal nail polish. What happens next is the different part. The beauty technician will place the pigment over the nail and expose it to UV light. This causes the polymer to form, turning the pigment from the liquid into a solid. Once the process is complete, the pigments are chemically bonded to the nail, giving the coating a long-lasting finish.

Polished polymers

Tom Husband explains how varnishing your nails is more like making plastic than painting.
Best of the rest: consistency
The Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA)

What we say

The visual brand manages a careful balance. It reflects its audience well but is just a little unexpected. It’s consistent with a strong use of purple and supporting palette and a recognisable angled graphic. The typographic mark, which sits alongside this, is simple and strong but well crafted.

It is professional but modern. It’s consistent and has well considered elements in the colourful illustration style, which is relevant to the subject and audience. There is a related infographic style that usefully communicates digestible facts and figures.

But they have an opportunity to up the ante further. Especially by injecting more personality into the messaging which is dry and functional. The visual language could be expanded for greater pace and variety and become even stronger.
A review of the year
annual report & accounts 2012
smart solutions supporting change
annual report & accounts 2013
Consistency: 16/20
Saliency: 15/20
Messaging: 11/20
Visual brand: 13/20
Quality: 14/20
Overall: 69%
Best of the rest: quality
Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT)

“Goodbye job, hello career … practical, real world qualifications”

What we say

Though perhaps not a designer’s dream, the overall quality of the AAT’s communications is hard to criticise. Their brand is distinctive and feels appropriate for its audience. Messages and imagery reflect a fair degree of humanity with good quality photography of people from their world.

What makes the AAT leaders in quality is that everything is done well. There may be nothing here that is truly great but there is also nothing mediocre. Digital technology is well executed and feels both robust and responsive. Print is well produced. They’ve thought about the user journey and the user experience, their information architecture is both logical and intuitive and different types of communication dovetail nicely together.

Perhaps what’s missing is a more powerful statement about their wider purpose beyond the delivery of qualifications. The overarching messages are a little workmanlike. But considering how much they do well, it’s a small failing.
The Association of Accounting Technicians
Annual report and financial statements of the Group for the year ending 31 December 2013

Messaging: 11/20
Consistency: 15/20
Saliency: 14/20

Visual brand: 11/20
Quality: 15/20

Overall: 66%
Conclusions

What we learned

_Battered reputations lead to better brands_ – sectors such as financial services are often served by better brands, presumably in a bid to help shape better perceptions of the organisations/individuals they represent. The converse is often true of those representing more creative sectors, which often have poor brands.

_Problem brands suggest problems operationally_ – from sub-brands that are dead but won’t lay down, to general lack of focus, a proportion of brand issues are suggestive of operational challenges that have not been properly closed down.

_Purpose is poorly expressed_ – often at least. Even if an organisation successfully expresses what it does, why it’s special is often elusive. Rich use of language is in short supply.

_To crest or not to crest_ – many organisations have historic crests that are often used poorly or not leveraged at all. Properly drawn they could provide a strong visual asset.

_Acronyms are nearly always challenging_ – history and name length dictates that many organisations use acronyms. The visual treatment of these is often challenging and unless the acronym is memorable, the name has to be spelled out in full elsewhere. Getting this right is an art in itself.

_Colour can go a long way to hold a brand together_ – but not if the colour is blue. A number of poorer brands retain some consistency with powerful use of colour. However blue is so ubiquitous that it frequently serves to weaken brands rather than strengthen them.

_Photography is a mainstay and one that’s hard to get right_ – one of the costliest brand assets, photography is probably responsible for the greatest number of brand gaffes. From abstract imagery that makes little sense, to poor quality clip art and portraiture reminiscent of sugardaddy.com the membership landscape contains many examples of ‘how not to do it’.

_Using moving image doesn’t demand Gone with the Wind film length_ – it’s great to see a growth in the use of moving image which provides a very immediate sense of what an organisation is like. There are some excellent examples as well as poorer ones, including a corporate homepage film that ran to over 30 minutes.
Don’t let a third party organisation dominate your website – third party banner advertising should be very carefully managed. In a few alarming cases it is so significant in scale that at first glance it appears as if you’ve arrived at the wrong website.

Healthcare is generally behind the curve – healthcare membership organisations are fulfilling an important role. For many of them how they communicate is therefore secondary. However, failure to focus on quality and clarity of communications is undermining credibility and accessibility of key messages.

What it means

1. You may think brand is superficial but in a world where we’re surrounded by sophisticated consumer brands, if your membership brand is poor it will impact adversely on your audience’s impression of you.

2. Your other collateral may be great, but if your website isn’t it may be the only thing people see and judge you by.

3. Clarity of purpose is most important of all. Articulate it, make it simple, get it right, communicate it consistently and ensure you’ve also captured the more emotive messages around why you exist and why you’re different.

4. If you’ve got a great crest, don’t ditch but get it redrawn for the computer age.

5. Handle your acronym with care so people know and understand who you are.

6. It’s even more costly to get photography wrong than to get it right so DIY with care and preferably use a professional.

7. Have a discernible visual language and one that’s reliant on more than colour alone.

8. Getting your brand and communications right takes investment, but as some key players on the shortlist demonstrate, may not cost the earth.
Conclusions

What next

However well or otherwise your brand is performing, changes should be informed and not undertaken lightly. Any brief should be shaped by an understanding of what you need to do to compete and 'stand out' in your landscape, and above all, meet the demands of your corporate plan. The first step towards this is carrying out a detailed audit of your existing brand and communications. If you’ve been included in this report, we can carry out a more detailed audit of your brand. If you haven’t then we’d be happy to do the same or include you in next year’s brand monitor.

We do much more than compile brand monitors. We’re a creative consultancy of communications specialists. We specialise in brand identity, brand and marketing communications, and internal engagement. We develop strategy, write copy, design creative and implement our recommendations. We focus on business-to-business, higher education, financial services, Government and public sector. We’re Frank, Bright & Abel. Not who we are but what we do and how we do it. Whatever you want us to be get in touch.

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