

**A BRANDING  
JOURNEY  
WITH  
PLYMOUTH  
UNIVERSITY**



# A BRANDING JOURNEY WITH PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY



The new '**with Plymouth University**' brand is a revolutionary concept in the higher education sector, and one that captures the institution's **pioneering** spirit, its **collaborative** approach to working, and its **forward thinking** community.

Eschewing the use of a static logo with little resonance of the aims and ambitions of the University, the new identity is one which can be tailored and used to communicate directly with different audiences. By putting the message in the hands of the communicator, it establishes a democracy of words, and opens up new creative possibilities.

The finished article tells only a fraction of the story, however, as to how and why the University embarked upon this journey to rebrand after 19 years. The process, which took 18 months from start to finish, has drawn upon the talents and energy of students, staff and stakeholders who have helped to define the values at the heart of the University's identity.

## A mandate for change

The branding project team, which comprised both academic staff with industry experience and professional services members, established a set of guiding principles. These included a commitment to make evidence-based decisions; to harness internal resources and expertise wherever possible; to create an holistic brand that would encompass tone of voice, HR processes, induction events etc; and that there would be minimal expenditure during the roll out – the project had to be cost neutral.

The first action was to gather evidence to establish whether the University's corporate identity was still fit for purpose. Utilising the market research skills of undergraduate and postgraduate business studies students, they established that there was a discrepancy between the way the University was perceived and the message it conveyed through its logo. They also learned:

- 54.8% of students did not like the logo, and 70.6% said the brand needed to be modernised
- Among teachers, there was a 100% rejection of the current logo, with 87.5% agreeing to modernisation of the brand
- And in the business population, 60% did not like it, and 80% wanted a change





Concurrently the project team was also conducting research into what people did like about the University itself – what were its essential qualities. They engaged 30,000 people and asked them to provide five words that summed up the institution. 5,000 people responded, and from this pool of 25,000 words, certain themes and consistencies were immediately apparent.

Through a series of workshops and focus groups involving people from both inside and outside of the University, these ideas and words were refined and distilled down to a set of values. They were:

- Expert
- Connected
- Creative
- Spirited
- Empowering

### A design for Plymouth life

The project team specified that any design agency that was to work with the University had to be connected with it in some way, whether in terms of previous study, internships, placements or the recruitment of graduates. After a short-listing process and interview, two agencies emerged as frontrunners; the Exeter-based Buddy, and Here from London. Between them, they had no less than four Plymouth graduates working as directors, ensuring that their connection to the University was evident at the very top.

Rather than choose between them, the University asked the two if they would be prepared to collaborate, playing to their own strengths, in an enterprising partnership. They agreed, and so were engaged to create a compelling, effective and inclusive brand identity, one which reflected the University's 'real-world' approach. And there was to be a litmus test applied at every milestone:

- Are we creating something groundbreaking?
- Does it reflect our collective power?
- Does it communicate with our stakeholders?

The agencies pitched two approaches. The first was an evolutionary approach which took the most memorable elements of the existing brand and created a refreshed identity. Solution two was the revolution, and took to its heart the aim of the University: For people to say they are proud to be associated with such an enterprising and forward-thinking institution. From that, the importance of the word **with** was evident. How much better, how much more inclusive would the sentence 'I am studying mathematics at the University of Plymouth' become if it read 'I am studying mathematics with Plymouth University'?!

What if '**with Plymouth University**' became not only the brand truth that reflected its collaborative nature, but also the basis of a pioneering new identity that could communicate different messages?

- **Pioneer** with Plymouth University
- **Endless Possibilities** with Plymouth University
- **Succeed** with Plymouth University

The two versions were taken to key stakeholders for testing, all of whom backed the radical approach, and plans for the roll out commenced. Staff engagement sessions were held, and for reasons of cost and sustainability, it was agreed that existing marketing collateral would continue in use until existing stocks were used up.

Work was also done to establish just how much the project had cost the University, and equally important, the likely benefits in the future. By drawing upon internal expertise for the formulation of the strategy, and student resources for market research and testing, rather than engaging external agencies, the University had calculated it had made significant savings.

Finally, after an 18-month journey which had examined the very values of the institution, the new Plymouth University brand was unveiled on June 14, 2011, at the Vice-Chancellor's Public Address.



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