

The resilience of the local authority brand

- The value of the local authority brand*
- Positioning the brand during times of instability*

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The value of the local authority brand

- Brand is key in competitive markets
- As councils are encouraged to trade services for future survival, strengthening the local authority brand is becoming increasingly important
- Strong branding can help prevent commercial competitors from cherry-picking the profitable parts of services and leaving local authorities to try and manage the rest

Local authority brand vs commercial brand

- As local authorities:
 - you provide residents and customers with **valuable services**
 - you are the **subject matter experts** in many specialist areas
 - you have the **experience** and importantly, you are providing services for all the right reasons, **not just for profit**
 - you are highly legislated, providing **reassurance** versus unregulated competition
 - you are the **logical provider of choice**
 - you are **trusted to deliver**

These values are represented by local authority branding

Local authority brand value

- Trust in local councils is at record levels – 71% (June 2020)
- 60% are satisfied with the support being offered during the pandemic and more than a third think that their local council/councillor is best placed to help the local area recover*
- 77% residents view services more positively with council branding and 57% view services more negatively if the local authority branding is removed
- Local authority branding is particularly important in the care sector – children and vulnerable adults

**It is important to maintain the trust and reputation
imbued in the local authority brands**

*LGA Resident Satisfaction Survey – June 2020

Visibility of the local authority brand

- Cost cutting strategies like digital comms and property co-location threaten to reduce local authority visibility
- Because you rarely see a 'bobby on the beat' you sometimes ask yourself what the police are doing. It's the same thing with local authorities - residents and businesses need to see councils doing something to believe in them
- Deep down, they know local authorities are dealing with difficult subjects like fostering, housing, vulnerable adults and educational challenges ... but for peace of mind and to minimise complaints about taxes they need to 'see' where their money is going

Brand saliency

- To maximise visibility, local authorities need to ‘brand’ everything they own and do - vehicles, buildings, people, publications etc
- Residents want to see the local authority doing the work, not (“expensive”) contractors - research indicates that this is particularly effective when it comes to emotive issues like pothole repair

Brand saliency cont

- Whilst some LATCs need 'branding' for registration or to counter perceptions in some sectors, the main council branding should be used wherever possible
- It is important to resist the urge to create meaningless sub-brands that are expensive to develop and in the absence of enormous ad budgets, will never amount to anything
- Sub-brands rely on the main brand for introductions and kudos...*hello, we are x, we are part of xx council*
- Sub-brands dilute salience of the main brand

The main council brand will always out perform sub-brands in terms of awareness, trust and reassurance

Brand positioning during times of instability

- In times of instability (COVID) brand resilience is key
- Being able to weather the storm is not just about financial security
- If a brand's behaviour upsets people they may shift their allegiance and worse still, tell everyone why!
- But people don't tend to punish brands they like

**Liked brands benefit from enhanced tolerance
they are allowed to make mistakes
and recover from them faster**

It is important a brand is liked, or at least respected

Brand resilience

- Brand resilience is earned and often stems from a decent ethos – John Lewis
- Sometimes it comes from challenging the prevailing market dynamics and forcing others to address poor practice
 - Robert Hiscox believes insurance is a *‘promise to pay’*, which might explain why Hiscox has become a major player in general insurance in less than 15 years
- Or being a customer champion – Lidl and Aldi, old Virgin
- Or from charitable connections - Co-op’s Fair Trade policy

Benefits of a positive brand response to Covid

- Brands that exhibit 'decent' behaviours now will benefit post Covid
 - Admiral Insurance - £25 to every policy holder
 - Hiscox Insurance - hibernated policies
 - Special opening hours – M&S, ASDA etc
- Covid is an opportunity to demonstrate 'decent citizen' brand values – patience, compassion, understanding and kindness
- Enforcing draconian regulations will be called out in media and remembered for a long time - damaging brand reputation and eroding resilience

Difficult times made worse

- Councils were facing financial hardship before Covid
- The additional financial pressures of Covid; the unexpected cost and stress of acquiring sufficient PPE; the additional staffing needs and required workarounds to meet social distancing legislation etc are creating additional pressures on an already stretched resource
- But, as government representatives, people are looking to their local authority for leadership, support and advice

Local authority leadership

- Local authorities need to dig deeper than ever to hold their communities together – to deliberately misquote WB Yeats ~ *things cannot fall apart, the centre must hold*
- The economic, social and psychological effects of Covid will be felt for decades, but there will also be opportunity for those who can hold their nerve (and can afford to weather it out)

It might feel counter intuitive, but Covid provides a good opportunity to strengthen local authority brands through positioning without incurring additional costs

Positioning for difficult times

- **Be visible and look strong**
residents and businesses are looking to you for leadership
- **Be generous where possible**
promote positives and initiatives eg free parking on Saturdays to try and save the high st, even though short term revenues will be less - and don't just do it, tell everyone you are doing it
- **Allow for those who don't have the technology**
they are already feeling isolated and need to be treated with compassion when they get in touch

Positioning for difficult times cont

- **Try not to be seen to 'claw' back revenues**
don't penalise people for lax behaviour, their heads are already full of other anxieties
- **Don't amplify negatives** - there is plenty of negative COVID messaging – try to COVID 'manage' in tone rather than COVID 'crisis'
- **Rather than state the rules, try to explain the need for the legislation**

Embedding resilient behaviours cost effectively

- Local authority employees already know that they are a vital part of the frontline infrastructure in the fight against Covid
- You are already a cohesive group, united in your public service of residents and businesses
- Use the cost effective communications channels you have – internal emails, online resources, notice boards and team reporting structures to remind staff they are important and that

businesses and residents are looking to them for leadership, care and support in adversity