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MA IN MEDIA STUDIES



MASTERS DISSERTATION

Values-driven marketing and IMC: How can emerging critical success factors from a values-driven marketing approach bridge the divide between brand owners and brand implementers in the effective execution and application of IMC?

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10 January 2023

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study investigates how Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) has contributed to a widening rift between brand owners¹ and brand implementers². This rift or disconnect has led to deteriorating relationships between clients and agencies.

This study also examines the positive impact a values-driven marketing approach can have on these relationships, and on the success of IMC implementation in small to medium enterprises (SMEs). The core research question is what do organisations have in common that has enabled their successful implementation of IMC?

The research question is expanded in the following questions:

- What are the critical success factors for bridging the disconnect between brand owners and brand implementers to facilitate the effective execution of IMC?
- How can emerging critical success factors from a values-driven marketing approach bridge the divide between brand owners and brand implementers in the effective execution and application of IMC?

The implementation of IMC introduced a vast range of options for marketers and business owners. However, with it came the rapid deterioration of relationships between brand owners (ie. business owners who need to market their brands) and brand implementers (both internal employees and external agencies and partners). Brand implementers are tasked with finding the most effective and efficient marketing avenues for each business, which is challenging in the absence of a strong working relationship. This disconnect has been described as a “widening rift between clients and agencies” (Mortimer & Laurie, 2019), and has been the subject of serious study and debate over the past decade.

¹ brand owner: Any person who is either the full legal owner of the brand or business in question, or the person who leads the organisation. This person has full autonomy to make decisions on behalf of the brand and business, and can direct effort and resources accordingly. This grouping is frequently referred to as the “Client” or client-side party.

² brand implementer: Anyone involved internally or externally in implementing the brand. Internally this includes employees at various levels. Externally this includes all agencies, consultants, and service providers who can be brought in to assist with the understanding, setup, and final implementation of the brand. This grouping is often referred to as the “Agency” or supplier.

Much of the more recent and more practical research in IMC has originated from the global south and/or emerging economies. These include Pakistan (Taimoor & Maqsood, 2011); New Zealand (Dresler-Hawke & Veer, 2006); Ghana (Anabila, 2019); Nigeria (Abimbola & Kolawole, 2020; Obinwanne & Ukabuilu, 2019); Malaysia (Mokhtar, Abdullah & Baharuddin, 2015); Australia (Hede & Kellett, 2011; Kerr & Kelly, 2015; Orazi et al, 2015; Turner, 2017; Valos et al, 2016); Romania (Oancea, 2016); and the full reach of the World Health Organization (WHO) (Ratzan, 2001). This research, conducted between South Africa and North America, positions itself within this burgeoning field.

The disconnect, or “widening rift”, as described by Mortimer & Laurie (2019) can be thought of as a gap in the understanding and scope of IMC between the brand owners and brand implementers.

There is a lack of clarity as to what IMC is, and how best to manage it on the side of the brand owners who are tasked with directing this endeavour. And, on the side of the brand implementers, who are necessary to effectively implement IMC, there is a wide range of IMC understanding. This understanding is sometimes exacerbated by the brand implementer attempting to educate or assist with IMC implementation in an incomplete or partisan way. Their bias is often due to their context, knowledge, and – in the case of external implementers – their profit and revenue imperatives. These elements can potentially lend bias to both their recommendations and their claimed scope of expertise.

The result of the disconnect is often frustration on both sides of the equation (ie. brand owners and brand implementers). The breakdown often occurs through a combination of a lack of directive and clarity on the strategy and brand identity or differentiation. It also occurs because of a lack of clear roles, responsibilities, outcomes, measures and remuneration structures for all parties. Poor results and return on investment and effort across the board can further fuel the communication breakdown.

In short, this lack of clarity and direction has led to a crisis in the relationships, structures and functions of brand implementers, and how they relate to the brand owner within the context of IMC.

Looking back on the evolving relationship between brand owners and brand implementers (including agencies) the first communications agencies were effectively media agencies. Such agencies brokered advertising space in newspapers or, in the case of Volney B. Palmer (Vos, 2013), it started as a support income stream for other existing and new business interests. Hence, the origin of agencies as brand implementers has commercially driven roots.

The first formal agencies were, in effect, media agencies, which evolved into a range of specialist communication implementers. Their skills ranged from advertising and design, to PR, and media. The advent of the digital age of advertising happened in 1994 when AT&T ran the very first online banner ad on Hotwired.com (Ivanjko & Bezjak, 2017; Pollak, 2010; Mehta, 2019). This humble start led to the revolution in media that we now think of as digital and integrated media. In turn, this media revolution led to the marketing philosophy of IMC.

Aim and Context of the Study

This study aims to interrogate IMC. I examine the impact IMC has had on the nature of the roles and relationships between brand owners and brand implementers, and the rift that has developed between them as a result. This study also analyses the success factors that allow SMEs to implement IMC to support their business objectives. This is achieved by drawing on the findings and insights around IMC origins and challenges, values-driven marketing, and four case studies. The insights from case studies in four widely varied industries are a starting point for creating a simpler approach to implementing effective IMC programs in SMEs. SMEs are pivotal to the growth of economies globally, and a key source of job creation in most emerging economies. These are businesses that have often not had the skills or resources available to effectively implement IMC, which could positively impact the growth of this important sector.

This research developed from insights gained from case studies into the implementation of IMC from a values-driven perspective. These case studies examine business entities from different categories, countries, business development stages and size tiers. This study also contributes to findings on the rift between brand owners and brand implementers.

Value Proposition (VP) Development and Values-Driven Marketing is a background to sharing four long-term case studies in diverse contexts and industries. The findings illustrate the importance of a values-driven approach to marketing as key to the successful implementation of IMC. The case studies involve both qualitative research and the inclusion of experiential field notes garnered from all four businesses across extended time periods with the longest-standing involvement having started in June of 2012 and still being active in October 2022.

The four case studies support the emerging success factors for implementing IMC in an SME context as outlined above, and show that these factors seem to be relevant across a wide range of business sizes, contexts, geographies and life stages. The leaders of these organisations also strongly support the idea of this specific version of Values-Driven Marketing. They consider it as an approach that has helped them achieve better marketing execution of IMC and stronger business results.

The four studies were started at various stages throughout the past decade and the longest standing has been an active project since 2012. Despite the diversity of businesses involved in these studies, certain key “success factors” have been consistently observed. These are believed to be contributing factors to the positive implementation of IMC and the building of strong working relationships with brand implementers across all the businesses under review.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Prior research into the implementation of IMC has largely focused on the definition and efficacy of IMC (Eagle & Kitchen, 2000; Keller, 2016; Kliatchko, 2008; Kliatchko & Schulz, 2014; Laurie & Mortimer, 2019; Luxton et al, 2015; Porcu et al, 2017; Reid, 2003; Schultz & Schultz, 1998). Furthermore, much of this focus has been on understanding the various challenges in implementing IMC, including the widening rift between brand owners and brand implementers (Beard, 1996, 1997 & 1997; Caplin 2016; Ceccotti et al, 2020; Gould et al, 1999; Gralpois, 2021; Mortimer & Laurie, 2017; West & Paliwoda, 1996).

Existing value proposition research focuses on the origin and definition of the concept (Haygood, 2016; Lanning, 2000 & 2015; Mahajan, 2019; Mishra et al, 2019; Ogilvy, 1963; Payne et al, 2020; Porter 1980; Reeves, 1961). It also examines the subsequent theoretical developments and evaluation of its practice and impact on business (Anderson et al, 2006; Baldassarre et al, 2017; Kaplan & Norton, 2001 & 2004; Mishra et al, 2019; Nenonen et al, 2020; Payne & Frown, 2014; Payne et al, 2020; Sales et al, 2017; Voelpel et al, 2004).

Studies into “Mission statements” as analogous to “Values” as well as into Values themselves are largely focused on their impact on business and organisational effectiveness in various contexts (Albion, 1951; Alegre et al, 2019; Anwer et al, 2020; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Bartkus, Glassman & McAfee 2006; Brown, 2018; Hsieh, 2010; Keller, 2009; Mas-Machuta & Marimon, 2019; Rokeach, 1973; Toh et al, 2022).

The cross-over studies into the benefits of combining Value Propositions and Values in an IMC context are less prevalent. The work that does exist covers the five areas of impact that have been identified in the case studies. These five areas of impact were present in existing research on the topic, but not framed in this way before, namely (a) As a way of verbalising intuitive founder knowledge (De Chernatony et al, 2004; Edvardsson, Enquist & Hay, 2006); (b) As key to communicating with brand implementers (Gould et al, 1999; Mortimer & Laurie, 2017); (c) As the start of a process that enables media-neutral planning (Grounds, 2003; Merron, 2003; Orr & Cano-Lopez, 2005; Saada, 2006; Tapp, 2004); (d) As key to hiring and keeping the right internal and external brand implementers (Drucker, 2016; Graham, 2021; Keller & Richey, 2006; Lipp, 2013; Schuele, 2000); and (e) As a way of creating internal alignment and supporting growth (Collins & Porras, 1994; De Chernatony et al, 2004; Edvardsson, Enquist & Hay, 2006; Gleeson, 2021; Lencioni, 2002; Morgan 2020).

Existing studies, then, do not consider the overlapping impact and potential the discreet topics that have to date been studied individually have for improving the implementation success of IMC when combined. This impact could improve implementation both from a business point of view, and from the point of view of improving relationships between brand owners and brand implementers.

In terms of the emerging critical success factors that this study identifies, their validity is supported individually by existing studies, but not yet as a collective:

1. The ownership and driving of the process of IMC implementation by senior management/brand ownership
2. Clarity on roles, responsibilities, measures and remuneration for all brand implementers in the IMC context
3. Clarity and alignment on the Value Proposition of the brand or business with particular emphasis on the Values embodied by the brand or business – or, differently stated, using Values-Driven Marketing as an implementation approach.
4. Access to Brand Management Expertise

This study proposes that viewing these success factors as a model for the successful implementation of IMC has the potential to improve the effectiveness of IMC implementation both from a business results point of view and from the point of view of improving the relationships between brand implementers and brand owners.

The success of this approach is demonstrated in the four case studies reviewed in this study, and more study is recommended into the formulation of a strong theoretical framework based on these insights.

The Disconnect Between Brand Owners and Brand Implementers

To understand the origins of the current owner/implementer relationship, it is helpful to consider three factors. Firstly, the origins and history of advertising, secondly the concept of the “agency” and finally how the relationship between the brand owner and the agency (as brand implementer) originated and has evolved.

In 1786 William Taylor set up what is generally acknowledged as the first advertising agency in the world in London, followed by James “Jem” White who set up R.F. White & Son in London and later by Volney B. Palmer who set up what was effectively a media agency in America in the 1840s, and “clearly recognized he was on to a good idea and referred to his ad business as an advertising agency as early as 1845” (Vos, 2013; Creative Thinks Media, 2008).

Palmer was, interestingly given the current context of agency evolution, primarily a lawyer turned businessman with interests in various industries eventually, but originally coal and then canal construction (the latter serving to support the former). His business interest in the canal company led him to encourage business owners along the length of a new stretch of canal to advertise their goods in the various publications he represented in order to improve the demand in those areas, and thereby fill up the empty capacity on ships in the canal on their return journey from a coal drop-off thus increasing canal revenue and taxes. Palmer actively sought out the businesses along the canal and pitched them on the benefits of advertising in order to increase their business, and even advised them on which publications and messages might be most beneficial. (Vos 2013) So the world's first advertising agency was in fact a blend of media sales house, creative agency and business consulting, all rolled into the one person of Volney B. Palmer.

The first advertising agency that resembles modern advertising agencies was set up in Philadelphia in 1869 with the catchy name N.W. Ayer & Son, and this is generally considered the birth of the industry dedicated solely to creating and executing adverts on behalf of clients. N.W. Ayer & Son would go on to create some of the most longstanding and well-known slogans to date including “A diamond is forever” for DeBeers in 1947 which – in the year 2000 it was named the best advertising slogan of the 20th century by *Advertising Age* magazine. The success of these kinds of campaigns, as well as the economic context of growth following the World Wars led to a surge of growth in both interest in advertising and the agencies that specialised in it (Ad Age, 1999 & 2003; Epstein, 1982; Wlosik, 2017).

A myriad of factors from the arrival of television advertising in 1942, the concretisation of different skills and approaches such as Paul Rand's “Thoughts on Design” in 1947, to the emergence of endorsement advertising and a shift to focusing on women as consumers through the 1950s: “The customer isn't a moron, she's your wife” (Ogilvy, 1963). These factors contributed to creating growth in the broad creative industry and ushered in the beginnings of overtly different types of agencies including media houses (which of course were the original “agency”), PR agencies, design agencies, advertising agencies and even marketing consultancies (AAAA, 2018; Ellis, 2018).

This boom in the late 1940s and 1950s ushered in the “Mad Men” Madison Avenue era of advertising in what is thought of as the “golden era of advertising”. The golden age of advertising stretches broadly from 1960 to the late 1980s. The industry at the time has been described as “...a time of big ideas, three martini lunches and larger-than-life personalities who graced both the society pages and the business columns” (Della Femina, 2017, video).

The first significant impact on the advertising industry after this period was the rapid consolidation of ownership. An estimated one-third of the 100 largest advertising agencies in the 1980s remained independent by the 1990s after mass acquisitions and mergers into large multinational agency holdings (Sharman, 2018; Scott, 2013).

The second significant impact on the world of advertising happened in the early 1990s with the introduction of digital advertising. In 1994 AT&T ran the first online banner ad on Hotwired.com magazine for a 3-month campaign that cost \$30,000, and thus digital advertising was born. With it came the impetus for the blurring of lines between media, creative work, and data analysis. It also went beyond the work of agencies into customer service and the famous Five P’s of the Marketing Mix to bring us to the current context of the IMC philosophy (Mehta, 2019; Scott, 2013). From that small start digital ad spending worldwide is now projected to reach \$517,51 billion by the year 2023 (Mehta, 2019).

The divide between pre- and post-internet (digital) advertising brought an explosion of digital media platforms. It also brought a myriad of new advertising channels and environments that were made available to advertisers allowing the opportunity for IMC to emerge and become the approach most recommended across the past 25 years. It also created a new level of complexity for the agency-client or brand owner-brand implementer relationship, and the need for new understandings of roles and responsibilities within the machinery of marketing.

Methodological Approach for the Study

The objective of this study is to seek commonalities across a diverse group of cases. Therefore, Gummesson’s concept of attempting to “present complexity so that it uncovers essential patterns and meanings of seeming confusion and chaos and assist clients in

turning that knowledge into actionable insights” (Gummesson, 2006, p171) is particularly pertinent. Each case study contains enormous complexity on its own, and in this instance, I consider four diverse cases and aggregate all their details into a useful pattern of insights. This meant that the level of complexity was extremely high overall. The complexity necessitated a high-level dynamic systematic view of all the interrelations and interactions in the system as recommended by Gummesson (2006) rather than attempting to isolate specific discrete causality.

Researcher Positionality

I have worked in consumer marketing for over 24 years. For the last 13 years, I’ve worked in the context of small to medium businesses across multiple countries. My role is to help businesses as they create or refine their brands and then implement them effectively in their chosen market/s.

My experience in this industry means that I have considerable contextual experience and knowledge of the field. I have helped multiple clients to successfully create and implement brands and IMC programs. Having been part of many processes led to the insights and core questions in this study. Particularly What do all of these different organisations have in common that has enabled their successful implementation of IMC?

The key challenges I found in creating these business case studies, particularly as they focus on existing and previous clients, were those of objectivity (Patton & Appelbaum, 2003). Managing this complexity (Gummesson, 2006), and defining my role and views of the businesses as part of interpreting the insights and data gained in the course of these studies (Woodside & Wilson, 2003) was also something to grapple with.

I had to be aware of my subjectivity as a researcher, especially in the context of businesses that I am so familiar with, and how this was the key to enabling openness. I became open to new possibilities and explanations as the common themes emerged, and my insight into these organisations enabled me better access (Patton & Appelbaum, 2003). Owing to the fact that strong mutual trust has been developed with these organisations, over a long time period, I had more access and permission to engage the organisation. Through these relationships, I gained access to key pieces of information and research articles that may not have been given to an external researcher.

However, I was self-reflexive about my existing views of the factors involved in each case. Throughout the study, I worked hard to ensure that I was not including or excluding data or insights due to my existing knowledge and bias. I found, for example, that as I considered the four cases as a group, rather than individually, I had to acknowledge that my presence in their businesses had been part of their success. This led to me adding a fourth emerging success factor, “access to brand management expertise”. Initially, I did not anticipate that this would be so key.

In addition to being aware of the enormous complexity, I also needed to take into account other factors. I had to acknowledge the context of each organisation and the impact of the varying number and degree of relationships I held with each organisation. I had to consider these factors when I sought the patterns across the sample. I was afforded a level of existing knowledge and insight into the businesses that would have been almost impossible for an external researcher to gain because of the rapport I developed. I sought “deep understanding” (Woodside & Wilson, 2003) and my existing depth and length of relationships as well as the trust developed with each of the four organisations studied were critical to this. It also meant that the level of sharing and openness by the primary interviewees (the brand owners) was significantly higher than it would have been had they not already had an established relationship of trust. These factors contributed to a much better data set and stronger insights generated as a result of my existing role as a consultant to all these organisations.

Summary of the Key Findings

In the four case studies I examined, there were four consistent factors that enabled them to improve the relationship between brand owners and brand implementers (particularly external agency-based implementers). These crucial factors contributed to the successful implementation of IMC in these cases.

The chapters that follow delve into the four critical success factors:

1. Senior management or brand owner’s ability to drive and implement IMC.

2. Clarity on roles, responsibilities, measures, and remuneration for all brand implementers in the IMC context.
3. Clarity and alignment on the value proposition of the brand or business, with emphasis on Values-Driven Marketing as an implementation approach.
4. Access to brand management expertise on a contract or educational basis in order to leverage this skill and experience that is financially viable for SMEs.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter theorises some of the ways that relationships affect the implementation of IMC. Drawing on the work of Beard (1999), Ceccotti et al (2019), Gould (1999), Keller (2016), and Mortimer & Laurie (2011, 2017, 2019, 2019) it shows how fractured relationships cause breakdowns in the implementation of the complex pieces involved in IMC. Furthermore, this chapter looks at how a values-driven approach enables stronger relationships and better IMC implementation. Here the work of Albion (1951), Balmer & Gray (2003) and Ming (2020) show how central the idea of values has been to business across multiple decades. Lanning (2000, 2015, 2019) and Payne & Frow (2014) support the use of a Value Proposition for strategic clarity.

The research gap that this literature review has highlighted is in regard to the inter-relation of all these key pieces and linking heretofore separate, even siloed, research areas into a cohesive and practically implementable approach that enables effective IMC implementation within SME businesses.

In accordance with the UCT requirements, the UCT Author-date referencing based on the Harvard referencing style was applied strictly throughout this dissertation.

Defining Integrated Marketing Communications

Integrated Marketing Communications, IMC, is a marketing philosophy. The philosophy recognises the degree of complexity and proliferation of media, messaging, and engagement touchpoints that a brand needs to manage in its interaction with a customer before, during, and after a purchase.

An early definition of IMC by the American Association of Advertising Agencies (McGrath, 2010) describes it as marketing communication that considers the intrinsic value of a multidisciplinary approach. Such an approach recognises the strategic roles of each communication discipline (Eagle & Kitchen, 2000). Seeing IMC in this way was subsequently expanded to include all the aspects of consumer engagement within a business, rather than just the communications aspects. Eagle & Kitchen (2000) still view

IMC as an “emergent discipline”, with the promise of it evolving into a strategic tool to help create consistency of message regardless of the media used.

At around the same time, the definition of IMC was also broadened to a business level approach rather than just a communications focus. Schultz & Schultz explain that “IMC is a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute, and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects and other relevant external and internal audiences” (1998, p. 18).

Looking at the first 20 years of understanding and implementation of IMC, Kliatchko & Schulz (2014) defined the top four “notions” of IMC as follows:

1. Use of multiple channels, touchpoints, or contact points to deliver a message to a targeted audience.
2. Consumer centricity and the need for deep consumer understanding, consumer engagements, and ongoing connections and conversations as a basis for marketing communications, planning, and execution.
3. Coordination and consistency of 360° or total communications solutions. This involves the coordination of messages and media channels to create and deliver one-sight, one-sound, clear messages to achieve synergy. This also extends to coordinating different elements to work together, aside from media and communications, such as packaging, pricing, distribution, and product design.
4. Involvement of the overall business process– not just marketing communications. This presupposes understanding the business and the integration not only of marketing and sales but also of all functions within the organisation. These functions encompass both horizontal and vertical integration across business platforms within the firm; everyone in the organisation is a steward of integration. At the core of the business process is the consumer.

Various researchers have consistently referred to an earlier definition of IMC. This definition seems to hold true today: IMC is “an audience-driven business process of

strategically managing stakeholders, content, channels and results of brand communication programs” (Kliatchko, 2008, p. 140).

Analysing the Efficacy of IMC

In response to the rapid and ongoing evolution of the media environment, IMC has been adopted globally across large and small businesses. It is widely acknowledged as a key approach to marketing and business strategy.

Multiple papers have affirmed the positive relationships between IMC implementation and good brand and business outcomes in sales volume, leads, or revenue (Kliatchko & Schultz, 2014; Low 2000; Reid 2003). They can also extend to key brand metrics such as awareness, loyalty, and market share. Low (2000) in particular states that the correlation “appears to be strong”.

A detailed study into firm-wide IMC evaluation suggests “that a higher level IMC is positively associated with a higher level of economic and financial performance” (Porcu, Del Barrio-Garcia & Kitchen, 2017, p. 710). Laurie & Mortimer (2019) state that most academics and practitioners agree that IMC is the most effective process to adopt in a complex, multi-channel environment, and that IMC has been proven to result in positive impacts on both brand and financial performance (Laurie & Mortimer, 2019).

Further studies in various geographies, countries, industries and even cultural and religious communities suggest that IMC has become a prevalent and highly effective approach to marketing communications. What’s more, it has validity in wide-ranging contexts. For example, an early study by Nowak & Phelps (1994) theorised the impact of integrated media on the traditional advertising industry, while Kitchen, Kim & Schultz (2008) found that IMC has become a reality and that research needs to shift from agency to client organisations to develop better implementation processes.

IMC has been demonstrated to have value in both services and products industries (Grove, Carlson & Dorsch, 2007; Valos et al 2016). It also has value in geographies from the UAE (Al Qaied, Al-Qeod, Khraiwish, Alwadi & Al-Gasawneh, 2022) and Australia (Wickham & Hall, 2006) to Spain and Belarus (Butkouskaya et al, 2021).

Consistent messaging and media usage in IMC has benefits in communicating wide-ranging topics. Such topics range from encouraging healthy living (Dresler-Hawke & Veer, 2006); micro-finance in emerging markets (Anabila, 2019); hotels in Nigeria (Obinwanne & Ukabuilu, 2019) and Croatia (Šerić & Gil-Saura, 2011); romance fiction marketing (Dungee, 2003); water quality in Malaysia (Mokhtar, Abdullah & Baharuddin, 2015); micro-fashion organisations in the UK (Henninger, Alevizou & Oates, 2016); universities in Nigeria (Abimbola & Kolawole, 2020); special events marketing (Hede & Kellett, 2011); health literacy communication (Ratzan, 2001); the trucking industry (Garber, Kim & Dotson, 2020); sustainable development (Šķiltere & Bormane, 2018), multi-cultural sporting events (Turner, 2017) and even IMC education itself (Kerr & Kelly, 2015).

There is also work showing the positive effects of the integration of established and emerging media into IMC. For example, social media (Taimoor & Maqsood, 2011; Oancea, 2016; Šerić, 2015; Valos et al, 2016), online word-of-mouth (Nekmat & Gower, 2012), Public Relations (Place, Smith & Lee, 2016), digital media with multiple stakeholders (Orazi et al, 2015), and email with video (Scheinbaum, Hampel & Kang, 2017).

The Disconnect Between Brand Owners and Brand Implementers

As early as 1996, Beard highlighted the fact that changes in the environment of marketing implementation in general, and the implementation of IMC specifically, have highlighted the problems inherent in the client and advertising-agency relationship. Here Beard includes issues related to who should be coordinating such complex campaigns with their multiple roleplayers, tools and media. He goes on to consider the evolving nature of the roles that all these roleplayers should deliver within this equally rapidly evolving, complex context (Beard, 1996, 1997).

In considering how IMC programs are practically implemented, Keller (2016) takes this a step further saying that developing the optimal IMC program requires choosing the best set of communication options and strategically managing the relationships between them. Arguably, the relationships between the agencies or internal implementers bringing all

these carefully chosen options to life are equally, if not more, important in this implementation.

Recently Mortimer and Laurie suggest that rather than having become more integrated in the intervening time, there is a “widening rift between clients and agencies” (Mortimer & Laurie, 2019, p29) that impacts both the likelihood of IMC being implemented. This rift then affects the ability of clients to extract the full value of the IMC approach. The relationship is found to be at an all-time low, and the rift between clients and agencies and its impact on the adoption of IMC has not been recognised by academics. This is actively impeding the implementation of IMC in many organisations (Mortimer & Laurie, 2019).

Having proposed a set of evaluation questions to help marketers make better IMC media choices, Keller (2016) proposes that one of the key areas that still needs work is to create a guideline to help brand owners effectively implement IMC. These guidelines range from organisational structure and process to how the organisation should work with partners and agencies in the design and implementation of IMC (Keller, 2016).

In other words, there is still much work to be done in understanding the disconnect that has emerged between brand owners and brand implementers as IMC has become an established approach. We also need to find pragmatic ways to bridge the gap that has formed as the implementation of this approach has become a reality in the world of marketing in the past decade.

The Changing Nature of Relationships in the Context of IMC

While there is general support for the correlation between the implementation of IMC and positive brand metrics, the changing landscape of IMC has had a significant impact on the nature of the relationship between brand owners and brand implementers.

During the ‘golden age’ of ad agencies the relationship could be categorised as brand owners contracting the agencies as “experts” in communicating compelling brand messages to the target market (Blank, 1963; Woods, 1994).

The advent of IMC, and in particular the glut of digital data now available about target markets, often owned by the brands, has led to a shift in this power balance. The ownership of insight into target markets shifts back to the brand owner rather than vesting with the brand implementers (Beard, 1996; Gould et al, 1999).

This shift is seen as one of the main reasons that agencies are being forced to step back into the more traditional agency theory role of supplier rather than a partner (Mortimer & Laurie, 2019).

The remainder of this section shows that there are many factors impacting this balance of power and how we characterise the nature of this relationship.

Theoretical Frameworks for the Relationship

Various theoretical frameworks have been applied to the traditional agency/client relationship in academic work. Much of the emphasis is pre-IMC falling on Agency Theory with its contract-based relationship ie. the two parties contract to pay X for Y services.

This approach is considered potentially restrictive within the IMC context. Most theorists feel some level of integration or a more inclusive working relationship is required. Duncan and Moriarty (1997) specifically address the client/agency relationship with respect to IMC and speak of a partnership between the two as opposed to having the agency viewed merely as a supplier or vendor.

Some of the other key theoretical frameworks that have been applied to the client/ agency relationship are the organisational theory approach of Integration which is concerned with the alignment and consistency of a corporate culture (Frost et al, 1991; Gould et al, 1999) and Interorganizational Theory which looks at firms working together to achieve a common purpose (Gould et al, 1999).

Gould et al (1999) conclude that neither Agency Theory nor Integration Theory are sufficient to model the complex relationships around IMC. Furthermore, building strong

alliances based on a combination of contract and relationship would be a better model for this relationship.

In their industry study, Mortimer and Laurie (2019) found that agencies are aware of their vulnerabilities due to this shift in power and feel they must resist being pushed back into a traditional tactical role. The way to ensure this is by providing broader strategic views/knowledge around communications, as well as insight and creativity. This “Shared Influence” model of the relationship requires a high level of information sharing, trust and commitment within the relationship between the brand owner and brand implementer. As we know such relationships have been negatively impacted in recent years.

With the adoption of IMC, the evidence suggests the balance of power in the relationship between clients and agencies in terms of who directs the process. With the increasing digital insight into consumers, this power of direction and leadership of the process of creative implementation seems to be shifting towards the Client. This is because the client now not only has the power to ‘reward and punish’ the agency in terms of awarding or removing work from them, but also the “expert power” (ie. the power of influence that comes from either having more experience or more insight into a specific area than the other party) that had previously belonged to the agency (Mortimer & Laurie, 2019).

Role Ambiguity and the Impact on the Relationship

Role ambiguity is an area of study that previously operated mainly in intra-organisational contexts. However, it has come to be usefully applied to the inter-organisational context of the relationship between brand owners and brand implementers who include both organisationally internal and external players.

In his study on client role ambiguity and its impact on the client/agency relationships, Beard (1999) notes that marketing client representatives need to interact more holistically and fulfil ‘boundary-spanning roles’. This extension of their roles means that they are more susceptible to role ambiguity (Beard 1999).

Beard (1999) goes on to demonstrate that earlier studies show that there is a positive correlation between the stability of the Agency/Clients relationship and the size of the organizations involved. His research shows that the nature of the relationships and dynamics between smaller and larger organisations and their implementing agencies are more similar than he had thought previously (Beard 1999).

Earlier explanations support the idea that larger client organisations and agencies tend to be more professionally managed. This professionalism is despite the fact that they have increased complexity and a need to formalise control. It may also be less pertinent to the state and success of Client/Ad Agency relationships than occupational role clarity (both inter and intra organisationally) and process clarity on both sides.

A key area of concern for Beard (1996) in his earlier study into the Client/Ad Agency relationship is the increased impact of a longstanding issue. He argues that the highly complex and demanding role played by the client representative has also contributed to the decline in the quality of these relationships (Beard 1996). He also notes that the lack of training, experience and clarity around the role of the client representative contributes via poor performance on their part to their own negative evaluation of the agency performance and therefore their low client satisfaction with the agency performance.

Overall, Beard finds that whereas marketers have clearly adopted the IMC approach even at this early stage of its development, the same clarity cannot be found on the agency side:

...there seems to be some debate concerning whether their ad agencies can offer both a wider diversity of communications tools, and more importantly, provide coordination among the wielders of these tools. Similarly, the debate continues over the issue of whether client organizations even want agencies to perform this role, with many marketers apparently preferring to lead and coordinate the development and execution of their own marketing programs, while purchasing marketing services, as needed, from various agencies. Thus the IMC approach appears to be contributing to the definition of new roles and expectations in the client-agency relationship (Beard, 1996, p. 211).

Gould et al (1999) also look at the issues around the differing perceptions of responsibilities and roles in managing IMC. They find there is a conflict that arises due to clients being motivated by overarching marketing responsibility versus agencies who also want to take responsibility. Such agencies are often more narrowly focused on their specialisation rather than the holistic brand perspective which is needed to fully implement IMC.

While Gould et al (1999) proposed that fewer agencies with longer tenure would likely lead to better implementation of IMC, the reality (as measured by Caplin, 2016) is that clients operating in large markets have an average of 24 agencies working with them. What's more, about 25% of the clients surveyed have over 50 agencies on their books, and this is likely to become the norm going forward.

Given this context, it is imperative that brand owners are able to easily and effectively brief all agencies and implementers on their brand's overall strategies and the role each one plays within this framework. In order to do this effectively, brand owners need to be 100% clear on their own brand propositions, customers, objectives and strategies. They also need to be able to easily, concisely and clearly communicate these pieces to a wide array of agencies and implementers in order to achieve their business and IMC goals.

The Impact of Relationships on IMC

Ceccotti, Venuccio & Mattiacci found, in their study of the evolution of agency-client relationships in Italy, that there has been a “progressive deterioration of relational dynamics” between agencies and clients (2020, p. 66).

Gould, Grein and Lerman (1999) proposed a greater degree of integration between clients and agencies. Fewer agencies are being kept on for longer in order to create a business alliance. However, recent research (Caplin 2016; Laurie & Mortimer, 2019, Mortimer & Laurie, 2019) and industry literature (Bonn, 2020; Cacheux, 2021; Coates, 2020; Costa, 2021; Condon, 2021; Cunnah, 2021; Davis, 2021; Steele 2021; Gralpois, 2021; Moti, 2021; Schwartz, 2021; Nielsen, 2021; Whitman, 2021) indicate that the opposite has happened. Agencies are being moved away from strategic involvement to becoming tactical suppliers who respond to specific briefs issued by the client.

This is also in line with the shift in data ownership, management, and insight generation. These responsibilities are moving in-house as tools and platforms have made it much more feasible for clients to integrate all their data sources and own their consumer knowledge without third-party involvement such as agencies.

Another key factor in the shift of power towards the client is the consensus that IMC needs to be strategised, implemented, and driven from a C-suite level within an organisation. This shift provides greater effectiveness. Thus the strategic elements of IMC have moved further from agencies and higher up the chain within client organisations. This shift has pushed agencies closer to a commoditised market based on price (Calderwood, Koslow & Sasser, 2021; Quebra, Bick & Abratt, 2013; West & Paliwoda, 1996).

Mortimer & Laurie (2017) identified four main themes on how and why the relationship between clients (brand owners) and agencies as brand implementers has changed within the context of IMC and these changes are summarised as follows:

- (1) client ownership of the consumer journey
- (2) lack of a strategic role of agencies
- (3) client responsibility for task allocation; and
- (4) agency specialisation.

The shift towards the IMC approach has had a dramatic and noticeable impact on the nature and status of the relationship between brand owners and brand implementers (particularly agencies). This shift has contributed to the current poor state of this relationship, and the lack of clarity as to roles and responsibilities within an IMC context.

Client Ownership of IMC Implementation: Trust, Clarity, and Direction

As early as 1996 Beard presciently framed the challenge of new roles for both clients and agencies as being in flux. He questions whether ad agencies can offer the wider range of communications tools and services needed in an IMC context. He also questions whether clients want or need agencies to take on this role of offering a wider range of services (Beard, 1996). Not to mention there is the need to consider the human resources needed

to understand and implement them. The preference is to bring the strategic, planning and directing of IMC in-house rather than relying on agencies to make these decisions for them.

This change in the allocation of responsibility between client and agency was a core question in multiple studies. Many studies (Beard 1999; Gould, Grein, Lerman 1999) found that clients are no longer willing to outsource the strategic and management responsibilities for the implementation of brand communications. Rather, they prefer to take the responsibility in order to take a holistic marketing strategy approach. They would rather do this than leave agencies to direct the implementation of brand communications and promotion based on their own experience, disciplines, areas of expertise, and revenue generation models. More than 20 years later, researchers are still finding that it can be unclear for both the agency and the client as to who has the responsibility of initiating an IMC approach (Laurie & Mortimer 2019).

In an earlier study, the findings indicate that most clients have an understanding of IMC (Laurie & Mortimer, 2011). This understanding and ownership of IMC by the client has resulted in a change in the balance of power between the client and the agency. Agencies are aligned with this view and feel quite strongly that clients need to take more responsibility in providing clarity and support in terms of actively defining the roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved. There is also the issue of the hierarchy between them that needs to be considered (Mortimer & Laurie 2017).

The need for the brand owner to take responsibility for IMC direction has not necessarily meant that the brand owners have the skills and/or experience to do so. The practical application of this role allocation does not seem to have translated in general to excellence in practice in terms of clarity of objective and measurement setting by the client. This lack of transparency can lead to vagueness as to whether the brief was met or not, and subjectiveness rather than data as a basis for evaluating agency effectiveness (Patti, Hartley, van Dessel & Baack, 2015). Similarly, a recent Italian study found some “client disorientation” occurring in a fragmenting communications market (Ceccotti et al, 2019). This explains that with this rapid diversification of media options and the blurring of lines between traditional media categories and the agencies that implement them, the risk of client confusion in terms of these choices is high (Ceccotti et al, 2019).

Furthermore, they may not be able to adequately structure, measure and reward each engagement with an agency. They do find, though, that this disorientation does seem to be gradually disappearing as clients learn about the specific contributions each type of agency is capable of delivering (Ceccotti et al, 2019).

It is clear that there is considerable work needed within brand owner/client organisations in order to improve their ability to manage the work and relationships needed for IMC to succeed. There is also a need for agencies to adjust their business models and offerings in order to be able to supply the appropriate work to support the client while still maintaining their own business sustainability.

Gould et al (1999) conclude that the key ideas of clarity and trust need to be developed for a common purpose that is based on shared information and perspectives. Doing this leads to better implementation. This conclusion is reaffirmed by Caplin (2016) who says there is a need to focus on stemming the loss of trust in agencies by clients through structured and transparent evaluation, assessment and feedback.

The key finding in the study by Mortimer & Laurie (2019) is that the client (or brand owner) must be the one to define and share the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved. This should be achieved as early as possible in the process in order to create clarity and focus. However, they also note that with an average of 24 agencies working for clients in major markets, the expectation is that these numbers will continue to grow. In turn, this leadership role will only become more challenging for clients.

In addition to clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of all the parties involved, the client also has the responsibility to ensure that all parties are clearly briefed in terms of the identity of the brand, objectives of the brand, the project, and their parts in the overall strategy.

Clear, formal briefing of brand implementers and the building of trust are also key findings from the Laurie & Mortimer (2019) study.

Remuneration and Measurement

Eagle and Kitchen (1999) identify that one of the major challenges for IMC is less about what it is, or how it works, but how to measure its effectiveness. Laurie & Mortimer also found that a “lack of clarity in terms of responsibility can lead to agencies fighting for a larger share of the work despite it being outside of their specialist area which is obviously of concern to specialist agencies, leading to conflict rather than collaboration” (Laurie & Mortimer, 2019, p. 243).

In addition to clear role allocation, clients also need to have a strong focus on creating a media implementation strategy that has associated accountability, clear outcomes, and specified and linked remuneration.

There have been several ideas tabled to formalise measuring IMC which take different approaches. One of these ideas has been to use statistical modelling to identify factors that correlate to IMC to develop a 3-step scale that measures the degree of IMC (Low, 2000). Others have suggested creating equational metrics for brand touchpoints (Reinold & Tropp, 2012), or creating a firm-wide IMC scale and audit system to ensure effective measurement which supports improved IMC performance and broader acceptance of the approach going forward (Porcu et al 2017). No single measurement system for IMC has yet been broadly accepted into practice by the industry.

Performance or deliverable linked/based remuneration based on effective measurement and tracking has also been identified by several recent industry papers (Bonn, 2020; Cacheux, 2021; Coates, 2020; Kaplowitz, 2021; Gralpois, 2021; Moti, 2021; Schwartz, 2021; Whitman, 2021). This is a topic to be addressed in helping simplify and smooth the current relationship crisis between agencies and clients. According to these authors, there should be a consideration for all brand owners implementing or further developing an IMC approach in their businesses.

Agency Flexibility vs Specialisation

There is a strong recent understanding that agencies who attempt to do it all and do it well are rare, and that a “simple rule of thumb of remembering that no one agency is best at everything, and nothing in life is free” (Mortimer & Laurie 2019, p. 35).

This viewpoint supports the idea of agency evolution and specialisation (ie. Google Ad or Social Media or PR or Media or Insight agencies rather than “Full-service agencies”, or the shift to geographic specialist agencies) as the strongest business proposition for agencies. It also reinforces the idea that the central leadership and implementation control and responsibility of an IMC approach need to come from the client, and not any single agency as discussed above (Bugge, 2010; Crawford, 2018; Cheung, Mirza & Leung, 2015; Grabher, 2001; Joshi & Lakshmikantha, 2022; Kitchen, Spickett-Jones & Grimes, 2007; Knuth, 2010).

Ceccotti et al (2020) identify some key differences among the types of agencies and their response to the shift that IMC has brought about. This is worth examining as most other studies have considered all agencies as similar, often focusing only on advertising agencies (Calderwood et al, 2021; O’Connor et al, 2016; Vafeas, 2021; West & Paliwoda, 1996) or on highly similar agencies types (Quebra et al, 2013) rather than differentiating between different types of specialised agencies.

When the agency offers strategic consulting services, it manages to avoid price competition and obtain a more mature and lasting relationship....This is especially the case for media centres and digital consulting agencies (that support the client in digital transformation). On the other hand, when agencies undertake the vicious path of relational volatility, there is a reduction at managerial level of their marketing counterparts. This is most frequently the case for advertising and PR agencies (Ceccotti et al, 2020, p. 76).

This research by Cacciotti et al indicates that advertising and PR agencies have been much slower to make the shift to strategic and data-focused services/partnerships with clients. Owing to this delay they are at much higher risk of becoming what they call “fungible”. On the other hand, media and digital agencies have become deep, data-driven experts who can offer an integrated value proposition and support the client’s strategy, and so have remained high-value, long-term resources for clients.

For example, working with SMEs across the USA, Canada and South Africa for the past decade has led to the usage of external agencies for a range of responsibilities. These

include graphic design (both general and packaging specific), content creation agencies (social media specific), specialist digital media implementation agencies (Google and Social Media specialist agencies individually), web design and development agencies, Public Relations agencies (for both media outreach and social influencer campaigns), CRM management & implementation agencies, and consumer & media research agencies. In addition, in the implementation of brands we have worked directly with media suppliers in areas such as direct mail, regional and national television and with suppliers such as collateral and packaging printers (various formats), signage suppliers and implementers, and directly with various digital advertising platforms. In the 13 years, I have worked outside of national and multinational corporate environments with SMEs (largely medium enterprises with considerable marketing spend in at least three instances), we have never contracted a traditional advertising agency or anyone who purported to be a “full-service” agency. This is due to the fees required for such agency resources, and poor previous experiences with multi-focused agencies vs specialist agencies in terms of meeting deliverables, deadlines and generating a positive return on the investment (ROI) or return on ad spend (ROAS) (Jacobsen, 2009 – 2022).

Data Access and “Ownership” of the Consumer and Brand

The complexity of IMC implementation, the higher number of agencies involved, and the impacts of agency turf wars and hierarchical politics has led to a decline in trust and sharing of information between Clients and Agencies. This complexity has been exacerbated or accelerated by the fact that clients now have significantly more access and ownership to consumer data with the advent of digital media and tracking as well as better internally tracked and shared consumer data (eg. sales, customer service, and other internal sources), and therefore have more direct ownership of the understanding of, and relationship with their consumers and less reliance on their agencies for data, insight and decision making than has historically been true (Orr & Cano-Lopez, 2005; Peltier, Schibrowsky & Shultz, 2003; Quinn et al, 2016).

This shift has supported the independence of clients in terms of their shift away from the Alliance Model towards the Agency Theory Model, and they now more often bring in specific agency or internal parties to implement specific, circumscribed pieces of work without always sharing the full plan or strategy that the work forms part of, and without

relying on the agency partners to drive the holistic implementation or campaigns as they may have done in the past.

C-suite Influence and Involvement

In examining the client/agency relationship regarding IMC, Gould et al specifically note that it is particularly important that “top management in both the agency and the client firms provides leadership in internal marketing and implementing relational aspects of IMC for it to succeed” (Gould et al, 1999, p. 10).

This idea of IMC being a C-suite responsibility has been supported by numerous studies across the past 20 years and is born out as a key factor affecting the success of IMC implementation.

There are broadly two reasons why C-suite ownership is key for IMC implementation. Firstly it is a key element of a holistic strategy that is driven at the senior management level. Secondly, the effective implementation of IMC crosses functional groupings (such as sales, marketing, and customer service), as well as multiple organisational levels (such as retail store staff, corporate marketers, and investor relations), and this scope requires direction from the top of the organisation.

Quinn et al find that “compelling evidence confirms that marketing ‘must be an integral part of the organization’s decision-making framework’ (2015, p2). The requests for data and insight are also increasingly coming from “higher up in the organization” (Quinn et al, 2015, p. 14). This finding is echoed by Laurie & Mortimer (2019) who believe that an IMC culture must come from the top of both brand owner and brand implementer organisations in order to ensure that the strategic ideas influence how the organisation does business holistically. Kliatchko & Shultz (2015) summarise this challenge saying that IMC issues have to become ‘C-suite’ challenges.

One of the unexpected results of this need for IMC to be driven from the top of an organisation is that it has in some ways contributed to the deterioration of the relationships under scrutiny here (ie. the key relationship between brand owners and brand implementers). This is due to the increased distance between the agencies and the

organisational strategy. However, it could also be a key driver in creating renewed clarity around the objectives of IMC, the impetus for its correct implementation, and being part of the solution to building renewed, more positive relationships with internal and external brand implementers.

The Importance of Value Propositions

Starting from Keller's (2016) directive it seems that academic and industry parties with a vested interest in ensuring the IMC are well implemented to help address the disconnect between brand owners/clients and brand implementers/agencies. This understanding will lead the charge to "develop a similar set of comprehensive criteria to guide internal efforts within the [brand owner] firm" (Keller, 2016, p. 300).

While this points to a large scope of work across a wide range of questions and topics, there is evidence across the literature that indicates a good point to start with would be clarity around the brand. Based on this, clarity in the briefing process enables all parties to understand their role, their deliverables against the brand objective, and their contribution to the overall brand implementation project (Ceccotti et al 2019; Gould et al 1999; Laurie & Mortimer 2019; Mortimer & Laurie, 2017).

Value Proposition Definition and Origin

The idea of a form of "proposition" to offer the customer is said to have originated in marketing as early as 1914 when Starch proposed the idea of communicating a proposition to customers (Mishra et al, 2020; Payne, Frow, Steinhoff & Eggert, 2020). This was then built upon to create the idea of a "USP" or "Unique Selling Proposition" by Rosser Reeves, compatriot advertising leader alongside David Ogilvy and author of *Reality in Advertising*, originally published in 1961. (Haygood, 2016; Reeves, 2017).

The term "Value Proposition" was first used by Michael J. Lanning in 1982 who was then a junior consultant with McKinsey & company, having spent six years as a brand manager with Procter & Gamble prior to this. Lanning created the term to refer to a very specific idea of a customer-focused approach to strategy. This came after being disappointed by what was available in the academic and consulting work around strategy. During this time thinking was around Porter's "Competitive Strategy" (1980) and the

McKinsey “The Business System” approach, where the focus was on competitive and product-driven differentiation rather than delivering value to the end user. Having come from a product marketing context at P&G, Lanning found this approach wanting. Lanning then proposed a system he called the “Value Delivery System” as an alternative approach to business strategy, and it was centred around the “VP” or Value Proposition (Mahajan, 2019).

Lanning defines his original conception of the VP as follows:

The proposition includes a scenario of specific experiences those customers will derive in return for the price (or something else of value). These customers will realise and perceive some value in this scenario, including benefits or positive experiences and price, costs and negative experiences (ie. trade-offs). Thus, it is a ‘VP’. A VP is the most fundamental element of a customer-centric business strategy. A VP is a statement for guiding internal leadership and management of a business strategy; it makes clear what the business intends to actually make happen for the target customers (who are identified in the VP). It should not explain how the VP will be delivered (ie. provided and communicated); the strategy (as a VDS) should articulate the VP and how it will be provided and communicated (Mahajan, 2019, p. 238).

Lanning is also very clear as to what a VP should be, stating that the five key strategic choices a VP should make are:

1. Who are the target customers (or other entities) for this VP?
 2. What is this VP’s time horizon?
 3. What do we want and propose that these customers/entities do?
 4. What competing alternative(s) do these entities have? (What are they most likely to do if they do not accept our VP?)
 5. What resulting experiences, including price, costs and any trade-offs, will they derive compared to their alternatives if they do as we propose?
- (Lanning, 2015; Mahajan, 2019)

Lanning (2015) also emphasises that a Value Proposition must be formulated but then also chosen (ie. committed to), delivered and communicated in order to be of real value to

the business. His conception of a Value Proposition is that it defines the precise objectives of a business and it includes a clear statement of the objective; a decision to commit to one of the options; and commitment from each department (not just marketing) to use it to guide their day-to-day operational decision-making (Lanning, 2015).

Lanning went on to create a consulting business around the idea of a value delivery system that is focused on “Delivering Profitable Value”. Delivering Profitable Value is a phrase that became the name of his new consulting entity. His value delivery system uses the VP as he originally conceptualised it. He saw it as a starting point for the development of strategy (Lanning, 2015), but the idea of a “Value Proposition” took on a life of its own and is still in use 30 years later. Value Proposition has become associated with the “fundamental strategic choice about what a business intends to actually deliver to customers” (Mahajan, 2019).

Theory vs Practice

In 2004, Voelpel et al include the idea of a “core value proposition(s) for customers” as a fundamental step in the creation of a business model. This sentiment is echoed by many (Bagley, 2013; Chesbrough & Rosenbaum, 2002; Morris et al, 2005) and is the central element to the creation of a strategy according to Robert S. Kaplan of Harvard Business School and “Balanced Scorecard” fame (Kaplan & Norton, 2004). Many of those who endorse the creation of a VP also build the concept of the VP into larger business model or strategy frameworks. Morris et al (2005), for example, position the VP as part of a set of six questions that underlie a business model. These questions highlight “How do we create value?”, “Who do we create value for?” and the financial and time elements that were included in the original idea of the VP. These are framed alongside some questions that are broader than Lanning’s original conception of a VP and include the source of a business’s competence (question 3) and competitive positioning (question 4) (Morris, Schindehutte & Allen, 2005).

After Lanning’s departure from McKinsey & company, the term “Value proposition” was broadly circulated and adopted by the industry. Subsequently, it was declared as one of the most widely used expressions in business in 2006 (Anderson et al, 2006). VP has been used in multiple ways since it was first coined. Most recently it has gained more

academic credence and interest with examples stretching from modelling the processes involved in developing a product or service that meets the needs of the target market (eg. Baldassarre et al, 2017). Furthermore, it's used in "collaborative business modelling" and co-created product evaluation (Kin-man To et al, 2018) and designing product-service offerings for a circular economy (da Costa Fernandes, Pigosso, McAloone & Rozenfeld, 2020). It is also an important element in the early and rapid scaling of new companies (Bailetti, Tanev & Keen, 2020) and even in positioning a start-up for investment, partnership or acquisition by established company customers (Wouters, Anderson & Kirchberger, 2018). Payne et al (2006) identify and evaluate eight different industry and academic frameworks designed to help businesses design, develop, implement or evaluate their value propositions.

These existing theoretical and industry VP models are relatively complex and there is little evidence that they are used extensively in practice. Studies show that in practice most large consultancies and companies tend to create their own proprietary models which are unique to their needs. It is also relatively difficult to get access to these models outside of these organisations (Payne & Frow 2014; Sales, Guarino, Guizzardi & Mylopoulos 2017).

Where the idea of a VP is used in practice, it is also often casually used with little commitment. This was a large focus of Lanning (2015) who argues VP is not actively chosen, formalised or used in practical everyday business implementation. In their survey of over 200 companies, Frow & Payne (2012) found that while many companies use the term Value Proposition in their everyday discussions, less than 10% of companies formally develop, communicate and use value propositions as a strategic tool (Frow & Payne, 2014).

Business Impact of a Value Proposition

Numerous studies have demonstrated that a clear, well-articulated VP does contribute to the overall organisational, financial and value performance, as well as create competitive advantage. (Anderson, Narus & van Rossum, 2006; Huang & Hu, 2004; Kaplan & Norton, 2001; Lusch, Vargo & Tanniru, 2009; Mishra, Ewing & Pitt, 2020; Parnell, 2006; Sim & Koh, 2001).

There is a fairly broad and longstanding agreement that each business and brand owner should create some form of a formal value proposition which contributes to the performance of the organisation. However, there are minimal resources in the way of easily available assistance for SME owners or managers in terms of how to approach or think through this process in order to populate any one of these models individually.

Overlap and Difference to the Mission Statement

Mission statements have been studied extensively. Although different in theory to the original Lanning definition of a VP, they do introduce some key elements that contribute to business performance, employee motivation and behaviour, organisational ethics and values, and the relationship with stakeholders (Alegre et al, 2019).

The idea of a mission statement is so entrenched in business and academic thinking that it has become ubiquitous. Studies have interrogated the impact of mission statements across various contexts, including non-profit organisations (Patel, Booker, Ramos & Bart, 2015), SMEs (Taghi Alavi & Karami, 2009), universities and schools (Alegre, Berbegal-Mirabent & Guerrero, 2019; Gurley, Peters, Collins & Fifolt, 2014; Lopez & Martin, 2018), benefit corporations and social enterprises (Bebegal-Mirabent, Mas-Machuca & Guix, 2021; Mion, Loza Adauí & Bonfanti, 2021), and even science parks (Bebegal-Mirabent, Alegre & Guerrero, 2020). The focus has been on a wide range of areas such as environmental concerns and the green agenda (Molchanova, Yashalova & Ruban, 2020), the negative impact of board power hierarchies on mission statements & the green agenda (Xie & Cao, 2019), and the positive effect of mission statements that include the idea of “food safety” on the pursuit of food safety certification in China (Lin, Zhu & Zhang, 2020). Such ubiquity often leads to the deterioration of inherent meaning in such a term, and also, as we have already seen with Value Propositions, to a wide range of in-practice meanings and uses.

There is less evidence of any correlation between a company having a Mission Statement and direct positive financial performance beyond what is seen as the obvious business basics. These basics are areas such as employee wellness and the responsibilities of being a corporate citizen in the society in which you exist (Bartkus, Glassman & McAfee,

2006). They are also associated with the indirect influence mediated by employee performance that has shown some positive financial impact (Bart, Bontiss & Taggar, 2001). A Mission Statement has also been found to be ineffective unless the organisation is “mission driven”, rather than just knowing or believing in the mission (Mas-Machuca & Marimon, 2019).

Mission statements do, however, introduce the idea of “values” (in some form) as an element of what a business or brand stands for (Toh, Tehseen, Mahmoud, Cheok, Grigoriou & Opute, 2022). While not a new idea (Albion, 1951), the value of “values” in business has become a strong recent trend in academic, popular business, and leadership thinking. This is evident in the strong emphasis found on values in the popular titles by Brené Brown including *Dare to Lead* (Brown, 2018).

As with the mission statements above, the discussion and movement that sprang up around Brown’s work as a catalyst have largely agreed that values in a business context are only truly useful if actually implemented and lived. These values can be an important driver of business decisions and identity rather than just a platitude (Ming, 2020; Hsieh, 2010).

Values as a Key Management Tool

Research shows that the promotion of values is of huge importance in the building of a brand, and it’s usually clients and practitioners in the field that need to be educated around this aspect of brand building.

In 1968 Milton Rokeach distilled what he called the 18 “terminal” values of human beings that he believed guide our actions and judgements in different contexts (Rokeach, 1973).

Balmer and Gray summarise the concept of corporate brand values and argue that they need to be well-defined, concise and distinct. Brand values also need to be consistent and communicate the ethos of the corporate culture. For the brand values to be communicated successfully they need to be part of the identity of the business and the objective of all parties within an organisation (Balmer & Gray, 2003).

Keller and Richey (2006) articulate the concept of values as key to creating a corporate brand. In his 2009 paper considering what shifts need to take place to build a strong brand in a digitally dominated global communications world, Keller finds that values are key to how the company relates to the brand. He asks the question: "...is the company viewed as a good brand steward and ensuring that the brand lives up to its promise, delivers on consumer expectations, and exhibits the right values in the marketplace?" (Keller, 2009, p. 153).

Echoing this finding, Balmer and Grey explain that "Similar to a product brand, a corporate brand makes the company and its espoused values easily identifiable and connotes a level of quality and consistency of performance in the minds of the target audiences" (Balmer and Gray, 2003, p985).

The Value of Values in Business

Academic research on values in business has been wide-ranging and through multiple social science and business disciplines. This has resulted in a less integrated body of knowledge (Agle & Caldwell, 1999). The problem with this is limited insights or conclusions at a holistic level.

Varying levels of research and analysis have led to specific and diverse insights such as perceived business values which have a positive impact on business purchasing decisions (Anwer, Deshpande, Derry & Basil, 2020). The published organisational values by tertiary departments or fields of study (in this case business school vs social work school) lead to self-selection by students based on the degree of congruence between their own personal values and those stated by the different schools (Arieli, Sagiv & Cohen-Shalem, 2016). This could also impact their ethical decision-making once in the world of business due to the embedded values they perceive to be dominant in both business school and the world of business (Painter-Morland & Slegers, 2018).

Values such as sustainability and creating happiness at work ("happiness management") have also been found to be challenging to incorporate into business decision making in a start-up or entrepreneurial environment. This is particularly pertinent if the values are not central to the proposition of the organisation (Bolis, Morioka, do Santos Leite & Cesar

Zambroni-de-Souza, 2021), or if values held strongly and personally by the entrepreneur or business leader (Foncubierta-Rodriguez, 2022). Recent research into B-Corp entrepreneurs in Chile (Roth & Winkler, 2018) strongly echoes the thesis of the 1951 book *True to Yourself: Leading a Values-Based Business* in which Albion argues that entrepreneurs and small business leaders are more fulfilled and successful when they are driven by a combination of bottom-line and values-driven purpose (Albion, 1951).

An industry study by LinkedIn into “Purpose at Work” in 2016 found that 58% of companies with a clearly articulated and understood purpose experienced growth of +10%” vs 42% of companies not prioritizing purpose (LinkedIn & Imperative, 2016). Furthermore, 42% of non-purpose-led companies showed a drop in revenue whereas 85% of purpose-led companies showed positive growth. All indications are that these trends have been strengthened through the Covid pandemic as employees at all levels re-evaluated their work and remuneration options and purpose choices leading to what has been called “the great resignation” (Elting, 2021).

While we have seen that “values” are not part of the original Lanning conception of a Value Proposition, the use of values as a guide to business implementation and growth has gained considerable credence since the VP model was first tabled. An argument could be made for either using them in tandem with a pure VP, or using a format which presents the business with a consolidated version of the two.

Brands are also considered “authentic” if they respect their core brand values (Ranfagni & Courvoisier, 2014), which closes the loop on values. Closing the loop links them from the founder/leader, through the corporate brand, into the identity of brand offerings and to the end consumer. This should be a key strategy to guide businesses and leaders at all levels of the business model.

Models from Non-Profit Sector

An aspect of business model and strategy building that the marketing and business sector can learn from the non-profit or “development” sector regarding mission statement is collaboration.

In the NGO/Development sector, there is a longstanding tool called the “Logframe” (officially the “Logical Framework Approach”, also referred to as the LFA) (Harley 2005; Uwizeyimana, 2020; Couillard, Garon & Riznic, 2009). The LFA is the industry standard format for outlining the need, interventions, and outcomes that an organisation is seeking funding for. It then acts as a measurement tool used by the funding organisation once in implementation. The LFA approach is a collaborative method that has been commonly used since the 1990s (Ringhofer & Kohlweg, 2019). Primarily, it is a project design tool that is used to assess needs, define the problem, and then summarise agreements and next steps (Sartorius, 1991). It was originally created in military and business contexts in the 1960s and is focused on contexts that demand highly structured and quantifiable objectives. This can be problematic in contexts with less clarity and no single centre of authority, but it does provide clarity, order, and consensual objectives (Hummelbrunner, 2010; Gasper, 2000).

The key idea here, from our point of view, is the participatory or consensual nature of this approach. Ringhofer & Kohlweg elucidate further on this point, “The LFA includes several analytical steps...and is designed as a participatory process, which should include relevant stakeholders” (Ringhofer & Kohlweg, 2019, p. 113).

Various attempts have been made to update the LFA, but none of these approaches has yet gained real traction amongst organisations (Grove & Zwi, 2008; Hummelbrunner, 2010; Jacobs, Barnett & Ponsford, 2010; Roduner, Schlappi & Egli, 2008; Uwizeyimana, 2020). An alternate approach, the “Theory of Change” (ToC) advocates for a collaborative approach but in a more flexible and practical way and supports the LFA. In some cases, the ToC has been integrated with LFA (Bours, McGinn & Pringle, 2014; Freer & Lemire, 2019; Prinsen & Nijhof, 2015). The ToC builds from a collaborative base that requires a willingness to drop jargon and acronyms and focuses on genuine debate and discussion with partners (Ringhofer & Kohlweg, 2019).

The benefit of the collaborative approach as evident in these project definition tools used in global aid and non-profit contexts can be summarised as follows: (a) drawing in a multiplicity of views, experience and expertise as related to the topic at hand, (b) aligning the thinking of the team, (c) ensuring agreement in both key definitions and approaches,

(d) gaining commitment from the full team to the agreed priorities and processes, and (e) creating a mission for the team and project.

VP-Type Models Available to Small to Medium Businesses

In my work with SMEs over the past 13 years, I have used a process that starts with an integrated Value Proposition workshop. The approach then moves towards understanding target markets, messaging objectives, and media choices as part of implementing IMC. This approach has been used with all the brands featured in case studies in Chapter 4. This approach has also contributed to the smoother implementation and better overall results across all these brands (Initial workshops conducted: TSG, 2012; Porchlight, 2017; At Source, 2009; Prairie Wear, 2015).

A small set of broadly similar approaches were found to be easily accessible for use outside of those proprietary versions created by large consulting houses or corporations (Payne & Frow 2019; Sales, Guarino, Guizzardi & Mylopoulos 2017). There is little to no academic research available on these practical, publicly available approaches, so they largely exist in practice only, with no overt external evaluation or verification beyond reported client feedback and testimonials.

Four such models, as briefly outlined below, were found to be available to SMEs as ways to define their offerings and serve as the starting point for their marketing efforts.

a) Peter Drucker – The Drucker Foundation Self-Assessment Tool for Non-Profits

Peter Drucker is widely considered the father of modern management thinking. Frequently described as the man who invented management (McGregor, 2015; Lewis, 1998), he was driven by trying to create what he termed “a functional society”, having witnessed first-hand the impact of the Nazis and the Great War and Depression.

As an academic, consultant, and prolific writer, his *The Practice of Management* (1954) laid the foundations for management as a discipline. This book was followed by *The Effective Executive* in 1966, and *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* in 1973. The latter became “the playbook for generations of corporate executives, non-profit managers and government leaders” (The Drucker Institute, 2022, Timeline – 1970s).

Drucker laid out the Mission statement as the driving force of an organisation: “A business is not defined by its name, statutes or articles of incorporation. It is defined by the business mission. Only a clear definition of the mission and purpose of the organisation makes possible clear and realistic business objectives.” (Drucker, 1974, p. 59). The Drucker Institute has shared a process for crafting a Mission Statement (The Peter F Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management, 2002). The tool lays out a series of steps including workshops, writing groups, and evaluation sessions in order to finalise such a statement for an organisation. This linear process is user-friendly and guides a group through the process in an easy-to-understand way, finalising with Board (or similar) approval. This is the starting point of all strategic goal-setting and planning, and provides a great starting point for any organisation.

b) Don Miller – Business Made Simple

Donald Miller is the creator of the StoryBrand marketing approach. *Business Made Simple* and his other books set out to explain that the first critical step for any business is to clarify the mission of the organisation, and align the team behind it (Miller, 2021).

Miller’s model builds beyond the Mission Statement and adds Key Characteristics, Critical Actions, a Story Pitch and a Theme to create a framework. This framework outlines the full value proposition of the business in question. He then goes on to discuss each portion of this model and explain why it matters. Thereafter, he provides practical advice and a “formula” for creating a mission statement (Miller, 2021).

This relatively simple and ‘built to implement’ model builds on the platform of the success of StoryBrand. It is also an easy approach for those attempting to define the value their business offers to clients in a clear and compelling way. This value is analysed for both internal and external audiences. Being relatively new to the market, there is not yet a great deal of “in use” proof of the practical implementation of this model, though it was based on Miller’s experience of implementing the StoryBrand marketing approach on thousands of brands (Daly, 2020; Howes, 2016; Wright, 2022).

c) Lisa Dennis – Value Propositions that SELL (Value Proposition Platform for B2B)

Lisa Dennis sets out a “simplified and repeatable process to create rock-solid value propositions for your existing and new offerings” (Dennis 2018, p. 14). Her company Knowledge™ Associates (valueproposition.com) offers VP assessments, pivots, an online course, workshops & seminars, and consulting around VP development specific to Business to Business (B2B) environments. Her book *Value Propositions that SELL* adds more detail to the process so that B2B organisations can understand and implement her VP process themselves.

d) The Integrated VP Pyramid Model as used in current Case Studies

Another example of a VP-type model in active use with small to medium businesses is the Integrated VP pyramid model. This model is employed with all the businesses included in the case studies as described in Chapter 4. This model has not been formally documented prior to this study, and no previous academic or other critique has evaluated it independently. The Integrated VP Pyramid Model is an approach that has led to positive impacts and business performance in those brands evaluated in the case studies. It has also been positive for many other existing corporate and business, non-profit, start-up and personal brands across the past 25 years.

This approach has led to in-market success for numerous brands and businesses, four of which are examined in the case studies in Chapter 4. The clarity around the proposition, values and roles has underpinned smoother implementation, greater ease of evaluation of results, and simpler direction from the organisational leadership in each case. This model has been used successfully across non-profit organisations, medium to large companies, start-ups, and sole proprietors in a wide range of industries and geographies. The simplicity and ease of understanding of this model may be factors in its successful implementation, alongside the proven theoretical backing reviewed. This theoretical backing is regarding Value Propositions, Mission Statements, values as business drivers, and the clarity on target markets, messaging insights, media options, and finally the choice of implementing partners.

The Benefits of Value Propositions and Values in an IMC context

Five key ideas emerged from the case studies in terms of the value of values in a business context. These ideas are all supported in principle by existing literature.

a) The VP as a way to verbalise/articulate the intuitive knowledge of the founder or CEO of brand development as a key management practice

A critical part of creating a sustainable, cohesive, and aligned organisation, is the translation of the vision of the founder or CEO. The vision should be a clear, understandable and inspiring identity, purpose, and set of values that the organisation and its clients, customers and partners understand and buys into. The identity can be used as a lodestar as they implement that vision day to day in the operations of that organisation.

Numerous studies argue that the values of a company or corporate brand are its fingerprint (Upshaw, 1995), its “soul” (Simones et al, 2005, p. 156), or its core (Edvardsson, Enquist & Hay, 2006), and are central to how the brand identity is conveyed to customers and stakeholders.

De Chernatony et al argue that “In terms of the responsibility for identifying and championing services brand values, the consensus of opinion was that it rests with either the chief executive officer or someone senior within the organization” (2004, p. 84).

What is not yet evident in the theoretical work is that the CEO or senior person leading the vision often needs assistance or a process through which to be able to articulate their vision. To be effective this should be a platform to discuss it so that it becomes clear and succinct enough to be useful as a tool in the day-to-day management of the organisation. Often the vision is not well translated from the founder or CEO into something that can be used by the organisation. This is also often something that the founder or CEO cannot achieve on their own.

b) VP as key to communicating with internal and external brand implementers to ensure consistency and clarity of execution

The frustration expressed by all the organisational leaders interviewed for these case studies is the lack of direction and strategy given by external implementers (usually agencies). Furthermore, they identified the inability to deliver what is actually needed on

the brand vs what they perceive to be their own strengths and their preferences or most lucrative services as issues. These are some of the key failings of agency delivery to clients (brand owners), particularly in the context of IMC (Integrated Marketing Communications).

Clients are motivated by marketing thought which leads them to want to take responsibility for integrated strategies. Agencies also want to take responsibility for integrated strategies, but start with a different focus than clients – they tend to be informed by their own particular promotion disciplines, such as advertising or public relations (Gould, Grein, Lerman 1999, p. 1).

Clients generally understand the philosophy of IMC and this has resulted in the balance of power changing between the client and the agency. However, agencies seem to feel that clients still need to take more responsibility in clarifying and directing the efforts of all agencies involved (Mortimer & Laurie 2017).

The brand values and brand identity statement should be used as an alignment and clarity tool for ensuring that all implementers (internal and external/agency) have clarity and guidelines for beginning their work. The interviewees all felt strongly that the workshops enabled them to ensure a strong foundation for everyone involved, as well as a benchmark for evaluating all work going forward.

c) The VP & Values as the start of a process that enables media-neutral planning

The VP and values are a key starting point to enable IMC implementers to make consumer-driven media choices which are beneficial. This means first finding out where your Target Market TM is and then planning media, not the other way round: "...marketers need to use data characteristics to define their choice of media, rather than profiling the consumers of media that have already been planned. In this way, a better fit can be achieved between the target audience and the media it uses." (Orr & Cano-Lopez, 2005, p137).

This approach is also known as 'media-neutral planning' (MNP). It involves advertisers (brand owners) looking to customer insight data first, rather than a preconceived idea of

the media choices (Orr & Cano-Lopez, 2005). In fact, the media decision should be one of the last planning decisions taken and should be done objectively (Tapp, 2004).

Media-neutral planning has, in some cases, been seen as “marketing-neutral planning”. Many definitions of MNP point to the need to de-silo internal departments responsible for different elements of communications implementation and the need to engage at board level that echoes the discussions around IMC. (Grounds, 2003; Merron, 2003; Tapp, 2004).

It is also useful to recall that MNP, in the context of large and multinational organisations, was a response to the fact that many media decisions were dictated either by the preferences of the agency media planner, or the creative team. This meant that decisions were about crafting the messaging rather than the needs and interests of the consumer (Saada, 2006). An MNP or “consumer-centric” approach prioritises when, where, and how the consumer is likely to best be able and willing to hear the brand message. Once this is established the media and messaging plan is crafted based on those insights.

d) Values as key to hiring (and keeping) the right people

Drucker stated that “culture eats strategy for breakfast” (2016). There are many examples of hiring practices based on values to create an enduring, organisation-wide culture. The idea of a values-driven organisation has been an enduring one. The Walt Disney Company is a popular example (Lipp, 2013; Schueler 2000;) of an organisation that is known for recruiting and hiring employees who specifically match their values, and strongly identify with the brand (Graham, 2021).

Many companies are now explicit about hiring people aligned with their values. There is also evidence that not only will using values to hire people result in happier employees, but they can actually positively impact the implementation of strict quantitative approaches such as TQM (Total Quality Management) (Ingelsson et al, 2012).

Not only are values the key to hiring the right people and contributing to better business efficiency and effectiveness, but the right people positively affect the associations with the brand and business too (Keller and Richey, 2006).

A recent *Fast Company* article highlights the need to connect with core values to encourage a greater sense of belonging as one of its key ways to re-engage employees in the post-Covid work environment (Mosher, 2022).

e) Values as a way of creating internal alignment and supporting growth

The idea of values-based management is not a new concept, but it was popularised by Collins & Porras in *Built to Last* (Collins & Porras, 1994). Values-based management is considered a positive influence in an organisation, but it can be challenging to implement in a strongly financially focused context. As Patrick Lencioni put it, it can actually backfire if implemented without real commitment:

The book [*Built to Last*] made the case that many of the best companies adhered to a set of principles called core values, provoking managers to stampede to off-site meetings in order to conjure up some core values of their own....values that too often stand for nothing but a desire to be au courant or, worse still, politically correct. If you're not willing to accept the pain real values incur, don't bother going to the trouble of formulating a values statement. You'll be better off without one. (Lencioni, 2002, p. 114)

However, a truly values-driven organisation and brand can reap measurable benefits. Such benefits include better staff motivation and engagement, and a “10-fold performance improvement” (Morgan, 2020). The shift to a values-driven purpose is key to ensuring all stakeholders are in agreement regarding the type of leadership being undertaken in the organisation. It's also integral to establishing a culture to deliver the agreed business results: “Values-based management is premised on a stakeholder perspective of leadership, responsibility, and ethics” (Edvardsson, Enquist & Hay, 2006, p. 234).

Elkington found that successful companies tend to have strong, values-driven cultures and build strategic alliances with internal and external partners, customers and suppliers.

They also take a balanced, values-based approach to measuring performance (Elkington, 2001). Gleeson (2021) echoes this by saying that those values should be the “bedrock” of why the company exists and how decisions are made in order to achieve goals and fulfil the vision.

De Chernatony et al (2004) believe that a management focus on values leads to the development of values-based brand identities and image. Gleeson echoed this saying that the focus should be on values that are “decisively created” and encouraged from the beginning (Gleeson, 2021), and this should be the basis for the effective implementation of IMC in an organisation.

Values-Driven Marketing

In 2010 Philip Kotler released *Marketing 3.0: Values-Driven Marketing* as the third evolution of marketing thinking. It started with Marketing 1.0, the product-centric era, and then it evolved into Marketing 2.0, or the customer-centric era. Owing to the impact of the evolution of information technology and the digital world, Kotler then shifted his thinking a third time to the human-centric era. The human-centric era is more collaborative, creative and holistic in its approach and where “the customer demands collaborative, iconic and independent marketing approaches” (Kotler & Kartajaya, 2010, p. 6).

Kotler & Kartajaya argue that in order to stay relevant in the 3.0 world, companies need to target consumers as whole human beings. By this, they mean that companies should include the spirit over and above the mind and emotions. This trend has already been used in marketing approaches, and emphasises marketing as keeping promises to customers. This process begins with the vision, mission and values of the company (Kotler & Kartajaya, 2010).

More recently the same team released *4.0 Moving from Traditional to Digital* (Kartajaya, Kotler & Setiawan, 2017) and *5.0 Technology for Humanity* (Kartajaya, Setiawan & Kotler, 2021). Both titles focus on how technological changes impact the world in general and the world of marketing, rather than an evolution of thinking beyond 3.0 and the values focus.

A closer look at product-driven marketing (1.0), customer-centric marketing (2.0) and human-centric marketing (3.0), reveals a clear paradigm shift in marketing over the years. However Marketing 4.0 is something that can be observed in isolation, and because moving from the “traditional to digital” is a “process in decades”, this transition is not a “Paradigm shift” as 4.0 does not replace 3.0, it simply adds new perspectives driven by technological change to the understanding of marketing as an ever-evolving discipline (Abeysekera, 2020, p. 178).

Marketing 5.0 focuses on helping senior management assess their digital readiness. It also assists marketers with strategic advice on implementing technology-empowered marketing, and helps academics with the latest trends in technology-empowered marketing. All of these aspects are useful in the implementation of marketing in a technological context and fit well with the approach of values-based marketing as proposed in Marketing 3.0. Hence, Marketing 5.0 is an update on implementing values-driven marketing in a digital world, and as such is an extremely useful resource.

This centrality of values and values-driven marketing as a marketing philosophy is integral. The focus on values also facilitates excellence in marketing implementation in all contexts, including the digital realm. This research has found this to be an incredibly valid and useful approach to creating and marketing a brand.

An Overview of Literature Reviewed

In summary, the literature reviewed in this chapter has shown that while many key areas have been studied, they have mostly been studied in isolation. These areas include, broadly:

- The use of IMC as a communications approach
- The impact of relationships between brand owners and brand implementers on IMC implementation
- Value Propositions
- Values in business
- Approaches in the Non-profit sector
- Values driven marketing

There is, however, very little evidence of study into the inter-relationship and overlapping impact of these areas of study. There is a gap in the literature and in our understanding of how these learnings can be used together to improve the implementation of IMC in SME's. The literature does not explicitly show, for example, that the concurrent use of a Value Proposition and identification of values within a brand or organisation can help to improve the implementation of IMC.

In practice I have seen that the integration of values-driven marketing and a VP can create a foundation for clearer relationship roles and better IMC implementation with stronger business results, but the literature demonstrates that there are no existing studies into this type of overlapping territory. There are also no existing studies that reflect the key factors that enable effective IMC implementation in SME's and beyond, this is also a current gap in the literature and in the field of academic study around IMC.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology undertaken in this research study. It describes the two different approaches to data gathering, namely individual one-on-one interviews and key stakeholder workshops. In terms of data gathering, this section reviews in-depth one-on-one interviews and full-day multi-stakeholder workshops (called Integrated Value Proposition workshops) that were used for this study. Furthermore, this chapter also explains the ethical considerations of my research. Regarding the ethics, this chapter explains the considerations around conducting individual interviews and sharing documents/concepts that would normally be internal proprietary information.

Qualitative Method Overview

Qualitative research enables the researcher to understand the human experience-based phenomenon under study.

A case study approach is characterised by embracing multiple forms for data and analytic techniques and often concentrates on the depth of study rather than breadth. It's considered a "meta-method" of analysis (Padgett, 2012), and is able to integrate a deep, more reflective understanding of an organisation (Rendtorff, 2015) and a practical demonstration of theory (Yin, 2011). Case studies enable the integration of theory and practice into the study of real-life cases and allow for a "deeper, reflective, philosophical, and ethical understanding of the organisation" (Rendtorff et al, 2015, p. 37).

Businesses should be viewed as open systems in a constant state of flux (Patton & Appelbaum, 2003). Case studies, which offer the chance of a more holistic view of a process, are able to deal with business studies well as they often involve a variety of evidence and can retain the "holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Patton & Appelbaum, 2003, p. 63).

This study uses what Yin (2012) describes as cross-case synthesis in that it evaluates multiple case studies within the same study.

Sampling

The case studies included in this research study are all micro or SME enterprises who have worked with me as an independent brand consultant. The businesses involved in the case studies have taken part in the values-driven structured workshop (ie. Integrated Value Proposition workshop) as a starting point for their brand formation and implementation.

A qualitative sampling approach was used in this analysis. Qualitative sampling is non-random. It is based on the researcher identifying participants who are best placed to provide data that enables the researcher to understand the phenomenon being studied (Gill, 2020, Coyne 1997).

Within this broad category, the chosen approach was purposeful or used purposive sampling. There are multiple conflicting definitions of purposeful sampling (Gentles et al, 2015) and a view that all sampling strategies are intended to be purposeful (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Viewing purposeful sampling as a conceptually driven sampling approach and it is defined as an approach that involves the researcher “deliberately and purposefully selecting the sample they believe can be the most fruitful in answering the research question” (Farrugia, 2019, p. 70).

Based on the four-point sampling definition approach proposed by Robinson (2014) for qualitative sampling, I decided on the following points as set out below.

A Heterogeneous Sample with One Key Inclusion Criteria

Heterogeneous sampling is the selection of a purposefully diverse and wide-ranging set of cases to be studied in order to demonstrate the possible range of the study. This is considered a “maximum variation sampling” approach (Gentles et al, 2015, p. 1779).

I utilised a set of case studies within different categories or industries as well as with diverse geographic locations, business cycle stages, and organisational sizes. The key inclusion criteria was that they had completed an Integrated Value Proposition (IVP) workshop with me at the start of their brand project. This workshop is a full day in person or a one to two-day virtual workshop. I facilitate workshops with the CEO or brand

owner and the key stakeholders in each organisation. The workshops enable them to think holistically through the objectives and propositions of their offerings and align their viewpoints to a consolidated statement about the brand. This includes Attributes (what we do), Benefits (why does it matter?), Values, Character and Essence. This process is key to initiating clarity on the brand and ensuring alignment amongst the key team members and a starting point for implementing IMC and brand implementation.

Small Sample Size

Due to the idiographic nature of the study, a small sample size of four case studies was selected for in-depth one-on-one interviews. These interviews led to four individual case studies.

The objective of the small sample size was to enable the understanding of the case-specific dynamics in enough detail to understand each individual business and brand challenge. This also allowed me to identify the overarching themes relative to the implementation of IMC that they have in common.

A Purposive Case Study Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling is the active choice for researchers who want to interrogate and understand the phenomenon under study.

This non-random sampling approach ensures that particular cases or examples are represented within the sample of the project in order to meet the intent of the study. According to Robinson (2014) the rationale for using a purposive strategy is to allow researchers to apply their existing theoretical (and sometimes practical) understanding of the topic to the choice of specific individuals as part of the sample group. The sample group consists of participants who researchers believe could have a useful or insightful perspective on the phenomenon being studied.

This sampling approach ensures that particular cases or examples are represented within the sample of the project to meet the intent of the study.

In order to investigate the applicability, usefulness, and flexibility of the approach, four case studies with widely divergent categories, business cycle stages, business sizes, and objectives were chosen. These case studies are detailed in Chapter 4 and a summary can be seen in Table 1 below.

Sourcing Participants via Personal Business Networks

Practically, I invited all participants to be part of the study. They are familiar with me and have worked with me (either previously or currently). All participants were given an outline of the purpose of the study, as well as the topline question outline for the interview to ensure they felt comfortable with the study. I received consent forms and they indicated they were happy to participate. No incentives were offered for participation.

Table 1: An overview of the sampled organisations

Organisation	TGS	Porchlight	At Source	Prairie Wear
Type of company	Sole proprietor	Pty (Ltd)	Pty (Ltd)	Pty (Ltd)
Creation date	2012	2009	2002	2016
Geographic reach	South Africa with global collaborations & digital reach	Western Canada	South Africa, with global exports to the UK, Europe, the Middle East	USA and Canada, with global shipping and distributors in Chile, the UK & Ireland, and Australia & New Zealand
Sector	Poetry & Education	Property Development	FMCG: Dried Fruit & Nut products	Post-surgical compression bras
# of Employees	1	22	172	4
Product / Service as per website	"Poet, performer, facilitator."	"We build a range of thoughtfully designed rental and for-purchase homes."	"Always reinventing what healthier and tastier mean in the dried fruit & nut category."	"Versatile, sustainable bras – better for your body, better for the planet."
Major Brand/s and / or Trade Marks	» TGS (Toni Giselle Stuart)	» Porchlight » The Williston » The Melody » Life » Element	» At Source » Cecilia's Farm » Koelfontein	» Prairie Wear Huggers™
Target Market/s Summary	Educated art appreciators with a special interest in ancestral memory & learning.	Purpose built rentals: Middle income, often first or second generation Canadians Independent Living Rentals: Upper & middle income retirees looking for independence & community For Sale: first time home buyers	"A new generation of traditionalists": high income families with a focus on exceptional quality fruit & nut products, health and innovation.	Women who are planet aware & looking for absolute comfort, safety and hi-tech / innovative / leading-edge bras for post-surgical support and beyond.
Business Model & Distribution Strategy	Commissioned poems, paid performances, funded collaborations or projects, artistic coaching and published work – delivered digitally and / or in person.	Property acquisition, design & development for either long-term rental income or re-sale either as individual units or of the full development a going entity.	Global sourcing of premium ingredients, fruits and nuts, manufacturing & innovation on-site. Branded range sold via owned online store, niche distributors, and global listings with retailers & wholesalers. White label supply to premium supermarkets locally & internationally.	Sold directly to end users via owned online store; and indirectly via independent and institution owned / linked retail stores, surgical practices and therapist offices; or at wholesale level via distributors with specific geographic reach.

Corporate Brand Values	» Freedom / Being true to yourself » Creativity » Whole-/(open-) heartedness » Community » Simplicity / Professionalism	» Performance » Accountability » Anticipation » Discipline » Kindness » Collaboration	» Excellence » Legacy » Innovation » People » Passion » Integrity	» Collaboration » Sustainability » Innovation » Authenticity » Kindness » Integrity
Promotion strategy	Email marketing, website presence and social media through both content creation and cross-leverage with other poets, collaborators and projects.	Consumer media driven by target market insight particular to each consumer-facing brand. Key objective is always high quality lead capture, with brand awareness coming into play only on brands as they shift from localized to national or multi-national presence. Heavy emphasis on digital media (including multiple google ad formats, social media events boosting), local television, targeted print, and email marketing.	Consumer awareness and purchase driving media only currently, with a focus on digital content and advertising (social media content, social media advertising, google search advertising), plus trade promotion through a presence at the SIAL Food Show in Paris in October 2022.	Digital direct sales promotion via various formats of google advertising, targeted social media advertising, social media content, email marketing, and a full traditional and digital PR campaign building up to the launch of a third Hugger product in late 2022.
Approximate number of current agency / other external marketing partners	3	17	11	8
Date of first IVP workshop	September 2012	May 2017	July 2009	December 2015
Driver of first IVP workshop	Owner	CEO & Co-owner	CEO & majority shareholder	CEO & Owner
Stated key benefits from the IVP process	"I think in terms of the [brand] value proposition, the obvious things like knowing the kind of work that I want to do will determine who I'm approaching." ... "They're [Values are] kind of like a compass pointing to your North." – Toni Stuart	"What I didn't fully appreciate was the precedent setting nature of the values. ... We govern the organisation by those principles. ... What I can tell you is, without knowing it, we set ourselves a really great roadmap." – Rob Butler	"So I don't often refer back to those [Integrated Value Propositions] in detail because in a sense it's intrinsic" ... "We also have our Values displayed in our board room and in the factory in a nicely designed way that helps remind us all, every day, what we believe is right." – Handri Conradie	"... a core value statement to me is the heart of every company... I realized as we're evolving and changing, it's always worth taking a look and going, what are those core values? Why are we here? I think it's really important for all of us to remember why we do this every day and why we are here." – Holli Markwald

Table One is an overview of the four organisations chosen for case studies. The chart demonstrates the diversity of each industry, geographic location, organisational size and age, target markets, business structure, and level of media engagement as part of the heterogeneous sample approach. The table also demonstrates the key inclusion criteria in terms of the date for the original IVP workshop per organisation.

Data Gathering Techniques

Two qualitative techniques were used for data gathering in this study, namely semi-structured individual one-on-one interviews and key stakeholder workshops.

Qualitative interviews come in many formats and different formats offer different benefits and insights into the topic under study.

Semi-structured individual interviews are considered the most commonly used interview technique in qualitative research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). They are defined as a versatile, flexible set of questions created by an informed researcher who has existing knowledge of the topic, and used to guide a discussion and allow unique voices and ideas to emerge rather than being strictly bound by the questionnaire (Kallio et al, 2016).

Workshops are considered an emerging but valid data-gathering technique in qualitative research and found to accommodate many characteristics of a qualitative study (Ahmed & Asraf, 2018). Workshops can be considered a form of in-depth group interview that falls between the free-flowing ethnographic interview and the semi-structured formal interview (Morse, 2005). This approach allows for the qualitative exploration of a topic with the group around a semi-formal question structure and is amplified by numerous semi-structured follow-up outputs and discussions. The outputs are formalised in a consistent format (the Brand IVP pyramid) that allows the group to focus on the content and storytelling, and their alignment around it rather than creating structure.

A creative workshop approach to brand image and essence has been demonstrated by Richards (2012) as a viable alternative to traditional qualitative market research tools such as focus groups, and as an effective evolution of visualization and projection techniques used in such studies.

This approach is arguably more in-depth than a more traditional interview or focus group study since it involves multiple touch points over a longer period of time. As a result, this allows for more active interrogation of the outputs and of how they are then translated into action within the organisation.

Individual One-on-One Interviews

The use of semi-structured individual one-on-one interviews allows for a more conversational, descriptive interview in which the interviewee shares their own experiences within a conversation rather than feeling constrained by tight questions. DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) describe semi-structured interviews as being organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions and amplified by questions that emerge from the discussion.

In total four Individual one-on-one interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom digital meeting space, and then transcribed. In one instance a formal follow-up interview was conducted which was also recorded and transcribed. In all four cases, further informal discussions were held with interviewees post the interviews as part of ongoing working relationships and in some instances, these were used to further amplify the insights gained from the formal interviews. Workshops were conducted over a thirteen-year period and formal interviews were done in December 2021 and January 2022.

Each interview was between an hour and 90 minutes long, and based on a semi-structured and open-ended interview process. The process was designed to allow the interviewee to share their brand and personal history, development and current status, as well as the ways in which they experienced the processes of the workshop and of working with internal and external brand implementers thereafter.

The interviewee in each case was either the single owner/originator of the branded organisation, or the top leader in that organisation, so CEO or Founder, as a rule.

Aberbach & Rockman (2002) found that when interviewing ‘elite’ and other highly educated people open-ended questions provide more opportunity for interviewees to create their own structures for their answers. This increases the validity of the responses but makes the analysis more complex. It also provides more space for respondents to explain their views and thinking.

A thematic discourse analysis was applied to each of the interview recordings and transcripts.

Discourse analysis is defined as the analysis of texts and conversation in a particular context (Padgett, 2012) with analysis centring on identifying the themes of each narrative. In this research, the analysis focused on identifying the key frustrations, processes and changes in the relationship with their brands and the implementers of their brands within each case study, as well as comparing the themes across the four case studies in order to identify the common emerging concepts.

Key Stakeholder Workshops with IMC Implementation Steps

Workshops are an effective format for gathering information and creating cross-disciplinary dialogue in multi-stakeholder contexts (Nielsen et al, 2020). Furthermore, the storytelling aspect of workshop dialogue is seen as being able to go deeper than theory and better inspire creativity as needed in real-world contexts of work (Treloar et al, 2018). When used as a research methodology workshops generate a markedly different kind of knowledge and data than interviews and observation. This difference comes from being able to combine elements of both these approaches into “a place for collaborative negotiation of meaning” (Ørngreen & Levinson, 2017, p. 78).

In this study, the group discussion stakeholder workshops were done either in person or virtually via Zoom, in one or two sessions totalling between 6 and 8 hours.

Each workshop followed a structured process with a series of exercises done either individually or as a group. The results of the exercises are then reviewed and debated by the group to reach a consensus as to their articulated answer to each phase of the process.

The IVP Workshop and IMC Implementation Process

Step 1: The IVP workshop to create clarity on brand vision, values and objectives

This first step is an online or in person full day workshop. The aim of the workshop is to align the core team and verbalise the value proposition, organisational values, characteristics of the brand, and working towards a “brand essence”. These elements become the key idea central to what the brand offers holistically. The outcome of this workshop is the topline “Integrated VP” pyramid, which broadly includes levels that relate to Lanning’s original conception of a VP. Lanning’s conception is the Attributes and Benefits level, the Values and Character level and the Essence level. The Essence Level is where the brand mission statement is clarified. This pyramid should encapsulate the debated and aligned brand offering and what the brand wants to be known or ‘famous’ for as a guiding principle.

Following the workshop, a series of meetings and discussions are held with the management and sometimes (depending on the context, industry, size of the organisation) the key brand implementers (usually internal at this stage). These meetings and

discussions clarify the available internal data, analysis and insights, and any external resources that may have relevance.

Step 2: Who do we want to talk to? Target Market definition.

Step 3: What do they need/want to hear about us? Message clarification.

Step 4: Where can we reach them/which media are they using? Media landscape for this Target Market.

Step 5: Of those environments, which would they be open to hearing from us in? (ie. this product, this category) Media Evaluation and Choice.

Step 6: Implementer partner choice: Choosing, appointing and briefing internal and external resources who have expertise in those areas identified as key for the brand (eg. media, creative, Google, design etc). Formal briefing of all implementers with the brand pyramid to ensure clarity on the brand, as well as details regarding their role and objectives, their remuneration structure, and timings and outcome expectations.

Step 7: Allocate funds and approval in order to use available marketing levers to optimise spend and ROI towards the business objectives.

The outcomes from the IVP workshops³ are then collated, edited, and finalised by the facilitator (in these instances myself). I develop the brand pyramid with five levels that each build on the level below and, together, crystallise the agreed brand proposition for that organisation.

The content in these brand pyramids is proprietary to each organisation and has been included in this research project with permission from each organisation.³

Ethical Considerations

Research ethics exist to ensure “appropriate, fair and just behaviour for researchers” (McKee & Porter, 2009, Preface p. xvii) and includes the need to seek informed consent at the start and also throughout the research particularly if it is over an extended period of time.

³ Please refer to the Appendix for an outline of the IVP model used, what each level aims to do and a summary of the workshop exercises.

Informed consent is considered the foremost issue in any research study involving human study subjects (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Consent should always balance the rights of the subjects with the social benefits of the research (Markham & Buchanan, 2017).

Regarding the ethics of case study research, specifically, where people and their organisations and experiences are closely described and interpreted, the concept of relational ethics comes into play (Simons, 2009). In these contexts a level of trust is created between the researcher and the participant and an ethical approach requires that this level of trust is respected and that all information gained in this context is used as intended by the participant.

In this study, I selected the participants from my previous and current client bases and their informed consent was obtained from them when they initially agreed to take part in the study. After explaining the nature, end date (January 2023), and purpose of my study, as well as my role as researcher, the one-on-one interviews were set up. Written informed consent was received from each interviewee on the day of their interview confirming that they were happy to be part of the study. They also agreed to provide agreed company information for use in the study and to the use of some of their proprietary and brand assets as data and visuals within the studies. As all the companies featured in these case studies are privately held, and under no obligation to divulge revenue or profit data, these details were not included in the data tables. In three of the four cases, I was able to include revenue growth over time as an indicator of business growth. In the fourth case study, this was demonstrated by the value of projects currently held. In all cases, these data points were reviewed and approved for use by the interviewees.

Copies and transcripts of the interview recordings were provided to the participants for approval or edits if they so desired. I also sought and received approval from each participant on the final tabular form and data to be included in the “business results” section of each case study.

Due to the storytelling approach of these case studies, the data was not anonymised and participants also agreed that the name and story of their businesses would be used publicly within these case studies.

All interviewees were provided with a verbal and written outline of the question guideline that would be used as a starting point for the discussion. This verbal outline was repeated at the beginning of each recorded interview to ensure that the participant understood the intention and was happy to proceed with the interview.

In terms of the ethical obligation to deliver informed consent (Knobel, 2003) I believe this study has met the criteria. I worked to ensure that the subjects were treated with respect and that their willingness to share their story and data has been recognised, respected and engaged with in a trustworthy and ethical way.

CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDIES

This chapter reviews each of the case studies by applying a thematic discourse analysis approach to the interview transcripts and IVP workshop outputs as well as examples of brand outputs in four case studies.

Key findings from these case studies show some consistent requirements for the successful implementation of IMC.

Each case study begins with an overview of the business, thereafter it analyses and discusses its key values as identified in the Integrated Value Proposition. This is followed by an evaluation of the theoretical work around the key challenges faced by each type of business and how these relate to the practical business, brand and media implementation in each case. Thereafter, the brand story is shared including the starting point of each project, the impetus for this work being done, and then moving into consideration in most cases of the impact of the Covid pandemic on the business. Finally, I review the media implementation and business and media results in each case.

Table 2: Key process checks

Organisation	1. Process started with a formal statement of values and a value proposition	2. Implemented by owner / CEO	3. Used to brief internal & external implementers	4. Used to manage and evaluate implementation	5. Values still referred to explicitly or have become implicit
Case Study One: TGS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Case Study Two: Porchlight	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Case Study Three: At Source	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Case Study Four: Prairie Wear	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table two shows the five key processes that were used across all four case studies that enabled the effective implementation of IMC in all cases studied. The key processes start with a formal IVP process which results in a formal VP and the articulation of values. In all four cases the project was initiated and championed by the person who owns and/or leads the organisation, and who included the key internal stakeholders in both the IVP

workshop and thereafter in the implementation of IMC in the organisation. The IVP and values have been consistently used in all these organisations as part of the briefing and evaluation processes involved in this implementation, and have become an implicit or explicit touchstone for all IMC or brand related choices.

In addition to the practical observation of these processes, there is also theoretical context for all of them.

Starting with Values and a VP Enables a Strong Strategy

There is precedent for the grounding of strategic thinking in some form of formal value proposition statement. As seen in Chapter Two, this approach has been validated by numerous studies that reinforce the use of a value proposition statement as a strong starting point for the creation of a business model and strategy (Bagley 2013; Chesbrough & Rosenbaum, 2002; Kaplan & Norton, 2004; Mahajan, 2019; Morris et al, 2005; Voelpel et al, 2004).

Implemented by the Owner/CEO

Experienced, educated C-suite or owner leadership is a requirement for the success of the process. In terms of the interviewees themselves, as per Table 2, they differ in age, location, and nationality, but they do have a tertiary level of education and significant experience in the role (10+ years), as well as ownership status in common. All of these elements are shown to correlate positively with management ability and results (Feng, Fay & Xiang, 2020; Goldfarb & Xiao, 2011; La Porta & Shleifer, 2008).

All interviewees, who were also the key drivers of the process in each of their organisations, qualify as the equivalent of “C-suite” or “CEO” in their respective contexts. This means that they are in each case the highest level management or owner within the organisation. This level of support has been shown to be crucial to effective implementation of IMC (Kerr & Patti, 2015; Kliatchko & Schultz, 2014; Laurie & Mortimer, 2019; Quinn et al, 2016).

This is borne out by the four case studies in this review, as well as other similar projects undertaken by me in both corporate and SME environments across the last 23 years.

These findings suggest that IMC brand projects are likely to be most successful when they are:

- (a) initiated and championed by the most senior titular leader in the organisation
- (b) when the initiating leader is educated and open-minded enough to seek expertise in the field of brand and marketing and learn from them
- (c) they feel informed and clear on the level of commitment that will be required in terms of funds, time and effort from themselves and their team
- (d) they have an ownership or controlling share that ensures that they are comfortable making decisions that can be new or uncomfortable for the organisation, but will have a positive impact on the business in the medium to long term.

Full, Clear Briefing of all Brand Implementers including Scope, Deliverables, Remuneration & Measurement is Key

Following the formalising of the VP and values, media evaluation & choices, and the search for appropriate, experienced & values aligned implementation partners, these partners were briefed comprehensively. This briefing included both the VP and values for the specific brand in question, as well as a clear outline of what deliverables were expected from each party. They were also given a timeframe as well as budget requirements. On average this has led to good implementation in terms of meeting expectations, timings, and costs.

The success of IMC implementation based on a formalised briefing process with strong emphasis on clarity is supported by the literature (Beard 1999; Caplin 2016; Ceccotti et al 2019; Eagle & Kitchen 2000; Gould et al 1999; Laurie & Mortimer 2019; Mortimer & Laurie 2019; Patti et al, 2017)

Values as Key to IMC Implementation

In all four cases, this VP process was also followed by a structured approach to implementation based on the values. After this the target market was defined and understood from both a media and a messaging point of view. This data was analysed to determine where the best ROI on marketing spend was likely to come from, and then the implementation partners (both internal and external) could be chosen based on the expertise and experience needed for each identified media and messaging area.

This aligns well with the “Media-Neutral Planning” approach which has been shown to have benefit in terms of being consumer-centric rather than biased by internal, media planning or creative preferences (Grounds, 2003; Merron, 2003; Orr & Cano-Lopez, 2005; Saada, 2006; Tapp, 2004).

Values as Explicit and Implicit During Implementation

In the implementation of the process across all these organisations the IVP model was actively used in the initial and active implementation stages (see checks 1 through 4 in Table 1, in Chapter 3). Beyond this, in all cases the agreed Values became a proxy of sorts for the full IVP and are what the organisation has visualised and actively refers to on an ongoing basis as the benchmark for all levels and types of brand implementation and delivery. At Source had posters made of all values for prominent display in the factory while at Porchlight the values for The Williston brand were made into posters and business cards for all staff to refer to daily. TGS has her values printed out and displayed at her desk. At Prairie Wear the values are shared via monthly social media posts, and are also referred to regularly in team meetings as the benchmark for everything– from what packaging is used to how to respond to a customer enquiry.

This is supported by the findings we have seen on the use of values as a key element in creating and solidifying a brand (Brown, 2018; De Chernatony et al, 2004; Hsieh, 2010; Keller & Richey, 2006; Ming, 2020); as central to all areas of organisational life including such seemingly wide-ranging areas as creating internal alignment (Edvardsson, Enquist & Hay, 2006); hiring decisions and the improvement of the implementation of TQM (Balmer & Grey, 2003; Graham 2021; Ingelsson et al, 2012); how the company is evaluated by the marketplace (Keller, 2009; Keller & Richey, 2006); and ultimately whether or not the organisation reaches its full potential (Balmer & Grey, 2003; Elkington, 2001).

Values are also increasingly being shown as central to the happiness at work of both employees (LinkedIn & Imperative, 2016; Elting, 2021) and entrepreneurs or business leaders (Albion 1951; Mosher, 2022; Roth & Winkler, 2018).

Implementation in Practice vs Theoretical Process

The full theoretical process was not always implemented in full from the beginning of each consulting relationship through to the end point, and those gaps can be instrumental in evaluating the value of this approach. With TGS, for example, the process was more organic post the VP workshop and evolved guided by the values and the VP of the business as opportunities came up. This enabled a highly authentic business model to evolve, but did require more rigorous awareness and application of the values by the business owner to ensure that the proposition still holds true.

Using Porchlight as an example, the process was begun as planned with the Integrated VP workshop. However, initial implementers were driven by preferences and relationships held by the CEO, and TM. Media and creative choices were outsourced to these parties which led to frustration in terms of a lack of clarity on outcomes, timings, and costs, and did not meet business targets. There were also too many internal players involved in the process with no clear allocation of leadership and decision-making, leading to confusion and lack of clarity in terms of deliverables and expectations. Thereafter the CEO re-set roles and expectations for the full management and implementation teams internally. This allowed the full process, driven by target market understanding, to be followed by the core marketing team who had responsibility for the final outcomes and reported directly to the CEO who had final approval on all points of implementation. The internal and external implementers were chosen once the strategy was approved and based on their credibility and experience in the specific fields of implementation required for success on each brand. This approach radically changed the speed, efficiency and ease of the process and led to much stronger business results. The Melody, for example, was 35% leased vs a 30% target when the property was ready for inhabitants, vs The Williston which only began the lease-up process when the doors opened, and has had two major extensions on the time required to gain what is considered “full lease-up” at a stabilised level of 95%. The Covid pandemic did also have an impact on the timings of The Williston, but the CEO and implementation team firmly believe that the timeline could have been shortened if the new, streamlined process had been implemented from the start of the project.

Table 3: An overview of case study interviewees

Organisation	Nationality	Primary Location	Interviewee Age	Designation	Education Level	Education Field
Case Study One: TGS	South African	South Africa / Kenya	39	Owner	MA	Poetry & Education
Case Study Two: Porchlight	Canadian	Canada	54	CEO & Owner	Under-graduate	Photography
Case Study Three: At Source	South African	South Africa	48	CEO & Majority share-holder	M.Sc	Agriculture (undergrad), IR & HR Mgmt (Masters)
Case Study Four: Prairie Wear	American	Canada	47	CEO & Owner	Honours	Social Work

Table three demonstrates the diversity of nationality, location, age, designation, and education level of the leaders of the organisations studied, as well as the diverse educational fields they qualified in.

A Consistent Approach is Possible Across Widely Divergent Organisations

The case studies shared in this paper were actively chosen (as per the outline in Chapter 3) to include a wide range of formal organisations with diverse leaders and in diverse fields and geographic locations.

These case studies have demonstrated that a consistent process starting with a value proposition and then continuing the logical flow through consumer/customer insight, media evaluation, media choices, messaging clarification, and finally choice and briefing of implementation partners can lead to easier, and more effective implementation of IMC regardless of the organisation type, size, location or industry. The principles of implementing a values-driven approach to IMC starting with a value proposition and the formal statement of values, and moving through a structured approach towards effective media implementation can be applied to a wide range of SMEs regardless of their field, leadership profile or location.

Case Study #1 TGS

Toni Stuart (Founder, TGS – Poet, Performer, Facilitator)

Overview

Field: Performance and written poet & poetry teacher.

Primary Markets: South Africa/Kenya with global collaborations

Company: Toni Giselle Stuart (hereafter TGS) – Poet, Performer, Teacher, Facilitator

Organisation size: 1

Interviewee: Toni Stuart

Position: Founder & Owner

Tenure: 2012 (start of business) to present (2022)

Introduction

I facilitated the original Integrated Value Proposition (IVP) workshop for the brand and supported the brand owner in an informal coaching and consulting relationship, but was not directly involved in the brand implementation on TGS which was driven by Toni herself.

The values identified for the brand at the beginning of the project were:

- Open-heartedness
- Professionalism
- Being true to yourself
- Creativity as a way of life
- Community

The interviews conducted for this research support the findings and the researcher's experience of the brand and brand owner since the IVP workshop in 2012. The study shows that the brand has been driven by the values in terms of decisions made and the evolution of the business focus and implementation. Although the values have evolved over time, the central focus on using them as a touchstone remains true.

The challenge of creating a sustainable, vibrant business purely from poetry was significant and the success to date demonstrates the commitment to a values-driven approach.

Insights

Identifying, Clarifying and Formalising the Personal Brand of a Poet

Arts and culture branding and marketing is a territory with wide ranging views particularly with regards the artistic versus commercial aspects. Even the evaluation of the field itself is contested with one study considering it a complex and “very young research stream with only a small collection of empirical-based findings” (Baumgarth & O’Reilly, 2014, p. 6), in contrast to another concurrent study feeling that “[a]rts marketing has emerged as a flourishing research domain over the last few decades” (Colbert & St-James, 2014, p. 566). Interest in the marketing learnings that can be taken from the art world has increased in recent years, as has interest in the marketing of arts organisations. The level of research into branding of artists, however, varies by type of artist with more available content on the branding aspects of musicians and visual artists, and less in the way of a specific focus on writers and poets (Angelini, Castellani & Pattitoni, 2019; Colbert, 2009; Ding, 2011; Hernando & Campo, 2017; Lee & Lee, 2017; Meier, 2011; Schroeder, 2005). There seems to be less current research into how the practice of personal branding or brand value proposition definition could influence the trajectory of a career in the arts in general, or as a writer or poet in particular. However there are interesting reflections on the work of classic poets and writers, and how their promotion and self-promotion strategies were often well ahead of their time (Brown, 2015; Bellew, 2017; Marsh, 2014; Redman, 2007; Strachan, 2007; Tronnes, 2020; Wilhelm, 1990; Walker, 2007).

“Creatives” or “the creative class” (Florida, 2005; 2006 & 2014) is a category that includes creative professionals. These include individuals such as management, business, legal, technical and healthcare occupations, as well as the “super-creative core”. The “super-creative core” spans computer and mathematical occupations as well as arts, design and entertainment. These fields are considered a driving force of economic growth (Zenker, 2009) and are often targeted by cities and areas in search of residents. It is crucial to understand the values, needs, preferences, and behaviours of these groups. Zenker (2009) identifies urbanity and diversity as the two core values or needs that are attractive to the creative class, and this is also supported by Florida (Florida, 2005, 2006 & 2014). There is some dissent on whether “creatives” or cultural industries are the true

drivers of urban regeneration and whether the policy changes are benefiting anyone other than the traditional economic power-holders (Peck, 2005; Pratt, 2008). However, the idea that the creative class drives change is generally agreed upon.

There is a large body of recent work around the concept of “creatives”. This work examines creatives as being both targeted and used in place branding as a discipline, as well as how the identity and profile of creatives impart values and identity to the place they operate in (Andron, 2018; Jansen, 2022; Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015; Zenker 2009; Rodrigues & Schmidt, 2021; Sandbach, 2022; Setiadi, Sutanto & Surienty, 2021). There is an intrinsic understanding that artists embody certain values and attributes, and these identities are then used to build up the values and attributes of other brands.

However, the artists themselves often don’t reflect the same ease with the values and attributes they represent. A particularly relevant paper (Kucharska & Mikolajczak, 2018) for this case study discusses how artists often find it difficult to define their artistic and “self-distinction” identities. Furthermore, they often feel that self-branding and marketing is irrelevant at best and offensive at worst. The study concludes that to be successful as an artist, the person must first define themselves as such, and then manage the creation of their professional reputation around this identity. This process is known as personal branding. The findings demonstrate that self-esteem underlies the young artists’ ability to perceive their self-distinctiveness and use that as a basis for building their personal brands. What’s more the stronger their personal branding, the more confident and successful their artistic performance: “This means that if artists view themselves as personal brands, it affects their personal performance in a positive way” (Kucharska & Mikolajczak, 2018, p. 249).

The first step Toni Stuart took in building a brand and business in an arts context was creating a brand for her professional persona (ie. TGS). She wanted to communicate herself as a full-time, economically independent writer and poet. She was aware that she needed to understand the parameters of the brand more coherently and also needed to gain clarity on the actual work and scope of the brand. This is why she completed an integrated value proposition workshop. This workshop included the consideration and commitment to the value proposition (what we do & why it offers value), the values of the personal brand which were aligned to her own individual values, the brand persona, and the brand essence of TGS (TGS Value Proposition Workshop, 14 September 2012). This VP workshop was held in September 2012 and the outputs can be seen in Images 1 and 2 above. This process allowed Toni to clarify the identity of the brand as distinct from her own identity. Clearing this up enabled her to approach the brand as a business, and to promote it and grow its influence. It also allowed her to maintain a degree of personal privacy that she felt was needed for her own creative practice and personal identity. This brand pyramid also allowed Toni to clarify the offerings and intention of the brand, and allowed the values and proposition of the brand to direct her implementation efforts as indicated here:

It's not about listening to the people in the room, but using the people in the room's ears to listen for what the business is, what it wants to be, and how it can guide what's going forward. Which is interesting because it feels like a soulful, human way of doing business. ...I think what the VP is, is a way to listen to what the business is already, and what it wants to be. If you're in a collective, putting the single artist to the side, sometimes that comes out of a particular person's vision or group of people's visions, and sometimes that's going to change and morph as the thing changes and morphs. ...I think in terms of the value proposition, the obvious things like knowing the kind of work that I want to do will determine who I'm approaching. (Toni Stuart, Interview January 17, 2022)

Toni's creation of TGS as a distinct brand persona supports the findings around the need for artists to craft and own their identity, proposition and values. It also indicates the need for artists to have confidence in their self-distinctiveness to boost both their artistic performance and their success in their chosen field.

Social Media for Personal Brand-building of Artists

It is impossible to consider personal branding in the past ten years without taking into account the impact of digital media and the pervasiveness and ubiquity of social media. Social media in particular is often used as a self-promotion tool intended to create a persona on these platforms that boosts reputation, fame and possibly profits (Edlom, 2020; Saboo, Kumar & Ramani, 2016; Scolere, Pruchniewska & Duffy, 2018). Research in this area examines the increasing complexity and concomitant additional work required to constantly curate a holistic and integrous online personality across multiple platforms. Particularly because each platform has its own algorithms, rules and mandates; and they are constantly evolving and changing. Scolere et al (2018) argue that creatives, as a lead indicator of the wider cultural economy, espouse the idea of a consistent online persona or “self-concept”. Furthermore, they suggest creating it via a series of “platform-specific self-branding” identities that, when taken together, construct a brand persona across a larger social media ecosystem rather than within each discrete social platform (Scolere et al, 2018).

There is also the need for freelance feminist writers to balance out their collective feminist objectives with the need to self-promote. In order to be sustainably employed, artists often face contradictions when “the promotional practices required of ...cultural producers to succeed in their careers stand in opposition to their values, their identity, and oftentimes, the content of their writing” (Pruchniewska, 2018, p. 811). In order to navigate these tensions, online feminist writers use three “reconciliation strategies”. The first of the reconciling strategies is to incorporate ‘authentic feminism’ into their self-branding endeavours, or, differently stated, they need to link their individual creativity and values to the process of personal promotion for authenticity. (Pruchniewska, 2018). This approach resonates with the experience Toni has in maintaining an authentic but marketing focused social media presence on her brand. In order to free up time, space, and energy to practice her art she engages and maintains her public profile and steps away from social media in her personal capacity.

Toni used the VP workshop to clarify, formalise, and verbalise her objectives as a full-time writer and poet (which may well be different to the objectives of other creative

entrepreneurs). In building her personal brand as a poet (ie. TGS). Toni's objectives were ultimately expressed in the very focused, succinct and clarified phrase: "to write, perform and run workshops".

It's been such a journey, because in the early years I was so clear about what I wanted to do, as in I wanted to write poems, I wanted to perform, I wanted to run workshops. It's interesting because that's never changed and it was very clear in the VP, that format. (Toni Stuart, Interview January 17, 2022)

For the first two years of the business, Toni attempted to create a sustainable business model and the drive to generate income. This led to her focusing on poetry-related project management and curation more than actual writing and performing.

But in needing to make money and find my own way, I did lots of curation and project management in the early years. I'm grateful I did, because I'm good at those things and it strengthened my own capable skills around management and admin. I got to learn how those things work, but I was also able to make contributions to the poetry industry and community. I was able to support young poets and open doors to young poets, especially poets of colour, poets in other languages, other styles and forms, be part of a platform that legitimised everyone, that didn't have this dichotomy or divide between page or stage hierarchy. ... [but] I decided in doing those things...I wasn't writing. I became resentful because I wasn't doing the creative work. Then running events and watching people grow, and feel my own creativity stagnate. (Toni Stuart, Interview January 17, 2022)

Although this was a learning process and meant that she was not yet fully embracing her value proposition, these projects did allow her to find her feet as an artist entrepreneur. The projects also achieved two things that were key to creating a strong foundation on which to build a business directly aligned to the value proposition and values in her VP. The first thing was building up a personal profile within the broader world of poetry as a business through taking on curation and project management work. The second thing was curating and evolving a digital presence for the brand that supported the brand objectives.

Table 4 (below) and figures 3 to 6 show the types of projects that Toni undertook in the early years of TGS. The sample shown here demonstrates the range of projects that were about poetry and the poetic community in Cape Town and beyond, but not always focused on creating poetry directly. Although there was often a small performance element to these projects, they were often largely administrative and project management focused in terms of Toni's main involvement.

Table 4: Examples of Project Work undertaken by TGS

Project Work Examples	URL links	Date/s
Being the Founding curator of "Poetica" at the Open Book Festival in Cape Town in 2013 and 2014 & Creating platforms for young poets	https://openbookfestival.co.za/authors/toni-stuart/ https://www.poetrypotion.com/slam-with-your-mother-tongue-at-open-book-poetica/	2013 - 2014
Organizing and featuring on panels as part of the 3rd annual Word N Sound International Youth Poetry + Live Music Festival in Cape Town in 2014	https://wordnsound.wordpress.com/?s=Toni+Stuart https://livemag.co.za/livecreativehustlesnov/	2014
Running workshops like "The Silence that Words Come From"	https://www.poetrypotion.com/toni-stuarts-the-silence-that-words-come-from/	Various
Working on various projects with and through the British Council	https://connectza.tumblr.com/post/68155157734/toni-stuart	Various
Cape Town / London Urban verse project with Jacob Sam-La Rose	https://slipnet.co.za/view/event/urban-verse-the-sequel/	2014

Table 4 outlines a selection of Project Management work undertaken by TGS in the early years (2012 to 2014) of the clarification and growth of TGS.



Figure 3: Screenshot of Open Book Festival “Urban Verse” event 2014 (<https://slipnet.co.za/view/event/urban-verse-the-sequel/>).

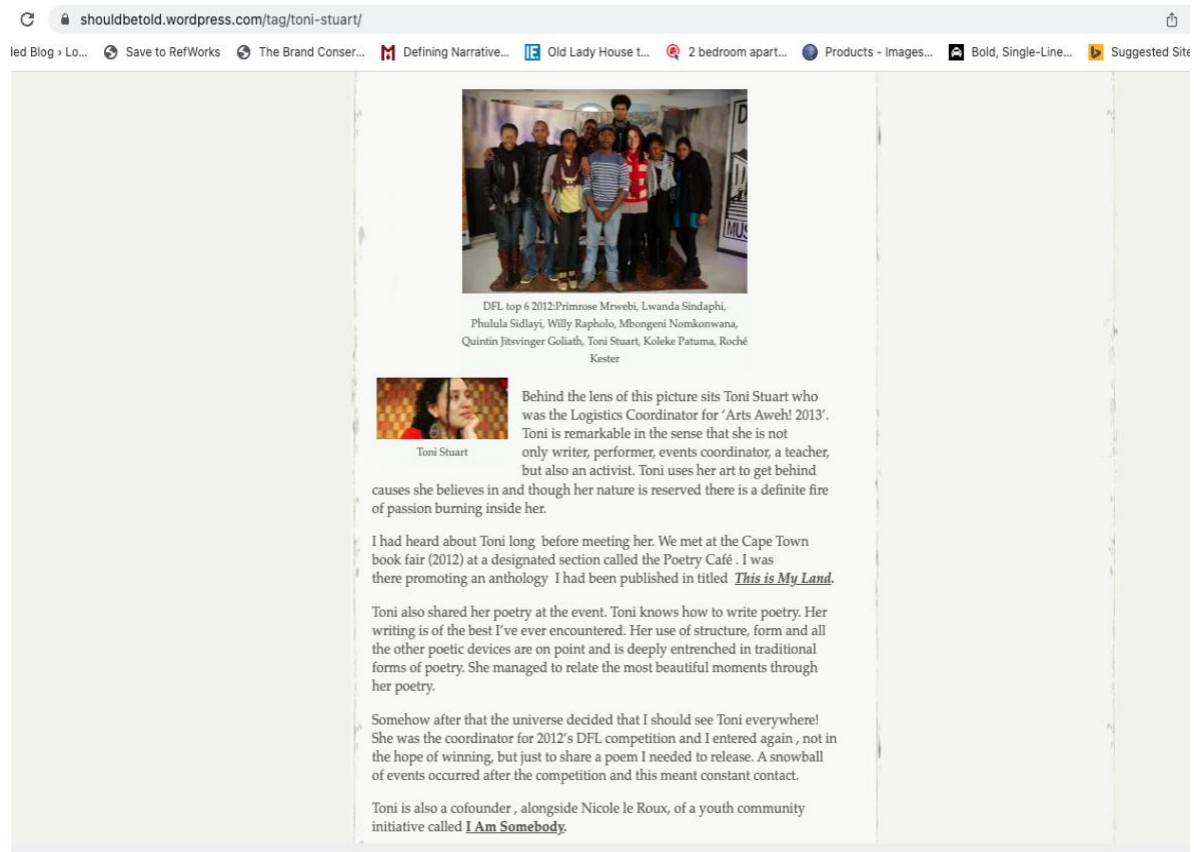


Figure 4: Screenshot of a personal blog covering Toni's involvement and co-ordination of the "Arts Aweh! 2013" project. (<https://shouldbetold.wordpress.com/2013/04/03/a-picture-is-worth-more-than-a-thousand-words/>)



Figure 5: Screenshot of a Twitter post showing Toni in a live performance in 2013 (<https://twitter.com/WordNSound/status/405687004547272704>)



Figure 6: Artist profile on Open Book website, 2014
(<https://openbookfestival.co.za/authors/toni-stuart/>)

Curating and evolving a digital presence for the brand that supported the brand objectives was a key part of the clarification of what TGS stood for and what work it focused on, and in Table 4 and figures 7 to 10 the sample demonstrates the evolution of owned media platforms used by TGS for self-promotion, as well as the evolution of the messaging focus from a focus on sharing poetry to a focus on the promotion of the commercial offerings available from TGS.

Table 5: Examples of Digital Self Promotion by TGS

Digital Channel	URL links	Rationale
Twitter	No longer active	Self-promotion of events and sharing of short poems or thoughts; connecting with other poets & trending ideas; linking to curation & project work.
Blogspot	http://tonistuart.blogspot.com/ No longer active	Sharing of poems, writing and upcoming events. Replaced by Tumblr.
Tumblr	No longer active	Blog functionality to share news on performances, workshops and creative poetry projects. Replaced by personal website.
Brand website	https://tonistuart.com/	Centralised digital home, owned platform for sharing work, projects, and commercial offerings. Currently active & the main digital repository for Toni's work and brand presence including driving newsletter signups which are used to engage directly with her community.
Sound-Cloud	https://soundcloud.com/nomadpoet Active, but no longer updated.	Used to share spoken word work, and re-share relevant work, quotes and interviews from other poets.
FaceBook	Profile no longer active, only present when interviewed or featured on other accounts. Example: https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1523389251359334&id=184608868253164&_rdr	Social media content sharing, initially poetry and later only events and promotion. Replaced by Instagram.
Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/tonigiselle_official/ Active.	Social media presence currently used to share updates, projects, reflections, poetic work, promote upcoming events and publications, and share other news from the world of poetry. Chosen as the least invasive of social media formats that still enables her to maintain some digital brand presence outside of her website.
YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMDVnEzdnNEIZIM7rV8bDeA/featured	As a platform for sharing work, performances & collaborations with a video or visual element, as well as testimonials and interviews.

Table five shows a broad selection of previous and current social and digital platforms that TGS has used for self-promotion since 2012. With the exception of the brand website and Instagram, these platforms are no longer used actively by TGS directly, some of them (eg. YouTube) become active again for short periods when TGS is featured by other brands or channels.

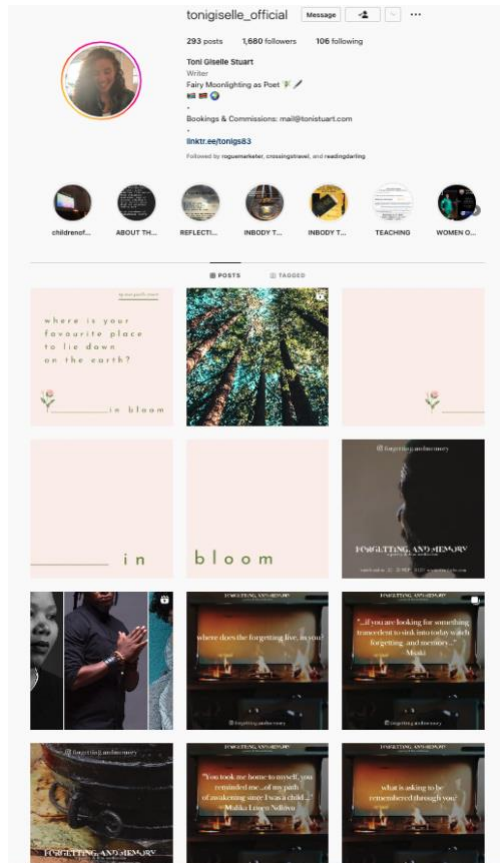


Figure 7: Screenshot of the active TGS Instagram Profile – October 2022
(https://www.instagram.com/tonigiselle_official/?hl=en)



Figures 8

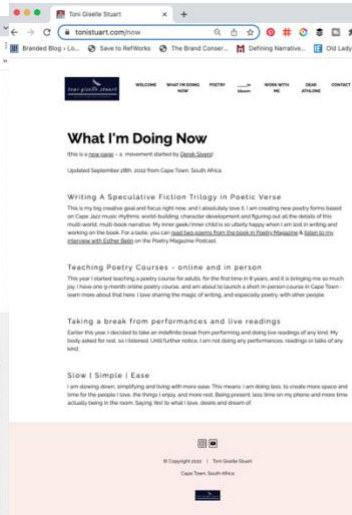


Figure 9

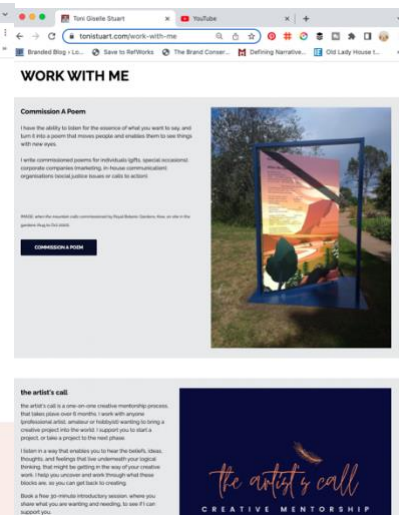


Figure 10

Figures 8 to 10: Screenshots of the Home page (8), “What I’m doing now” page (9) and the “Work with me” page (10) on the current active TGS website – October 2022
(<https://tonistuart.com/>)

Artists as Cultural Icons vs Commercial Endeavours

Artists are generally viewed as part of ‘culture’ and as cultural icons, and they are even used as symbols of national and brand values (Scarpaci, Coupey & Reed, 2018). However, there is less awareness of the necessary entrepreneurship aspect of being a full-time artist. Research has shown that “elite” artists like Picasso, Dali and Warhol were “canny commercial operators who knew their own worth and weren’t reluctant to exploit it” (Brown, 2015, p. 411). Many current high profile artists still have an aversion to thinking of themselves as brands. However, research indicates that many modernist artists and poets such as TS Eliot and his mentor Ezra Pound embraced their work as a business entity. Furthermore, they also engaged in some very progressive marketing and promotional approaches and in comparison to current marketing thinking (Brown, 2015; Bellew, 2017; Marsh, 2014; Redman 2007; Wilhelm, 1990). While the ‘great divide’ between art and commerce is still a point of debate in current commercial and artistic circles (Brown 2015; Brown & Wijland, 2015) the digital context has had considerable impact. The digital and self-promotion heavy context of modern artistic endeavours has, in some ways, forced artists in general, and poets in particular, to consider the value of their art more clearly. What’s more they need to ensure they are being recognised – culturally and commercially – for their contributions to society.

Part of Toni’s brand and business development process was aligning the artistic and commercial pursuits of a poet. In 2014 Toni was chosen as a Chevening Scholar ⁴ (awarded on her artistic portfolio as well as due to her profile within the poetry landscape and her community and mentorship projects, She nurtured all of these aspects during the preceding two years). She went to Goldsmiths University in London to pursue a Masters in Poetry Performance and Teaching. Taking time to complete a Masters (earned with distinction) may seem counterintuitive to the process of commercialising her poetry, but the degree and the context enabled a key shift in Toni’s thinking around her business and brand:

[M]y Masters was a big turning point for me, because I was going away to London to do it, and decided when I left that I would stop all project management work, and focus on the teaching, performing, and writing. ...it was the first time I was

⁴ Chevening Scholarships are scholarships for one year Master’s Degrees in the UK awarded to “outstanding emerging leaders from all over the world” (<https://www.chevening.org/scholarships/>).

being paid to think, to write, and to create. It showed me it was possible..... Then coming home, and how that opened up a whole world of international work. I'd been doing international work before, but that really strengthened things and shifted things. (Toni Stuart, Interview January 17, 2022)

The opportunity to complete her degree internationally, and in a multi-cultural centre such as London, allowed Toni to engage with the broader international context of modern poetry, performers, and critical thinkers. This exposure helped her broaden her networks and build her profile even further. It also allowed her to extend her work and collaborations globally to a degree that had been unavailable to her before her Masters. After her Masters Toni embraced more fully her own identity, voice, and values as a poet and brand. Toni successfully created a sustainable business model driven by teaching and writing poetry through accessing governmental & regional grants, and pursuing collaborations and performance projects. She no longer relied on project management work as can be seen in Table 6 (below) which shows a selection of the work undertaken after the completion of her Master's degree.

Table 6: Examples of performance and collaboration focused projects post Toni's masters

Creative Project, Performance & Collaboration Examples	URL links	Date/s
"Here to Listen" project	https://www.instagram.com/heretolisten_poetry/	May 25, 2020 – June 29, 2020.
dotdotdot Dance collaboration	http://blog.dancedirect.com/2017/01/09/dotdotdot-sadlers-wells-sampled/	UK & Sweden, 2016 - 2020
"From my view" Film collaboration with Shelley Barry	https://africanfilmny.org/directors/shelley-barry/	
Papillon performance collaboration with Ella Mesma	https://vimeo.com/281097074 https://www.instagram.com/p/BkZeuo9HW86/?hl=en	2018
Spoken word archive	https://poetryarchive.org/poet/toni-stuart/	Various
A visual art and augmented reality collaboration with Athi Musoke as part of the Giving Poetry Wings 3 project, by The Radioactive Blog.	https://curat10n.com/giving-poetry-wings/	June 2020
Poetry, Paramedics & Film - collaboration with filmmaker and public health researcher, Leanne Brady.	https://youtu.be/llBRAGkRT9U	March 2019
forgetting, and memory - A collaboration with poet vangile gantsho and filmmaker Vusumzi Ngxande,	https://youtu.be/kWke44pUf_I	July 2020
Performance for Centre for Caribbean & Disapora Studies with Centre for Feminist Research (Goldsmiths)	https://www.gold.ac.uk/news/an-interview-with-toni-stuart/	December 2015
Profile – MatieMedia	https://www.matiemedia.org/toni-stuart-poetry-on-the-hurting-the-healing-and-the-releasing/	May 2022

Table six demonstrates a selection of TGS projects post the Masters Toni completed in London, showing the shift of focus from project management to performance and creation.

Beyond performances, talks, and collaborations (both digital and physical), other income streams for TGS comprise commissioned, coaching, teaching and printed work.

Commissioned poems are from organisations or individuals who seek a customised piece, while creative mentorships involve a longer term commitment to coaching or mentoring a fellow or aspiring artist in a specific project. Teaching usually involves a specific thematic or form focused course that is run either in person or digitally, and has a specific lifespan. Participants commit to the process and timespan of each specific course.

Traditional printed formats span the inclusion of poems into anthologies and a book-length work that Toni is working on. In this, Toni uses poetry-as-prose in a trilogy of speculative fiction. This work is in process and already optioned by a local publisher.

Figures 11 to 18 show a selection of the digital earned media generated by projects undertaken since the completion of the Master's degree showing the strong focus on artistic projects and continued building of an international profile as a poet.

Figures 11 to 18: Screenshots of various digital formats and reporting on TGS projects during and post her Masters work at Goldsmiths University, London from 2015 - 2022

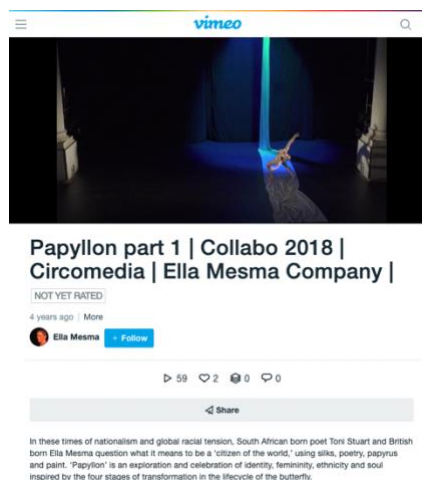


Figure 11: Vimeo – Collaboration with dancer Ella Mesma

https://vimeo.com/281097074?embedded=true&source=video_title&owner=4806655

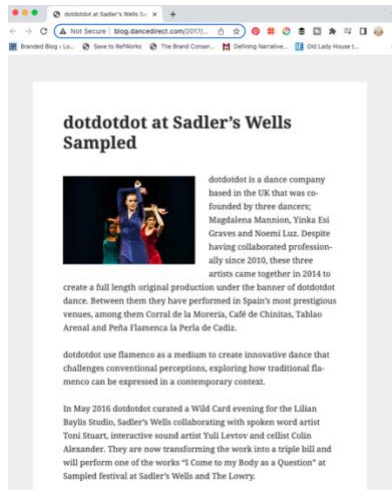


Figure 12 Performance with Dotdotdot at Sadlers Wells

<http://blog.dancedirect.com/2017/01/09/dotdotdot-sadlers-wells-sampled/>

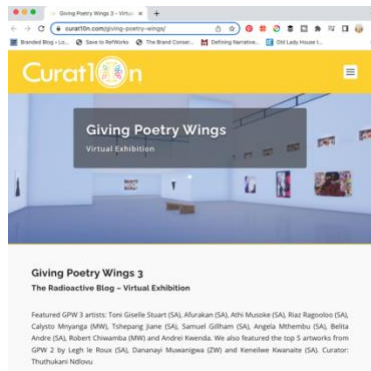


Figure 13 Featured artist in Giving Poetry Wings3, a National Arts Festival project

<https://curat10n.com/giving-poetry-wings/>

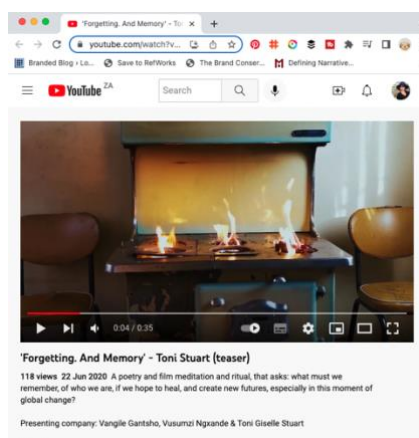


Figure 14 Collaboration with another poet and a filmmaker

https://youtu.be/kWke44pUf_I

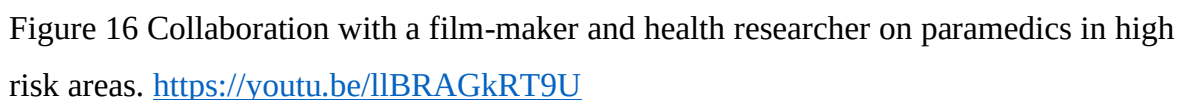
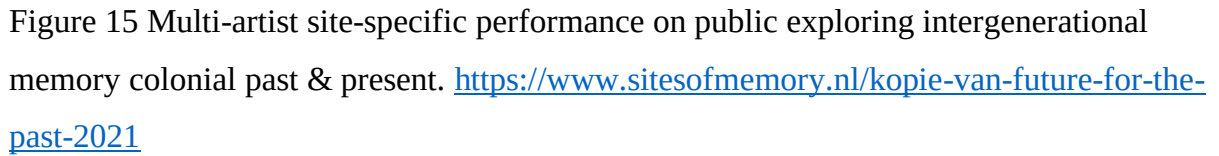




Figure 18 Open Book Festival 2022 - profile on the return of festival post Covid, featuring TGS

<https://citylifearts.co.za/popular-book-fair-returns-featuring-exciting-authors-after-two-years-of-disruption-by-the-global-pandemic/>

Brand Values for Artists

Little has been written regarding the impact of values on the personal branding and marketing of artists, and poets in particular. This is striking given that intrinsic values and identity are usually a core part of an artists' expression and outputs, and therefore could be expected to have a significant impact on the crafting of their personal brands.

...then having to distil and only choose, and again having to distil and only choose what is it that you really value. ... You said another way to think about it is: what is it that I value as a person? Then as a business, what is it that we value? And these five values drive the decisions that we make, and how we move and do things. That stayed with me, because again I think I've refined and become clearer, the values have shifted slightly, but literally at my desk next to my wall I have a laminated card that has five values in circles. It sits there. I thought the business and mine were different, but actually they cross over. (Toni Stuart, Interview January 17, 2022)

There are examples of highly successful, profitable artistic entrepreneurs such as Thomas Kincaid (Schroeder, 2006) however, successful artists are often conflicted in their success. Discourses around this conflict include the idea that they have sold out. For example, Dame Helen Mirren feels she "should have been a struggling artist" (Singh, 2017) and many historic and contemporary examples (Brown, 2020; Salamon, 2004;). There seem to be fewer who have successfully found the balance between maintaining

artistic integrity and driving real commercial success. Where this balance has been successfully found can be seen in examples such as Gibney in New York City (Elstein, 2019) or Pablo Picasso who said “An artist needs success. Not only in order to live, but primarily so that he can realize his work” (Muniz, Norris & Fine, 2014). In these instances the artists/leaders have been driven by intrinsic values and the passionate belief in the value (in all senses) of their art, or the drive to be ground-breaking.

For Toni the clarity and “north star” nature of her brand values have been a guide to the development of her business model. The inspiration is finding the balance between commercial and artistic success and the driving force behind the achievement of the goals she set herself ten years ago. For example, Toni explained that,

So ten years down the line, where I am is that I, in the last year, have made the most, had the highest income that I’ve ever had over the last ten years. What’s significant about that is that it was during the pandemic. I made that money only doing things that I absolutely love doing, and not doing anything for the money, if that makes sense? Not thinking that I needed to do anything based on, “If I don’t do this I’m not going to get paid, or I’m not going to be able to pay my rent.” That feels like a really big win, because getting to that point means you’re no longer controlled by external forces and you have a sense of sovereignty over your own life. So where I’m at is that, for the first time in my life I’m going into the year and I’ve refined and simplified the business model to only do what I want to do, which is write poems. So the kind of business model is: I do three hours of writing in the morning in a book, and then my afternoons are spent doing income-generating work. That income stream that I’m focusing on is pitching for commissioned poems, in various ways. I think a lot of the time work has found me, and so the shift that I’ve made this year is that I don’t only wait for work to find me, but actually looking for people that I’m interested in working with and contacting them. That’s a range of magazines around themes that I’m interested in, events and organisations, and then also learning how to market to individuals, for like special occasions, like birthdays and anniversaries and weddings and babies. I really feel that I’m living a pedagogy that I developed, even though I’m not teaching at the moment, I’m living a pedagogy I developed in my masters eight years ago, of rooting in one’s own creative practice, and from that moving out into

the world, sharing what you have to share. Even though it's not a teaching practice, it feels like the rooting and writing of the trilogy is going to directly feed into the income stream, but also pitching in creative ways. (Toni Stuart, Interview January 17, 2022)



Figure 19: Values graphic created by Toni Stuart to guide the early development of TGS (WhatsApp message, Toni Stuart, 13 October 2022)

The Brand Story

The Integrated Value Proposition for TGS

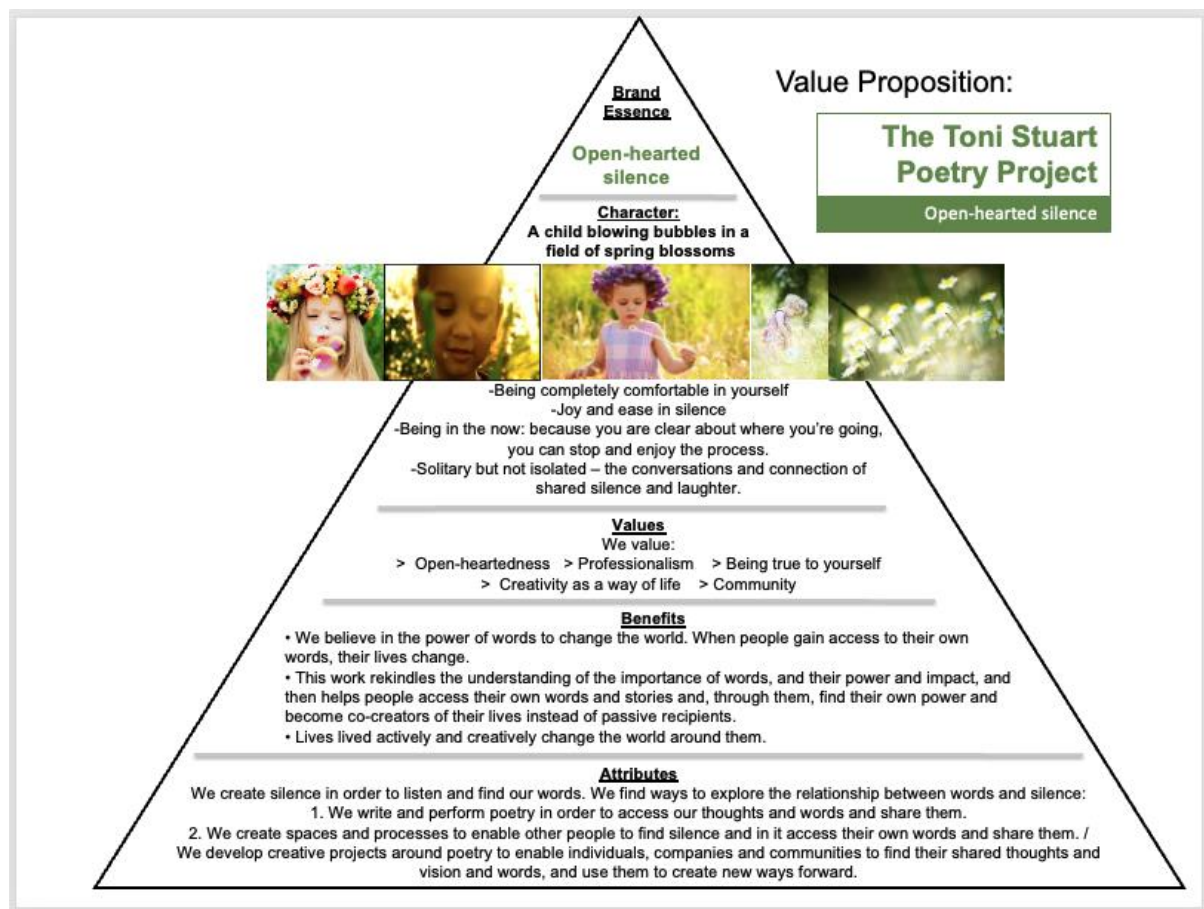


Figure 20: Screenshot of the brand pyramid in PowerPoint generated after the original IVP workshop held in person in September 2012.

The Starting Point

The origin of the brand project with Toni Stuart was the creation of a new brand – TGS – as a vehicle for a new career as a full-time poet. This initial workshop was done in September 2012 as Toni was leaving the non-profit organisation that she had co-founded after a first career as a journalist.

A Change of Focus

Toni had always had an active and productive side-career writing and performing poetry in Cape Town. However, the drive to make this her full-time career and sole source of

income meant that she had to think about her poetry as an independent business entity, and not as a hobby.

This required greater clarity of thought regarding her offering, project scope, financial model and objectives. Toni was also able to articulate her values, which have been core to creating the meaningful business and career she set out to create. This core includes writing, performing and teaching poetry in various forms.

For the first two years of TGS, Toni continued to write and perform poetry largely as a secondary aspect of her work. She built her business on curation and project management work around poetry projects and festivals such as Poetica at the Open Book festival in Cape Town. Toni founded the Open Book Festival and coordinated it for its first two years (See table 1 in this chapter for project links in reference to Poetica projects).

Toni was also very active in supporting young poets, especially those of colour, and in other languages and forms. She wanted to help to bring them into the arena of “legitimate” poetry. She was also named a *Mail & Guardian* “Top 200 Young South African” of 2013, but at this stage realised that although she was now working in and with poetry, she was still not primarily working as a poet. This led to her decision to pursue a Master’s degree in Poetry Writing & Teaching at Goldsmiths, University of London. She was chosen as a Chevening Scholar for this program and spent 2014 and 2015 on the Master’s in London for which she earned a degree with distinction and created a long form poem called “Krotoa-Eva’s Suite – a Cape jazz poem in three movements”.

The Master’s degree and the network she built from this time in London enabled her to establish herself as a full-time poet, create collaborations locally and internationally, and earn a global profile. This further enabled her to attract funding and investment for her poetry projects both in South Africa and abroad. This higher profile also jump-started her focus on commissioned poetic work as a strong revenue stream. Toni continued to grow her writing and performance career, particularly through strong international collaborations, and this became her growing source of income through the next 3 years. In 2018/19 Toni also started work on a trilogy of speculative fiction books written in

poetic verse form and added to her income generating work a stream that teaches and supports other artists in their creation of a specific artistic project.

The Covid Impact

Although Toni's work has always been a blend of performance, written work, and teaching, the impact of Covid on TGS was different to expectations. The international nature of Toni's work and collaborations meant that she was already used to interacting in a digital space. Using digital communication platforms allowed Toni and her fellow performers to successfully shift their performances online through streaming, video integration, and other forms of digital interactions. This meant that despite the dramatic impact Covid had on most performing arts generally, the collaborative digital space provided ample opportunities for performance poetry. It allowed Toni to continue to generate her income solely from poetic work through 2020 & 2021. TGS actually had its most lucrative business year to date in 2021, and is set for further growth in 2022 and beyond. (Toni Stuart, Interview January 17, 2022).

Media Implementation

Given the size of the brand and the nature of the category, minimal paid media was needed in the implementation of this brand. The primary focus was to create a strong digital presence through owned media, primarily a brand website, which functions as a digital home base for the brand. The website contains (a) a repository for all the work that can be shared digitally and (b) details the commercial aspects of the business (ie. what offerings are available and how they can be accessed). This information allows the website to drive lead generation and new business for TGS. Other owned media that TGS utilised were social media profiles, blogging environment, and YouTube. Table 2 in this chapter provides an overview of all the owned media employed over time on TGS with the objective of sharing work and creating engagement with audiences.

Beyond the website Toni focused on generating earned media in order to drive awareness and interest in her brand. She did so through collaborations with people who then shared the projects on their owned platforms. This networking gave TGS exposure to their followers and supporters thus broadening her own awareness. Media interviews around

the projects, her MA and her own work also drove strong brand awareness for TGS.

Table 5 above shows a selection of some examples of earned media gained by the brand.

No paid media has been undertaken on TGS to date.

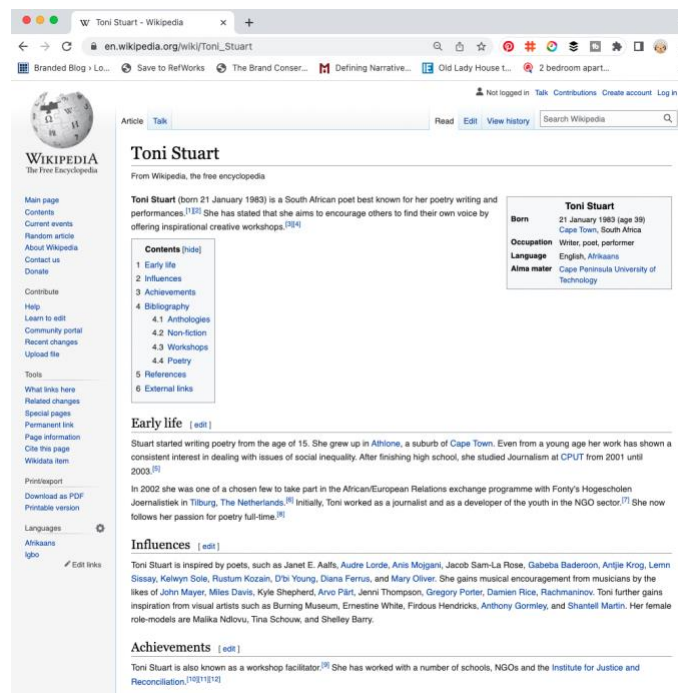


Figure 21: Screenshot of the Toni Stuart Wikipedia page (partial) – October 2022 – demonstrating her level of profile and the establishment of her identity as a full-time artist with international recognition. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toni_Stuart

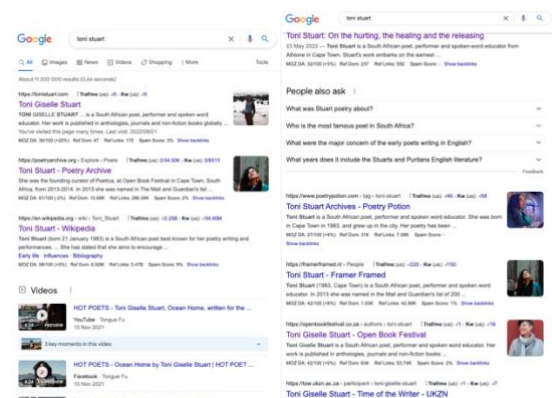


Figure 22

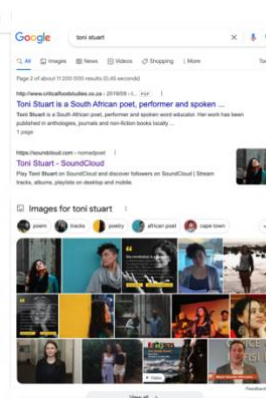


Figure 23

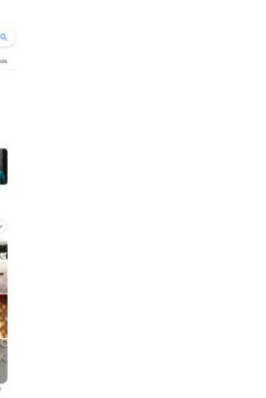


Figure 24

Figures 22 to 24: Screenshots of the Google Search Results for the search term “Toni Stuart” to demonstrate the depth of her poetic profile locally and internationally and confirm her status as a full-time artist as of October 2022.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=toni+stuart&oq=toni+stuart&aqs=chrome.0.35i39j46i512j35i39j0i22i30l2j69i60l3.3511j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

Results

Business Results

In terms of business results, the impact of Toni’s shift to full-time poet can be seen in the growth of the revenue generated. We can also see this in the progression from poetry-related project work towards work that is actually about creating and teaching poetry. This progression can be seen in Table 7 (below).

This shift in emphasis demonstrates the clarity of vision and values being implemented over time.

Table 7: Business Results

Toni Giselle Stuart											
As at fiscal year end 28 February of each	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Revenue growth %	-	34%	7%	-5%	n/a	201%	-42%	114%	-52%	50%	73%
Notes:		First year as a Professional Poet		Partly on Scholarship in London	On Scholarship in London					Covid Pandemic	Covid Pandemic
# of Project Management Jobs	4	4	4		3		2				
# of Commissioned Poems	3	1	1	1	1	1	3	3	4	5	5
# of Collaborations	2	5	2	1	3	2	3	3	5	1	1
# of Performances & Talks	11	10	6	6	21	25	6	5	7	5	3
# of Workshops	7	10	5	3	5	6	6	7	2	7	3

Table seven demonstrates the shift of focus from project management work to writing and teaching as the main sources of income for the business.

The IVP process and values formalisation also allowed for clearer, more focused and streamlined implementation on key brand elements such as the website and Corporate Identity:

Also there was an exercise around who is your competition? In other words, who are the people that do the same thing that you do, and what do their websites look like? One of the things that came out there is that not many people state poet, so it's difficult to search. That really stuck with me; I always made sure that poetry or poet was on the first page.... I'm going to have my brand identity updated again. I'm going to finally have it done by someone else, a new visual ID, letterheads, newsletter templates. I definitely want to use that. The person who I'm getting to do this works in the same way with their business. What is the essence, what is it about, how do we communicate that visually? (Toni Stuart, Interview January 17, 2022)

Media Results

Although buying media has not been a part of the journey of Toni Giselle Stuart as a brand, there has been an internal shift in both what media the brand uses to promote itself, and also what media the actual poetry comes to life in.

In terms of promotional media, TGS has embraced the digital space and as such has done promotional work primarily via email marketing, website presence, and social media. This is in terms of both content creation and cross-leverage with other poets, collaborators, and projects.

In terms of media that TGS works in, the focus on creating poetry and poetic collaborations has propelled TGS into digital multimedia along with live performance. Beyond live in-person performances and collaborations in Europe, the UK, and South Africa with other poets, dancers and artists, TGS projects have also included media. The media used is diverse and includes YouTube/video, live interactive sessions, visual art integrations, digital audio performances, blogs, and a new form of "interactive poetry". Interactive poetry is where Toni listens to people as they share their stories. Thereafter she writes a poem based on the essence of what they have shared. In addition Toni also focuses on formal written and published work.⁵

⁵ See Table 6 on p. 81 for examples and links for projects and performances

Case Study #2 Porchlight Developments

Rob Butler (CEO, Porchlight Developments. Multiple brands including The Williston)

Overview

Field: Property development

Primary Market: Canada

Company: Porchlight Development

Organisation size: 22

Interviewee: Rob Butler

Position: CEO & Owner (1 of 2 owners, 1 of 4 key investors)

Tenure: 5 years in current role, 15 years in various ownership & leadership roles.

Introduction

I have been working with Porchlight since July 2017. I have been involved with the update of the corporate brand and select existing brands, as well as the creation and implementation of new brands across multiple categories for the business.

The interviews conducted for this research mirror my experience of the team, and particularly the brand owner as committed to, and driven by, the values. The values are actively used by the management team to guide the implementation of the business and brands

The values identified for the corporate brand at the beginning of the project were:

- Performance
- Accountability
- Anticipation
- Discipline
- Kindness
- Collaboration

These values, as well as those of the Independent Living (IDL) brands, have held steadfast. They are still very much in evidence on public materials such as the website, within the communities in question, and discussed at weekly management meetings.

The clarification and articulation of values has been core to the survival and growth of the business and its brands. They have been fundamental during several challenging periods of business, and are considered as core to the success of key partnerships and funding relationships. The values are also central to the implementation of the brands at a consumer level. The values are seen as “precedent setting” in terms of how the business evolves and grows.

Insights

Brand Building in a Low Trust Industry

The construction or building industry is an industry that is hampered – rightly or wrongly – by perceptions of untrustworthiness from end consumers and amongst suppliers, partners and competitors within the industry. This phenomenon has been found worthy of discussion and study across multiple geographies including China and Hong Kong (Jiang & Lu, 2017; Shao Kai Lu & Hong Yan, 2016; Yao, Chen, Chen & Zhu, 2019), Malaysia (Aziz, Ahmad & Dominic, 2014), Vietnam (Yean Yng Ling & Bao Tram Tran, 2012), the UK (Challender, Farrell & Sherratt, 2017; Jones 2009; McDermott, Khalfan & Swan, 2017), Australia (Doloi, 2009; Strahorn, Brewer & Gajendran, 2017), the USA (Kent & Becerik-Gerber, 2010; Zuppa, Olbina & Issa, 2016), The Netherlands (Graafland & Nijhof, 2007; Koolwijk, van Oel & Bel, 2022) and Norway (Buvik & Rolfsen, 2015).

Trust in the construction industry is such a prevalent topic that full conference proceedings have been premised on it – such as “Trust as a competitive parameter in the construction industry” (COBRA 2011). A study at this conference found a distinct lack of response from clients, architects, and variably from sub-contractors; it was only engineers and contractors who engaged to a useful degree. This finding indicates the lack of trust, openness, and communication within the industry. The study also found that the “main reason for the ineffectiveness in the building industry, indicated by the industry itself, is the lack of trust” (Wandahl, Bejder & Ussing, 2011, p. 1134). The study goes on to examine why trust is important in this industry and finds that it reduces the costs of control, improves the process and workflow. It is also shown to relate directly to financial growth (Wandahl, Bejder & Ussing, 2011). This study was conducted in Denmark, a country noted for being the happiest nation on earth, and generally thought of as “one of

the most trustful nations in the world” (Wandahl, Bejder & Ussing, 2011, p. 1131). However, even in Denmark the construction industry is shown to have poor to non-existent trust ratings indicating once again the almost universal nature of this issue for the industry.

The construction industry is seen as a low trust industry, both within Canada and across many other markets. (Momaya & Selby, 1998; Zaghloul & Hartman, 2003). The first challenge facing Porchlight was creating and building positive, engaging brands in an industry with extremely low trust

The notion of a “low trust” industry is not foreign especially in the context of digital shopping in 2022. In this industry the core challenge has been the underpinning and, in some cases, undoing of many online retailers looking to encourage online shopping amongst consumers. These consumers initially had very little trust in either the retailers or the digital payment platforms that they required. In this context smaller e-retailers benefited from the trust built by large players such as Amazon marketplace as well as third party IT-led trust enablers such as credit card guarantees (Pavlou & Geffen, 2004). As a consequence smart early digital retailers soon shifted their emphasis to creating trust in their platforms. They focused on information, and service delivery using both internal (eg. Money-back guarantees) and external (eg. third party seals of approval or community endorsement) mechanisms (Ke, Chen & Su, 2016) This is because “trust is earned by meeting expectations” (Urban, Sultan & Qualls, 2000, p. 42). A low trust industry, then, can build trust through creating clear expectations, giving consumers and partners a sense of security in their purchase or contract, and meeting the communicated expectations and commitments.

Indra Nooyi (former Chairman & CEO of PepsiCo) in her Foreword of “Smart Trust” (Covey, Link & Merrill, 2012) considers the need for building trust as a core business objective in volatile times: “But the significant loss of trust in today’s volatile environment requires all companies – big and small – to think again about what we do to build and rebuild trust, and to think again about how to create, give and add value. And most of all, it requires all companies to ensure that we embrace not just the commercial idea of value, but the ethical idea of values, too.” (Nooyi, 2012, p. xvii - xviii).

Well-constructed and managed brands can be used as part of this trust building process for high engagement categories through the brand image communicated (Kim & Chao, 2019). Other aspects are how the brand engages online (Nikbin et al, 2022) and how it is represented online - largely based on owned platforms such as a brand website (Ke, Chen & Su, 2016). Increasing trust also comes down to how the representatives of the organisation engage with consumers in real-world experiences (Han et al, 2019); and how the organisation responds and recovers when that trust is challenged (Abbasi et al, 2022; Ozuem et al, 2021; Robson & Farquhar, 2021).

What allowed Porchlight to create and build strong brands in the low trust industry of construction and property development (exacerbated by a global health crisis and concomitant financial and economic impacts) was the fact that the business and the brands that it owns and markets are values-driven. This is emphasised by Rob Butler:

We govern the organisation by those principles. I can tell you, if I look over here, that I've got The Williston's values hanging on my wall. What I can tell you is, without knowing it, we set ourselves a really great roadmap. The roadmap was a series of five or six mountain peaks. On top of each mountain peak was a value, and we just started turning towards them. So the most valuable part of the VP process, for me, is the values, and aligning our interaction with the team and the governance of the client experience, aligning those with the values. That's extraordinarily helpful. It helps everywhere. It helps with who you're going to hire and who you're not. It helps when you run into a situation which you've never run into before, and you're trying to come up with the answer, and there is no answer, but our approach will be governed by the values. So our approach will be governed by kindness, or our approach will be governed by great food, or whatever it is. It's a really great communication piece, and it took the intuitive vision that we all had of the building of this community, and we were able to get to of agreeing that, "Okay, I think my vision can live inside of these things." (Rob Butler, Interview December 28, 2021)

The Williston is an Independent Living (IDL) brand that was launched just prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The brand was actively built based on a value proposition and a set of core guiding values. The VP workshop was held on 31 May 2017. Thereafter the brand

name was chosen, the CID (Corporate Identity) was developed, and the brand went into implementation in 2018. This brand development happened while construction progressed for a grand opening of the property (VP workshop follow up email, 5 June 2017).

The clarity of the VP gave direction to the look and feel of the brand, the language and tonality it would use, the expression of the lifestyle on offer. It also served as a guide for all brand representatives to share with potential and (later) active residents as well as use as a touchpoint for their own everyday decisions and responses. A true test of the values of The Williston emerged in late 2019 when the first Executive Director's actions no longer aligned with the values of the brand. The staff, residents and management had negative experiences around the delivery of the brand values. (Rob Butler, Interview December 28, 2021 and subsequent discussions).



Figure 25 – Photo by Natasha Sukarukoff, Lifestyle Consultant at The Williston, 202

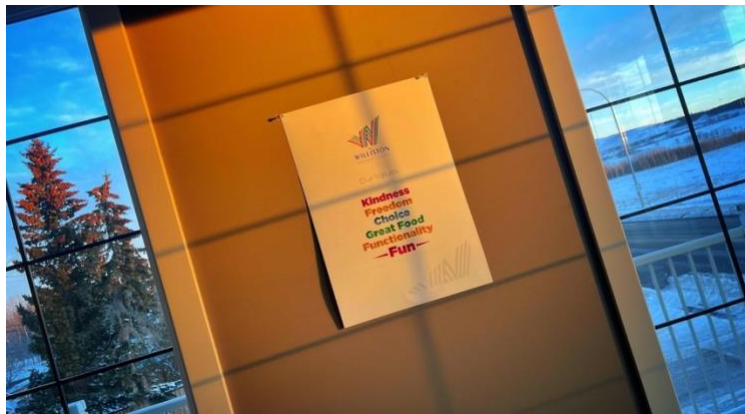


Figure 26 – Photo by Rob Butler, CEO of Porchlight Developments which owns The Williston, 2022.

Figures 25 & 26: These photos show the posters of the brand values of The Williston brand as found in the CEO’s office (Figure 25) and in the staff room at The Williston, Regina (Figure 26) – October 2022. The posters read: “The Williston – Our Values: Kindness, Freedom, Choice, Great Food, Functionality, Fun.



Figure 27: Screenshot of the design for a Referral program poster that includes the brand values for The Williston brand – October 2022.

What was critical was how residents felt about the strength of the brand equity and the brand values. The residents were the stakeholder group that demanded a response to the brand falling short of delivering the values it espoused and advertised, and they precipitated a change of Director as a result.

Interestingly ...the leasing team really felt strongly about the values, and that's what they sold. So when you do that, when you sell these values, well it would make sense that when that group of people come and start looking in your community, it would make sense that they would expect to see those values, because that's what you sold. So it's a wonderful, if somewhat uncomfortable, opportunity for folks over here to say, "This is what you said it was going to be, this is what it is. Are you going to try and get there, because if you are we're with you? If you're not and this was just a bait-and-switch, then this might not be the place for us." So when your sales team believes in the values and your clientele partly decides to commit to whatever your promise is, based on those values, then it gives you an automatic report card. Because when your client doesn't get the values that you sold, they're going to let you know. So slowly and gently we had to redirect the leadership of that community, again using the values. (Rob Butler, Interview December 28, 2021)

The residents of the community holding the ownership, staff, and brand to account for the brand values indicates a high degree of trust in the brand and the organisation behind it. It also indicates that Porchlight has, using value-driven brands and IMC deployment of their values, managed to overcome the trust issues so deeply strongly associated with the industry in which they operate.

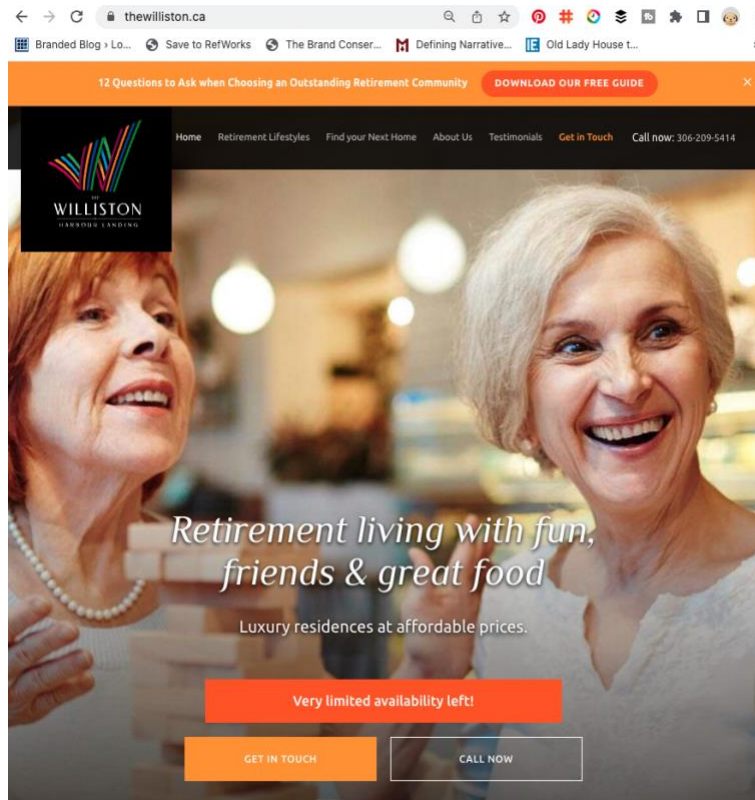


Figure 28: Screenshot of the home page of The Williston – October 2022.

<https://www.thewilliston.ca/>

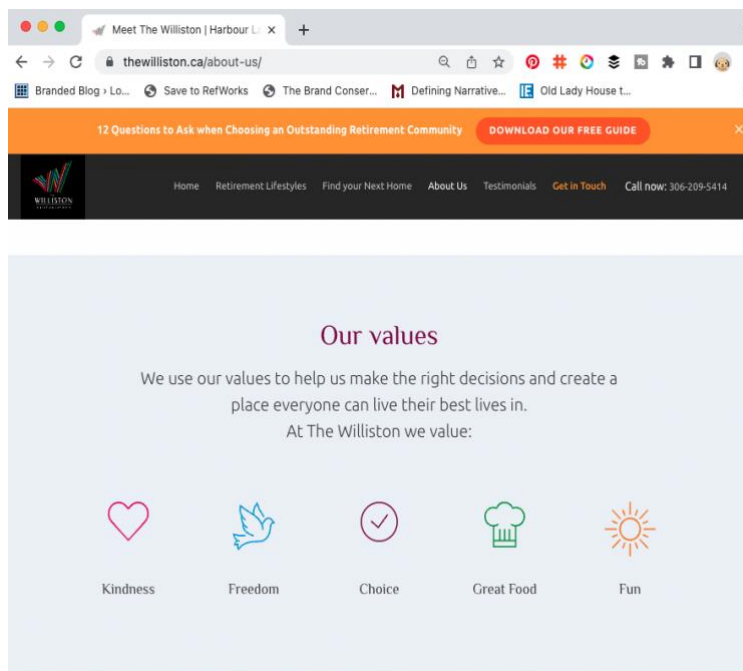


Figure 29: Screenshot of a section of The Williston website “About us” page showing the brand values – October 2022. <https://www.thewilliston.ca/about-us/>

The next test of the brand and organisation’s commitment to being values-driven is managing the change-over of responsibility for the product experience (ie. the ongoing

management of the community). This transition is from Porchlight (who is responsible for development, setup & lease up) to their business partner who will be responsible for the ongoing management of the operational running of the community once stabilised. The delivery of a values-driven experience is key to delivering on the promise setup by the advertising and leasing of the community. It is also a key building block for the expansion of the brand into the three new locations in other key centres in Western Canada where construction planning is already underway for further communities under a now national “The Williston” brand.

Differentiating in a Generic, Short-Term Oriented Marketing Context

Porter proposed “Differentiation” as one of his three generic strategies and believed that this strategy was best applied in those industries or categories that are not price sensitive (Porter, 1980). However, it has also been said that “there is no such thing as a commodity. All goods and services are differentiable” (Levitt, 1980, p. 1). Although differentiable, certain industries seem more prone to a generic and traditional or “conventional” approach to marketing. A short-term, perfunctory attitude to brands and brand development, and the home building, home supply (either via leasing or sales) and management industry does seem to be one such example (Briandana & Dwitya, 2020; Hillebrandt and Cannon, 1990; Morgan & Burnicle, 1991; Pheng 1991). Marketing is generally done on an ad hoc basis in the construction industry, and is not considered part of corporate strategy as a rule. Marketing is viewed only as a tactical sales approach, not the development of a “client-oriented business” (Yisa, Ndekugri & Ambrose, 1996).

Some studies differentiate the current status of the different sub-sectors of this overarching sector for example Briandana & Dwitya (2020) argue that residential property is a popular sector for investment and ownership. However, the impacts of digital and virtual reality media on the industry are undeniable. Furthermore these media have led to a shift in media usage and engagement channels in the marketing of these sectors, even if they are considered commodities (Alias & Pui, 2012; Jansen Van Rensburg, 2013; Kumar, 2014; Xiong, Cheung, Levy & Allen, 2022). The same shift is not, however, as prevalent regarding embracing branding and differentiation of offerings beyond product. This is particularly true regarding a service orientation and values-driven humanising of services (Zhang, 2020).

This is surprising because as far back as 1995, research into how the property sector could mitigate future risk found that marketing-led research into consumer needs and trends was required. This was in addition to traditional operational forecasting and property research. They also found that development companies that adopt this research and corporate brand approach recommended by the Centre for Strategic Studies in Construction (1989) would gain an advantage in the instability of the markets (Guy & Harris, 1997). The value of a strong branding approach is echoed by Bennett (2005) who argued that despite the industry tendency towards short-term marketing, the long-term approach significantly adds to the performance of a business.

Global property markets anticipated a slow down as early as 2018 (Woon & Mohd Suki, 2020). The global Covid-19 pandemic added further pressure to the industry with national shutdowns across the globe leading to lower demand for housing amidst high supply (particularly in high density urban areas), a shift in demand patterns, and an unpredictable variability of prices in multiple sectors (Ahsan & Sadak, 2021; Allen-Coghlan & McQuinn, 2020; Balemi, Fuss & Weigand, 2021; Bhat, Jiao & Amin, 2021; Guglielminetti, Loberto, Zevi & Zizza, 2021; Kang et al, 2020; Liu & Su, 2021; Nygaard & Parkinson, 2021). The pandemic also had an impact on how the sector works, and in some geographies sped up the transition to digital marketing and engagement channels. This was in addition to the economic and demand impacts (Marona & Tomal, 2020). These sector impacts have led to a rise in interest in stronger marketing and branding strategies in the broader construction development and housing industries (Woon & Mohd Suki, 2020).

For Porchlight, the shift in the marketing approach was driven by numerous factors. It was partly caused by frustration at the numerous examples of a lack of strong, strategy driven, measurable marketing offered by agencies and marketing companies in the past. It was also partly enabled by entering a new category (IDL) with the intention to create national brands with a long-term approach to marketing. This long term brand focus was a significant departure from their typical short-term approach to brands which were used for the period of lease-up or sales only, and then discarded. Porchlight's approach to media was also short-term and based solely on what the company has always done. In

other words known media and channels, or channels recommended by agencies without significant rationales, rather than informed by the target market. Rob Butler explains,

What I realised, conversations with the marketing companies would kind of go like, “What do you want to do? Tell us what you want to do, and we can make that happen, anything you want.” Quickly my answer would get to a frustrated, “I want leads. You guys should know how to do that, that’s what you’re saying your job is.” Marketing company after marketing company, I found I was unable to motivate them and have them really be accountable to what I wanted from them, which was leads that were relevant to the solution I was putting into the marketplace. So my approach to that has been to start to gather a collection of experts in certain fields.... So we’re taking the accountability of getting leads on ourselves, and the way we’re doing that is by having a marketing, advertising business unit. (Rob Butler, Interview December 28, 2021)

In this shift towards a more professional, owned approach to marketing, I was brought in as a marketing consultant in 2017. I began the process of creating the IDL brands and marketing approach with a multi-stakeholder Integrated Value Proposition (IVP) workshop. After this we rolled out the marketing development process. The IVP workshop included the formalisation of brand values, which have already been referenced as key to the brand rollout. However, the full IVP has also held value in terms of formalising and articulating the intuitional knowledge and strategy of the company’s CEO who has been the driving force behind this shift to professional marketing:

So we source experts. ...I think for those folks, the first thing I send over is the new VP. ... I think it’s incredibly valuable from the perspective of, there’s so much in the development of business that is intuitional, and the danger with the intuitional side is that it becomes verbal, and then you get frustrated because things don’t happen the way you thought they would. The truth is, I never really thought about it enough to articulate it, so it still lives in that world of intuition, and it’s never been articulated or verbalised, so you’re just left frustrated wondering why no one is picking it up. I think from that perspective the VP is really valuable. (Rob Butler, Interview December 28, 2021)

The formalisation of brand through the IVP and values is a more professional marketing approach. This values-driven philosophy has allowed Porchlight to clarify and improve delivery of marketing efforts and ROI. It has also allowed them to differentiate themselves as a corporate brand, and its consumer brands from a marketplace dominated by short-term marketing. Interest now lies in creating long-term, sustainable and valuable brands that support the business objectives.

High Flexibility Need

As discussed above, the medium-sized/mid-level development sub-sector of the home supply industry in particular has been somewhat short-term oriented. This is due to the need to be highly flexible in response to a constantly changing business and economic environment:

So we worked hard at creating beautiful homes for people that are entering into their first time, second time, third time home living situation. When that was condos and townhomes, one of the things that came out of '09 was a restructuring in Canada of mortgages. What that did, it took all the people entering into the market with the intention of purchase, it made it untouchable for them. The stress tests that they had to pass to qualify for a mortgage were unattainable. So we had to pivot, from 'For sale' to 'For rent'. We had two very, incredibly fortunate introductions during that time, without which I don't think we'd be around. So now what we do is rentals. It's the same focus, the same market, more or less, and we're moving into a rental world. So we've been in rentals for I guess three or four years. We're just about to go back to our first "For sale" project, a townhome project in the hot market in British Columbia, so we'll see how that goes. (Rob Butler, Interview December 28, 2021)

The challenge for Porchlight, from a brand and marketing point of view, lies in deciding whether to create brands that can attempt to withstand the constant flux and continue to add value to the business, or to create new brands for each new context it needs to operate in. This challenge is not dissimilar to that faced by technology companies in their ever evolving, conflating and expanding markets.

Elder (2006) considers the “triple play” market created by the integration of telecom, cable and internet service providers in the early 2000s. This study into brand definition in volatile markets found that the two strongest influences on purchase intention in the new category were category fit and brand equity (Elder, 2006). This research indicates that category shifts have some similarity in consumer perception to that of brand extensions into new categories. Both instances show that building strong, flexible (ie not category bound) brands and choosing the places you use each brand strategically will improve chances of success in that market rather than creating a new brand for each new market/context that is entered.

Studies looking at critical success factors in agile supply chain management also have some relevance here given their focus on volatile markets. One study found that “more agile” companies were those that were more customer focused and using a combination of methodologies “in order to meet changing customer requirements” (Power, Sohal & Rahman, 2001). Another similar study concluded that the value and importance of agility be recognized in the current highly volatile and challenging business environment (Christopher, 2000).

Video on demand (VOD) is another volatile market. A recent study interrogates the factors that have enabled Netflix to successfully navigate multiple business model changes in a highly volatile, constantly evolving market (Allegretti et al, 2021). Key to Netflix’s success is flexibility and being “open to change” despite current success in a specific model. They are also willing to change their mind (or stated viewpoints) as needed, and are able to create new revenue streams and run them in parallel with current, profitable products. Furthermore, they have clarity of focus on the product offering they want to deliver (and then innovating within that focal area) (Allegretti et al, 2021). Netflix has established a strong single-minded, community-oriented “portal as brand” identity globally (Wayne, 2018) that now largely represents the idea of its stated core offering - “home entertainment” for consumers (Camarrone & Van Hulle, 2019; Gonzalez-Chans et al, 2020; Hsu, 2019).

It seems that building strong brands is deeply connected to the concept of “agility” and the ability to respond to a volatile marketplace effectively.

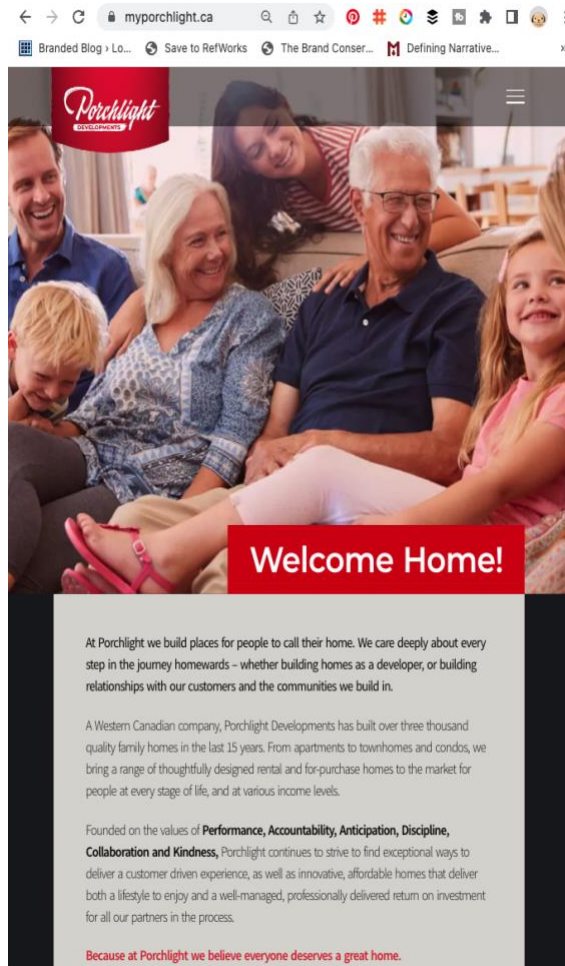


Figure 30: Screenshot of the introduction section on the home page of the Porchlight website showing the corporate brand values which are: Performance, Accountability, Anticipation, Discipline, Collaboration and Kindness – October 2022.

<https://myporchlight.ca/>

In the home supply industry there's a need to be able to shift organisational strategy and direction rapidly and efficiently when market conditions change. This requires a nimbleness that has, traditionally, not led to long-term thinking on brands and marketing. The thinking seems to have been that if a brand may need to be abandoned or changed due to a change of strategy, there is little point in investing time, money and expertise into building a strong brand. This lack of brand orientation also means that typically there has been no time or effort put into developing credibility and trust in the brand which then, in turn, means that the market has no established trust in the organisation or industry as a whole.

In this context Porchlight has recently made the shift to creating and building long-term brands that are focused by offering type, but not restricted to specific geographies,

locations, or product types. Traditionally these distinctions meant that each new project required its own brand. The business now has fewer brands that have been set up to allow it to expand and respond to the market as needed. They can do this without impacting the brand equity that is being built through marketing, customer service, and product experience. This shift has largely been driven by the expansion opportunities presented in a new market. Furthermore, they've seen the positive impact of a market-driven approach to marketing, the desire to develop brands with a larger footprint and impact than was previously the norm for the organisation. (Rob Butler, Interview December 28, 2021)



Figure 31: Photograph of a graphic in the Leasing Centre at The Melody community showing the brand values on display. These values are Kindness, Freedom, Choice, Great Food and Fun. Photo by Lauren Herschel, Marketing Implementation Manager at Porchlight, 25 November 2022.

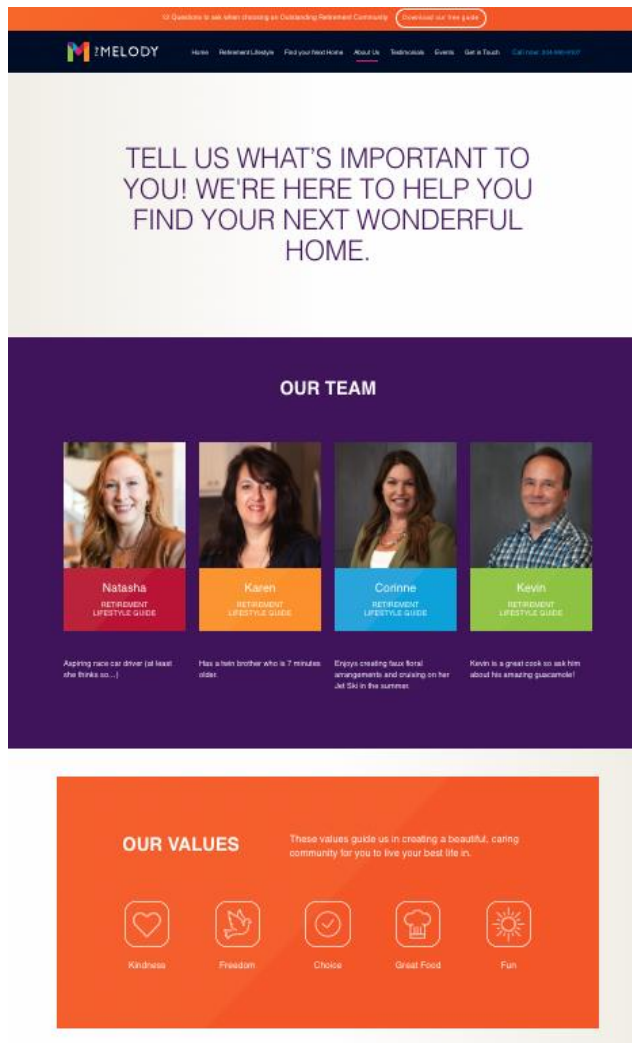


Figure 32: Screenshot of the brand values of The Melody as shown on the “About us” page of the brand website – October 2022. <https://themelody.ca/about-us/>

Porchlight’s shift to a values-driven approach to business, brand, and people has enabled the company to smoothly navigate through the rapid changes of a volatile industry exacerbated by a global pandemic and the economic knock-on effects from it:

I think the reason the folks ended up sticking around in the organisation I was trying to lead comes down to values. It comes down to being brutally honest and vulnerable with your values, and saying, “Here’s our set of values, here’s what we’re trying to be, and when we stumble we’re going to acknowledge that that’s not our values. It’s not what we’re trying to be, and we’re going to use that as a learning ground.” There’s been lots of transparency, lots of vulnerability. Anyone that’s been with me for a long time has probably had me apologise to them at least ten times. Transparency is valued, transparency in what the organisation is trying

to achieve, combined with it the transparency and vulnerability of... the values are the same for me too. Making the same mistakes, and still trying to strive, so I think there might be a humanness to it. (Rob Butler, Interview December 28, 2021)

Business Structure and Brands

Porchlight is a company incorporated in Canada that buys land and then develops it. Thereafter it either leases or sells large multi-family housing communities across Western Canada.

The company was created through the merger of two allied businesses and it owns several short and long term brands within these categories.

Originally it was primarily a “For Sale” developer. However, a shift in market conditions led to building and leasing communities longer term as interest rates rose and home ownership became unattainable to the large majority of Canadians. “For Sale” developments require only short term, “throwaway” brands, however, the shift into “Purpose Built Rental” (hereafter PBR) communities has meant a different approach to brands. This approach is because these now became longer term responsibilities of the business and as such needed more clarity and management.

Porchlight originally focused on the corporate brand (ie. “Porchlight”) as a source of credibility behind the short-term brands built for sale. However, the shift into PBR communities also meant a shift away from the corporate brand to a focus on the community brands as those were being marketed ongoing to potential lessees.

From this shift the business identified a strong growth opportunity in the “Independent living” (hereafter IDL) category. This category is essentially a “For Rent” community, but designed, specced and leased to retirees entering in search of less responsibility than caring for a large family house, but full freedom to live and enjoy their lives as they choose.

This category is in its early growth phase and offers Porchlight excellent long term growth and income streams (Mordor Intelligence, 2022; Ferguson, 2021; Lanthier, 2022;

Canada Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors, 2019; Research and Markets, 2022). This growth has shifted the approach to brands with the creation of The Williston and The Melody brands as IDL brands that would be kept and run long term by Porchlight. It has also expanded geographically into multiple cities, provinces and even countries. This strategy necessitated another step up in terms of brand creation and management as these brands are being built to maintain multiple locations and geographies over time.

The secondary impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Porchlight has been a re-costing and re-structuring of several planned communities due to the multiple impacts of the post-Covid global logistics crisis. These impacts include the lack of availability of key supplies and skills, as well as the rising costs due to increased demand on these key skills and supplies in desirable new locations as global populations reconsider their priorities in terms of work and quality of life. One of the consequences of these changes has been the refocusing of brands. For example, projects planned initially as PBR properties have now been re-stated as “For Sale” properties. These shifts also highlight the importance of the corporate brand as it functions as a source of credibility behind the shifting new and existing consumer-facing brands.

In summary, then, the current consolidated brand ownership of Porchlight is as follows:

1. Corporate brand: Porchlight (myporchlight.ca)
2. Consumer brands in three categories:
 - IDL brands:
 - a) The Williston (thewilliston.ca)
 - b) The Melody (themelody.ca)
 - PBR brands:
 - a) Element (elementtownrentals.ca)
 - b) Jade (jadetownrentals.ca) – a temporary holding, likely to be transitioned to Element in time
 - For Sale brands:
 - a) Life (lifenewhomes.ca)

Porchlight Brand Portfolio Strategy

Updated 1 March 2022

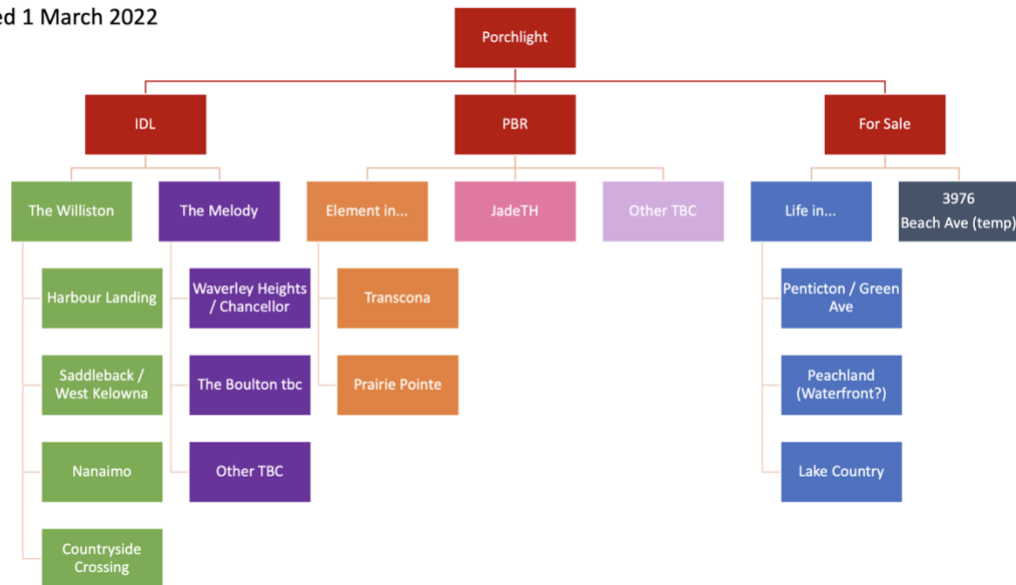


Figure 33: Screenshot from an internal Porchlight Portfolio Strategy deck showing an iteration of the portfolio of categories and brands as the business shifts towards a consolidated set of established core brands, March 2022.

The Brand Story

The starting point of Porchlight’s brand project was the launch of the first new IDL brand (The Williston) into a new retirement living sector that bridges the gap between traditional care homes and the family home. Many retirees have the desire to downsize from the demands of owning their own, large family homes, but don’t want to live in a care home. The intent was to ensure that the brand defined this emerging category, and was set up in such a way as to grow from one location into a national and international brand, in time.

The original IVP workshop for The Williston was done on 31 May 2017. Thereafter the brand name was chosen, the CID (Corporate Identity) was developed, and the brand went into implementation in 2018. This happened while construction progressed for a grand opening of the property in October 2019 (The Williston IVP workshop deck, 2017; Rob Butler, Interview December 28, 2021).

A re-set of management and some staffing within Porchlight as well as at The Williston happened in late 2019. This was just before the COVID-19 pandemic began and it

brought Rob Butler into the full CEO role. Up until this point he had shared the CEO role between the two co-founders. This structure resulted in a lack of clarity internally and a lack of full ownership of the role between the two founders (Rob Butler, Interview December 28, 2021).

The Integrated Value Propositions

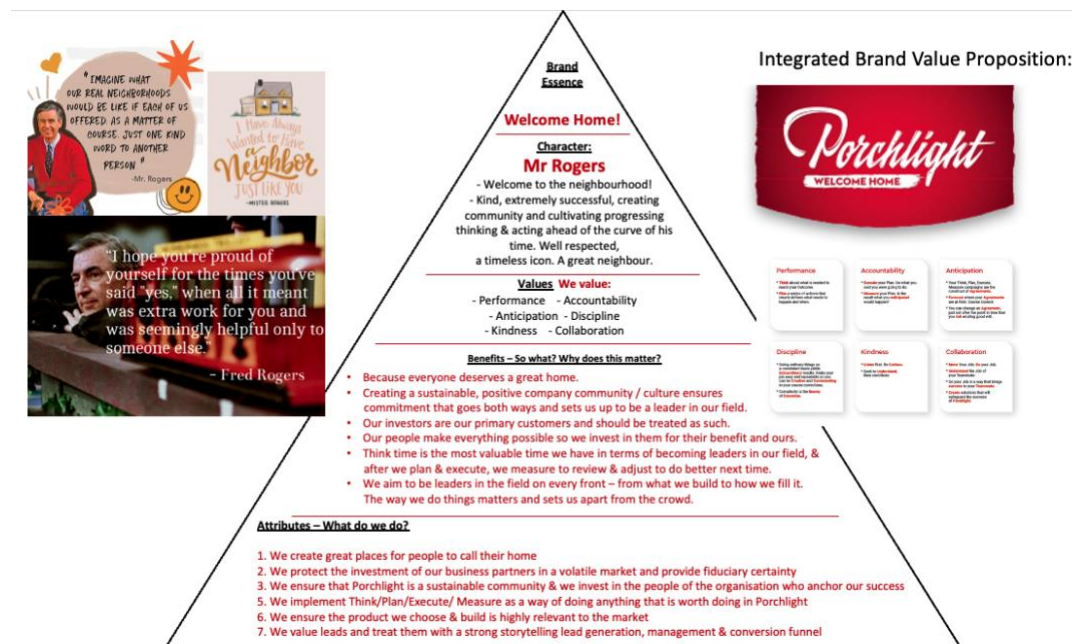


Figure 34: Screenshot of the IVP brand pyramid for Porchlight as a corporate brand – as at October 2022.

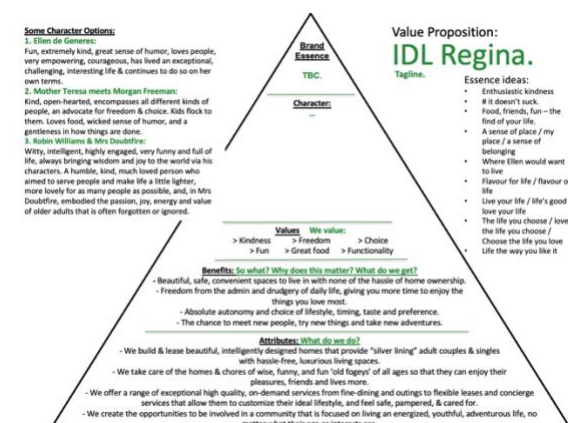


Figure 35

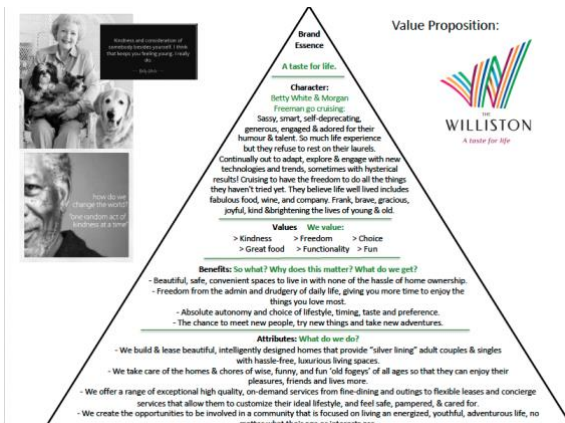


Figure 36

Figures 35 & 36: Screenshots of the draft IVP and final IVP brand pyramids for The Williston as a consumer facing IDL brand – May 2017 & September 2018.

The COVID-19 Impact in Canada

The first travel related case of COVID-19 in Canada was reported on January 25th. This was followed by the first local transmission case on January 27th and shortly before the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a “public health emergency of international concern” on 30 January 2020 (Gallegos, 2021, p. 1).

By March 2020 the pandemic was officially declared and countries instituted rapid lockdowns and preventative programs. In Canada Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced a Cabinet Committee on the federal response to the pandemic on March 4, 2020. This was followed by a \$1 billion response fund announced on March 11th. An announcement on March 16th restricted entry into Canada to US and Canadian citizens and to permanent residents not displaying symptoms of Covid-19. A mandatory 14 day self-isolation for all entrants was also imposed. By March 16th Ontario and Alberta went into a state of emergency, followed by the rest of the provinces in the next few days. On March 25th the Emergency Aid Bill was passed making 14 day quarantine mandatory, but no mask mandates were yet in place. Unemployment figures for Canada in March 2020 showed that the economy had lost 1,000,000 jobs and the official jobless rate moved to 7,8 percent (The Canadian Press Staff, 2021).

In April 2020 the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) was tasked to enforce the “Quarantine Act, 2005” and the Canadian Parliament passed the “COVID-19 Emergency Response Act, No. 2”. On April 15th Trudeau stated that the economy would not be reopened “for many more weeks”. In May Trudeau announced that bridging finance for large employers would be put in place to protect jobs and avoid bankruptcies as far as possible. Some provinces started easing restrictions, but the case numbers still climbed and the unemployment rate jumped to 13 percent, the second-highest figure on record in Canada. In June 2020, when Canada reported 100,000 coronavirus cases Fitch Ratings downgraded Canada’s credit rating from triple-A to double-A-plus (The Canadian Press Staff, 2021; Fitch Ratings, 2020).

In July 2020 Quebec became the first province in Canada to require mask-wearing in all indoor public places. By September 23rd Trudeau announced the second wave of COVID-19 which was followed by tougher restrictions coming back into place across the country. The speed of infections accelerated to over 200,000 by October 2020, just four months after the 100,000 mark was reached (Wikipedia, 2022; The Canadian Press Staff, 2021).

Cases continued to climb, and in January 2021 curfews and other stricter measures were put in place as the new variants started to appear in Canada, along with travel restrictions and delays in vaccine delivery (The Canadian Press Staff, 2021).

A sharp fall in cases was reported in early 2021, but the next waves of infection followed in March and December of 2021. These came with continued shutdowns and restrictions. The total cases approached 3,2 million in February, with the majority of cases in Ontario and Quebec (Elflein, 2022).

In early 2022 it was reported that “...the COVID-19 pandemic has also had a staggering effect on Canada’s economy.” (Elflein, 2022) The unemployment rate in 2020 was estimated to be double what it had been in 2019. Despite government aid aimed at helping individuals and businesses GDP in Canada decreased in Canada in 2020 for the first time in decades.

COVID-19 and Porchlight

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic shutdowns, the uncertainty around movement of people, and the expected timeline of the pandemic, Porchlight lost 6 out of 7 planned projects. This all happened in the first few months of 2020 as funders put funding agreements on hold and work ground to a halt across multiple provinces and building sites.

Under threat of business collapse, Porchlight scaled back its staffing by 80% between March and June 2020. The remaining core staff took a pay-cut of 15% to 30% in order to ensure the continuation of Porchlight. Management took no compensation, and the owners invested an additional \$2 million CAD into the sustainability of the business (Rob Butler, Interview December 28, 2021).

Results

Business Results

Through very challenging business conditions, by working on core business basics, Porchlight stabilised and survived the dramatic change in business conditions brought on by the Covid pandemic. During this challenging time they focused on the clarity of values, role articulation, accountability for roles, focusing on key financial measures and managing and staffing on a values basis. The results 24 months later was a significantly smaller work force managing a larger portfolio, in terms of number of projects, dollar value and number of categories, more efficiently and effectively.

Table 8: Business Results

Porchlight Case Study Information															
Data	Year											Covid	Covid		
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
# of Employees	9	11	15	17	21	23	32	35	42	39	34	8	14	22	
# of Projects	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	4	1	0	1	1	2	4
Value of projects started each year	\$32.2m	\$50.3m	\$48.9m	\$68.1m	\$74.4m	\$66.2m	\$75.3m	\$45.6m	\$114m	\$17.1m	\$4.65m	\$59m	\$15.75m	\$107.5m	\$134m
# of Sectors	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	0	1	1	2	2
# of Brands Active	2	4	6	6	5	7	2	6	7	7	2	3	4	5	4
- For Sale Brands	2	4	6	6	5	7	0	4	3	3				1	1
- PBR Brands							2	2	3	3	1	1	2	2	1
-IDL Brands									1	1	1	2	2	2	2

Table 8 demonstrates the growth of the company and the direct impact of Covid on the number of employees and projects. Also evident here is the growth into a more flexible business with the shift from one to multiple sectors but simultaneously the focus on consolidating the number of brands in use so as to streamline implementation speed and the costs of marketing overall.

Media Results

Prior to 2017, Porchlight focused on historical patterns of media choice and agency dependency. One agency held the reins overall design, development, and hosting of their digital presence. They did this with a custom CMS and coding approach that allowed them to charge high rates for every small change or update on a website. This practice did not allow Porchlight any freedom to change agencies easily, have control over their websites or brands, or encounter any new thinking on media and marketing overall.

Internally there was also very limited marketing expertise with the marketing approaches in use. Their processes were based on legacy and “this has worked in the past” insight, instead of data that was based on current consumer, media, and creative options available in the market.

The move into the Independent Living category and the creation of The Williston brand in 2017 came with the intention of building it out into a national and potentially multinational brand. This brand was created consciously from a VP and value set up and the media approach within Porchlight started to shift to one that is target market led and informed by data rather than tradition.

Porchlight took a more strategic, logical process of brand development. The Williston started with the blueprint and then moved to consumer insights, media and competitor evaluation, and then media choices based on those learnings. Once the media choices were made, then partners in the different areas of media and implementation were sought.

This process was an improvement but still held on to partner choices based, in some cases, on legacy. In some cases choice was also based on personal attachment or preference by senior managers rather than verified, independent referrals and case study proof of their competence and results. This led to a couple of missteps on agency and partner choices in this process with mixed results. These results were in terms of delivery and impact on marketing which led to a re-evaluation of how agency partners are chosen.

At this point it was agreed to move to specialist agencies and partners, rather than generalist agency partners. Generalist agency partners tend to over-promise on a broad range of media and deliverables with mixed to poor results as is typical of IMC implementations in general, as discussed in the literature.

Since this decision Porchlight has had significantly improved relationships with, and results from, agency partners across the spectrum. From design and web development through to digital advertising, video, photography, and media buying all relationships are better. They believe this is due to their own improved clarity around the target market and

what is needed to reach them, and also what values the brands stand for as a key measure that the agencies must meet.

Practical Implementation of Values

“As a further benefit, the same segment codes used to define the media schedule can be put to work across the enterprise. Retail-based organisations have been looking for ways to identify and respond to consumers face to face that align with those customers’ expectations, for example. *If those expectations have been created through advertising and marketing initiatives, then front-office actions should reflect the same insights.*” (Orr & Cano-Lopez, 2005, p. 6) – emphasis added.

At Porchlight the shift of emphasis onto values and bringing them actively into the direction of the company was driven by Rob Butler. This was part of his re-focusing of the business with one CEO and a clear vision for the business. However they were also challenged and refined by the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic shortly after this leadership change.

Drawing on the centrality of values within the “The Williston” brand, Rob identified and verbalised the values of the corporate Porchlight brand. He used these values in multiple key ways to entrench them within the organisation and ensure they were core to all business decisions being made by his leadership team as they all navigated the Covid economy and changing business focus.

At a Porchlight level:

1. A fixed agenda point on values in weekly leadership training and planning meetings instituted after the dramatic staff cutbacks in early 2020
2. Shared with the whole organisation via their management, via onboarding, and at company-wide Town Hall meetings
3. Communicated to all interviewees during the first interview and repeated thereafter as part of onboarding (see Figure 37, below) to ensure that they are aware of the centrality of values to the way Porchlight operates
4. Used as a part of the measurement and accountability for all staff in terms of evaluating their performance and outcomes weekly, monthly and annually.

5. Financially supporting non-profits and other organisations that align to the values of the business and the people within it via an ongoing management reward initiative linked to planning and associated leadership practices.

	A	B	C
1			
2		Onboarding Guide: Marketing Implementation Lead	
3			
4	Week	Topic	Detail
5	Week 1	1.1 Setup	IT setup - laptop, phone
6	- March 1st to 4th		Office space, parking, general info
7			Email, server access, general software logins
8			Marketing specific logins & details
9		1.2 Porchlight Intro	Porchlight Value Proposition / Brand Blueprint & Values & TPDM
10			Porchlight Structure & Key people
11			Porchlight Marketing Roles & structure
12			Porchlight business model: where/ what/ brand/categories/project approach etc
13		1.3 Key Processes & Docs (Topline)	ProForma approach & Budgeting (topline)
14			Master Schedule
15			MLL Funnel & HubSpot
16		1.4 Key Lead Projects Overview	HubSpot Reporting
17			CRM with Elaine
18			Melody next phase media plan incl. TV
19			Social Media on current brands x 4
20			Setup on new brand/s: Social media, HubSpot, Rental sites.

Figure 37: Excerpt from Onboarding Guide for the Marketing Implementation Manager showing Values as a key introductory topic in week 1, March 2022.

At a brand level at The Williston:

1. Brand values have been visible and shared on the brand website from the start, and communicated by leasing and operations teams to all current and future residents as “the way we live here”. This has led to an actively engaged community that now holds staff and management accountable when these standards are not met. (See figures 25 and 26)
2. Using the values to recruit a new Executive Director when the incumbent’s actions undermined the intent of the brand values and created an environment that was not in line with the values or the expectations of the residents based on the communicated values.
3. Printed wall posters and business cards issued to all staff members after the management change to ensure they were central to how staff carried out day to day engagement with current and potential residents (See figures 27 and 29)
4. Sharing the meaning and importance of these values at regular operations staff meetings and performance reviews, and ensuring they are understood and that their weight is appreciated and lived up to.

As an example of the business results derived from this intensive focus on values, The Williston’s leasing rate slowed during the Covid pandemic. However it increased month on month for the full duration of the pandemic (ie. the community continued to progress

to fully leased) while the rest of the IDL industry in Canada either stalled or lost occupancy across the board. Based on insights from industry experts, competitors, high level funders and government sources, The Williston seems to be the only IDL community to have continued to show positive growth of any kind during the pandemic (Rob Butler, Interview December 28, 2021).

Case Study #3 At Source Handmade Foods

Handri Conradie (CEO, At Source Handmade Foods. Three brands: At Source, Cecilia's Farm, Koelfontein)

Overview

Field: Premium dried fruit & nut products.

Primary Market/s: South Africa, with current exports to the USA, the UK, and Australia.

Company: At Source Handmade Foods (Pty) Ltd

Organisation size: 172

Interviewee: Handri Conradie

Position: CEO & Owner

Tenure: 2002 (start of business) to present (2022)

Introduction

I have been involved with At Source since June 2009. I have worked with them on the corporate brand clarification and the creation and implementation of the consumer brand, Cecilia's Farm from inception to current state.

In this case study, the CEO and brand owner is deeply committed to the values, and to using them to guide the development of the business and brand.

The values identified for the corporate brand at the beginning of the project were as follows:

- Excellence
- Legacy
- Innovation
- People
- Integrity
- Passion

These values have not shifted at all, and are still core drivers in the growth of the business. They are used by the CEO to guide decision-making in the business and are still on display in the factory and boardroom. This commitment to being values-driven

has been key to the evolution, growth and current success of this business and its consumer facing brand.



Figure 38: Photo of one of the Values banners in the At Source factory, 2012. The banner is focused on the “People” value and as demonstrated here all the banners explain the concept of the value and show the value in the three languages mainly spoken in the factory and on the farm namely English, Afrikaans, and as seen here, Xhosa.

Insights

Strategy after a Market Deregulation

In a regulated environment, strategies are constrained by the regulatory agency, so firms may not achieve maximum efficiency from their resource base. Upon deregulation, however, the firm has the option to use excess capacity more fully, and this in turn, provides growth potential. (Pettus, 2002, p. 43)

The deregulation of a previously regulated, state-monopolised directed market is considered a major external disruptor. It requires the players in such a market to revise their strategy in order to adapt to a new market reality (Corsi, Grimm, Smith & Smith, 1991; Kangis & O'Reilly, 2003; Pettus, Kor & Mahoney, 2009).

There seems to be general agreement that deregulation as an engineered change in a market that stimulates competition and has a positive impact on efficiency and performance (Atkinson, Nichols & Oleson, 2000; Chou, 2014; Chung, 2006; Rennie, 2006). Several large industries have been transformed by deregulation at national and multinational levels since the 1970s. As diverse as these industries are, there are a few overarching themes that emerge in terms of strategic response to such seismic market shifts. These include globalisation and defence of home markets (Bonardi, 2004), and a drive towards differentiation (Delmas, Russo & Montes-Sancho, 2007).

“As industries globalize, firms that historically competed in a particular regulatory context begin to look beyond their borders and face new competitors” leading to differential advantages based on their contexts of origins, and requiring new strategic choices (Reger, Duhaime & Stimpert, 1992, p. 189).

In 1992 the airline industry in Europe was deregulated to create a single market. The traditional approach of “flag carrier” airlines which were effectively considered an extension of each country’s identity and service to its citizens was exposed to the realities of an unregulated market. In this market driven by supply and demand rather than national pride these airlines were forced to consider competitive strategy for the first time rather than rely on the state to support them as needed (Kangis & O’Reilly, 2003). Considering the strategies of two brands in this context (ie. Ryanair with its low cost, no frills approach vs AerLingus which doubled-down on providing an exceptional, full quality service) the researchers conclude as follows.

Where an important external stimulus...disturbs the comfortable status quo of an industry... and thus changes the nature of the barriers to entry (deregulation), the adoption of a strategy which is noticeably different from that pursued by the market leader [usually the monopoly brand under regulation]... is a credible means for a newcomer...to get a toehold. (Kangis & O’Reilly, 2003, p. 110)

In the USA the airline industry faced deregulation in 1978. Deregulation led to diverse strategic adjustments, and it was found that supporting differentiation is the strongest strategy (Brown Johnson, Sambharya and Bobko, 1989). Based on multiple studies, the market structure in deregulated airline markets generally shows consolidation of the

industry. While this may seem contradictory to the intention of deregulation to create increased competition, these moves are noted as having benefited the majority of consumers, if not all (Levine, 1987; Wolf, 1994). Alongside differentiation and greater risk taking, there also seems to be some evidence for improved communications and marketing as part of a deregulation strategy in the US (Martinez and Artz, 2006).

Banking in the USA was deregulated in the early 1980s when changes to bank charters enabled easier entry to the category and associated higher risk strategies and greater risk of bank insolvency ensued (Marcus, 1984). The banking sector deregulation in 1990 impacted managerial relationships with key political and industry figures (which provides critical information to the firm) and previous experience in a deregulation context (which provides knowledge of systems and processes at play) played a role in strategic decisions in market contexts (Chung, 2006). Another study found that deregulation has both direct and indirect impacts on banker's risk (ratio of net interest income to total assets) and ROA (Return on Assets). This leads to the temptation to maintain profits through increased risks. This is a strategy that in this instance led to multiple company failures in the short term, but seemingly increased returns in the long term (Reger, Duhaime & Stimpert, 1992).

The deregulation of electricity supply happened in multiple locations and contexts during the past 20 years. It was considered a 'radical transformation' with unpredictable impacts. It has been shown that the speed at which companies learn and adjust was the key factor to success (Lomi & Larsen, 1999). In the USA, the deregulation of the electric power industry in the 1990s led to a spate of mergers and acquisitions into new geographic areas or newer power markets such as natural gas. The shift was in order to diversify offerings, find synergies, expand customer bases, and thereby drive growth. Research shows that none of the merged entities improved financial performance or stability vs non-merged entities. This indicates that growth through merger was not necessary for survival in the post-electric deregulation world. What's more, if efficiencies and synergies were created as a result of deregulation, it was not necessary to grow through merger to capture them (Becker-Blease, Goldberg & Kaen, 2007). A later study into the link between electricity deregulation and the switch to "greener" energy found that this was driven by deeper insights in the target markets and their needs and interests.

The deregulation of the market led to a shift from a product based strategy under regulation to a consumer focus that led to greater interest in meeting the needs for more eco-friendly energy as a differentiation strategy. Under regulation there was a reliance on coal power and a focus on efficiency and the latent demand for differentiated services was suppressed (Delmas, Russo & Montes-Sancho, 2007). However, In the Swedish market (noted as similar to the Norwegian and Finnish markets) the deregulation of electricity supply in the 1990s was met with mixed preparedness with some mergers amongst existing (mostly smaller) regional monopolistic entities, and the adoption of differentiation strategies largely amongst the larger organisations (Lindblom & Andersson, 1998). Once again this emphasises the impact of this strategy in a deregulation environment.

This finding in the electricity supply industry on mergers and acquisitions in a deregulated environment is echoed in poorer post-merger performance in the banking industry (Knapp, Gart & Becher, 2005). It can also be seen in regards to the US trucking industry in the 1980s:

Growth will not result if firms view acquisitions from a static perspective which is only concerned with the current time period. Firms that do not view growth as an evolutionary, dynamic process will not survive....Firms that anticipated the nature of the industry, post-deregulation, leveraged their resource positions and built dynamic capabilities to succeed in the new environment. (Pettus, 1984, p. 46)

The US trucking industry's substantial (but not complete) deregulation in 1980 was designed to increase competition in the industry. The evaluation of the success of various strategies adopted by players in this industry after the deregulation have shown that a strategy based on differentiation led to significantly better performance results whereas strategies based on low cost and broad product/geographic scope performed the worst (Corsi, Grimm, Smith & Smith, 1991). Another study into this sector found a sequence of strategic steps post deregulation: firms first use excess capacity to expand in the period directly after deregulation, and then shift to a focus on international market coverage, and after that an expansion to other value-added services (Pettus, 2001).

Looking at agricultural contexts specifically, a New Zealand based study found that farmers are now facing deregulation world-wide which means that they have to deal with

more market uncertainty and also contend with risk management on production, often for the first time (Martin & McLeay, 1998). This study also found that strategies undertaken post deregulation vary widely, but that the role of family succession and other life cycle factors that multiple previous studies had identified, also had substantial impact on what changes were made in terms of strategy and risk management.

In South Africa multiple industry control boards were deregulated in the late 1990s alongside the end of the Apartheid government, the transition to democracy and a new constitution, and the joining of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). For the dried fruit industry this deregulation happened in 1997. The regulated approach had meant South African producers could only sell their fruit directly to the Dried Fruit Board or their appointed agent, SAD (South African Dried Fruit Co-op) which was owned jointly by all the growers (Handri Conradie, Interview December 13, 2021; Sandrey & Vink, 2009).

After deregulation, many of the farmer's co-ops were reconstituted as companies to unlock the value of their existing equity under a new legal framework. SAD was one of those who made the transition. The shareholdings in these entities was not very liquid as they could not be sold, but as SAD was doing a better job at marketing the product than most of the other co-ops it did not immediately dissolve into individual entities doing their own sales and marketing in the same way that, for example, Capespan – the fresh fruit single channel marketer under regulation – did. The farmers within SAD had a vested interest in the value that was built up in the company over the decades of its existence, and so largely remained part of the collective (Handri Conradie, Interview December 13, 2021; Steenkamp, 2017). The deregulation of the fruit industries in South Africa led to an increase in production and exports driven by access to three things: new production regions, new production technology, and temperature controlled transport containers (Sandrey & Vink, 2009).

In the early 2000s the H.J. Heinz Company (now the Kraft Heinz Company, hereafter Heinz) made an offer to purchase SAD based on a joint venture. Heinz already had chutneys and tomato sauce. However, at that time the land grab accelerated in neighbouring Zimbabwe rapidly, and Heinz divested from South Africa letting the whole SAD deal fall through. The market now knew, however, that SAD was up for sale and it was subsequently sold to Pioneer Foods (now a subsidiary of PepsiCo). At this point

many of the previous shareholders - including Handri's father the then owner of the family farm - cashed their shares out (Handri Conradie, Interview December 13, 2021).

For Handri this change also precipitated his father's retirement and allowed him to take over the family farm. This enabled Handri to revise the entire strategy of the farm and create the forward integrated business that is At Source Handmade Foods. From there he created two new streams of revenue that would not have been possible under regulation, namely (1) providing product to retailers under their own-brand strategy, and (2) creating an owned branded offering to enable greater control over product innovation, route to market, and geographic reach (Handri Conradie, Interview December 13, 2021). The success of these strategies supports the findings in the literature that the success of strategies is built on differentiation. Furthermore it's consumer driven, and there is opportunity to leverage of resource positions and take greater risks in a deregulated environment:

... There was a time when there was almost a nanny state. But deregulation meant people had to be innovative, and customer-focused. A lot of agribusinesses are now integrated. We're not nearly the first, nor the biggest with that idea, but I just knew that that was the future. You just have to be a bigger part of the value chain.
(Handri Conradie, Interview December 13, 2021)

Branding and Innovation as Differentiation Strategies in an Agricultural Context: Farming Past the Farm-gate

Closely linked to the deregulation of the market is the fact that this business operates within the agricultural industry. Agriculture is an industry that is traditionally more conservative in terms of acquired risk given the inherent risks of a climate-dependent product. This conservatism was exacerbated in South Africa due to the tightly regulated market control system under the Apartheid government, and thus it was not an innovative or consumer focused industry.

In considering branding strategies for SMEs it has been found that brand orientation levels vary hugely. However, "the more brand-oriented the firm is, the more it pursues strategic brand and marketing-related performance benefits, such as competitive

positioning and brand distinctiveness” (Bakkour, Fort & Mione, 2015, p. 87). Studies have also noted the importance of the ownership and management structure, specifically in family-run businesses. This structure has impacts on the strategic brand decisions; as well as the size of the firm and the market structure that it operates within (Davis, 2000; Craig et al, 2008).

SME branding in the agri-food sector is equally diverse and variably implemented:

A firm can build its own trade brand, produce goods for large retailers or other producers’ brands, or use many quality labels that work as brands... Due to their limited resources and budget for building strong own brands, plus the high pressure from large retailers, SMEs are increasingly involved in retailers’ private brands (Bakkour et al, 2015, p. 88).

This sentiment is echoed in a study in Australia:

Around the world, innovation and product differentiation are considered sustainable responses to the challenges facing firms in the agricultural industry, yet traditionally the adoption of such strategies has been limited. ... For many fresh produce farmers and marketers, very little has changed in the 50 years since Makens (1964) published his plea for farmers to adopt the power of branding in the *Journal of Marketing*. (Lewis et al, 2014, p. 150)

Studies in Germany, Greece, the USA and UK, where agricultural products traditionally lagged behind FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) in terms of innovation and marketing, have also shown a shift in agricultural commodity industries. These industries were “transformed” from price driven, fragmented commodity markets towards strategic, investment oriented, collaborative value-add focused industries (Baziana & Tzimitra-Kalogianni, 2019; Bonney et al, 2007; Fearne 1998; Fearne & Hughes, 1999; Hanf & Kuhl, 2005).

Consensus is that the agricultural commodity industry needs a more branded approach that identifies the consumer's needs and profit. This branded approach also allows time-starved consumers the affirmation from a brand that the product is good quality and can be trusted, and to differentiate the producer from others (Stanton & Herbst, 2005). The shift to move focus onto innovation and branding is due to 3 factors: a) it has been shown

that consumers will pay substantial premiums for branded and value-added products; b) the increased emphasis on price has led to price promotions and lost margin and branding provides a basis for differentiation and a competitive advantage; and c) it provides an opportunity to introduce new products and exploit line extensions more easily (Stanton & Herbst, 2005).

In addition to affirming the need for commodities to focus on a market-orientation in order to thrive, Armstrong et al (2005) also identify the final hurdle for agricultural producers which they see as having to compete in a changing marketplace both at home and internationally (Armstrong, Farley and Durkin, 2005).

This summary mirrors the challenges facing the sixth generation fruit farm inherited by Handri Conradie that led to the creation of At Source Handmade Foods and the move into a branded offering:

1. The farm had been limited to the sale of fresh and dried fruit, and had not exploited opportunities to forward integration into value-added products. This led to the creation of At Source Handmade Foods as an entity focused on creating value-added products.
2. The initial success of At Source in own brand/white label manufacturing for top end retailers created strong early growth for the business. However, it then plateaued and created a bottle-neck in terms of bringing all the innovation being generated by the business to the market.
3. The strong innovation and new product development (NPD) focus in the business needed a vehicle that enabled them to offer this innovation directly to the market. The innovative products also command higher margins for the business.

(Handri Conradie, Interview December 13, 2021).

The strong drive from the CEO to focus on innovation broadly and in a product sense, as well as the desire to bring their values to the market more directly all led to a deep commitment to a branded approach that has just started to show benefits to the business and the industry they operate in:

That's one of the things I learnt early on; that the mindset in agriculture in those regulation days was that the farmers produced and their co-op needed to find someone who wants it. We realised that you need to find out what the customer wants and try and fulfil that need. Sometimes they don't know what that need is yet, and you're creating new products that are ahead of their time. Instead of having the mindset that I'm farming with pears, for instance, and I need to convince people to eat more pears because that's what I produce. You know, instead finding out what the customer wants and working backwards from that....So I'm very excited about agribusiness and... I can't think of anywhere else I'd want to be right now. (Handri Conradie, Interview December 13, 2021)

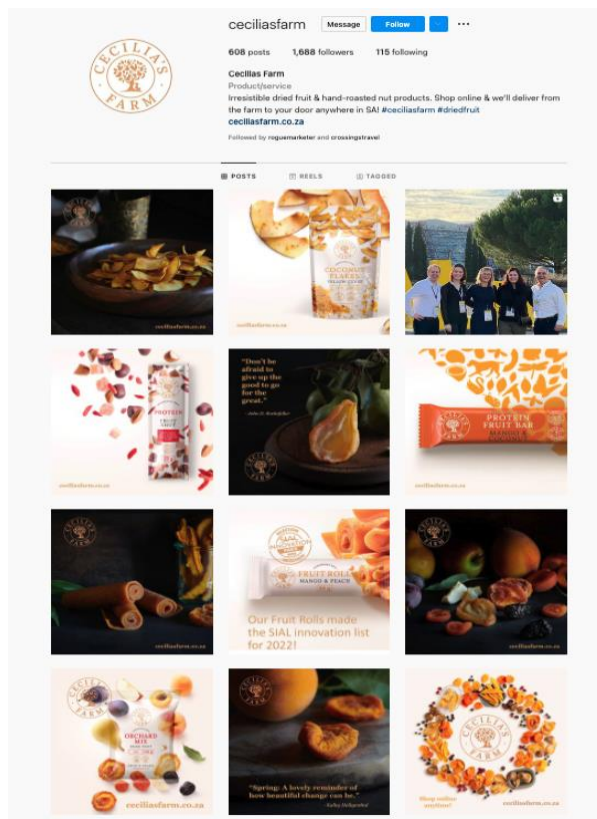


Figure 39: Screenshot of the Cecilia's Farm Instagram Feed showing the new packaging and products launched at SIAL in Paris, October 2022.

<https://www.instagram.com/ceciliasmfarm/?hl=en>

The Challenges of a Formal Branding and Marketing Process for an SME

One of the other key challenges faced by At Source, and found consistently across other SMEs around the world, is a lack of knowledge and skill around branding and marketing.

Furthermore there's also a lack of access to professional marketing expertise, and / or funds to engage the marketing expertise needed (Afriyie, Appiah & Musah, 2018; Cant, 2012; Carson & Gilmore, 2000; Gilmore, 2011; Harrigan, Parry, Jones, Rowley & Kupiec-Teahan, 2012; Kazimoto, 2014; Marcati, Guido & Peluso, 2010; Harrigan, Ramsey & Ibbotson, 2012; Rahman, Yaacob & Radzi, 2016; Salam, Imtiaz & Burhan, 2020; Van Scheers, Botha & Van Scheers, 2015).

...I took part in a process with a company called Endeavour. They were identifying high-impact entrepreneurs in emerging markets and countries, and helping them to scale their businesses. ...we came up with these scenarios for the future, but we just knew we needed a branded offering. Whenever we spoke to the Endeavour people, they would ask us to identify our biggest constraints; where were the biggest areas we needed help in? We kept coming back to branding and marketing. We didn't have that skill in-house. (Handri Conradie, Interview December 13, 2021)

This often leads to SMEs relying on a wide range of agencies and other external brand implementers to either do the work of marketing on their behalf, or direct their marketing on their behalf in terms of what needs to be done. The literature shows the challenges of IMC implementation. A frequent result of this situation – created by lack of internal skill; lack of ownership and / or marketing expertise by the person leading the organisation; and the inability or lack of willingness on the part of the agencies to temper their offerings and recommendations due to a need to maximise profits – is frustration amongst both parties; poor brand and marketing execution; and lack of business results from what has been executed.

We had so little experience and we were so ignorant of how that process works, or how it should work, that we fell for the assertion by all these agencies that they were like a one stop shop. Everyone tells you that they do everything. (Handri Conradie, Interview December 13, 2021)

...I feel the agencies have an inherent conflict of interest, because they want to design stuff and almost mould your business or brand to what they want to design. It's not necessarily what you need to be designed. ... That's why they often come

up with weird and wonderful things which don't necessarily capture the essence of the brand; it's because they want to design pretty things. (Handri Conradie, Interview December 13, 2021)

As a medium enterprise (generally defined as below 500 employees), Handri used his networks to locate a marketing expert. He wanted someone who was available to work with At Source on a consulting contract basis thereby giving them access to professional marketing expertise without having to pay for a full-time resource.

With this guidance At Source then went on to update their corporate brand and raise the profile of the business via a PR campaign followed by the creation and launch of a consumer-facing brand supported by social media content, social media advertising and an online store presence.

This formalisation of the brand through the VP and values, a contracted professional marketing approach and a values-driven philosophy allowed At Source to differentiate itself as a corporate brand. It also led to the creation of a consumer brand that diversified the risk out of white label manufacturing and also as a platform for demonstrating their product innovation in both their local market and the global premium foods marketplace

...figure out which brand is which...



Figure 43: Excerpt from brand creation deck demonstrating the full development process for the creation of Cecilia's Farm as a brand, May 2010.

...and re-do the corporate brand along the way

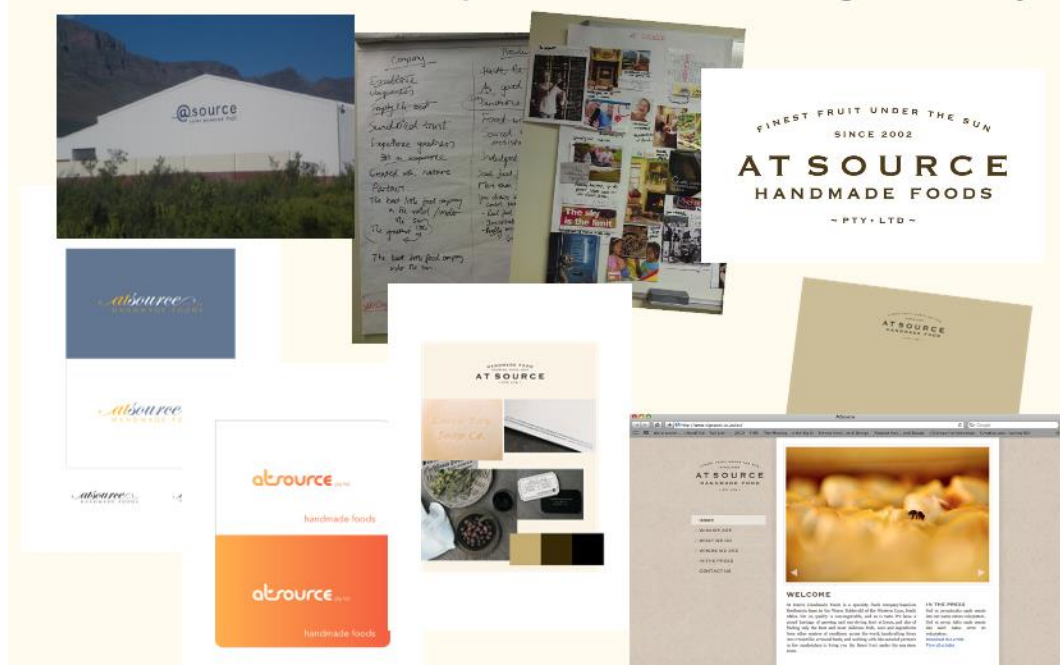


Figure 44: Excerpt from an internal strategy deck showing a summary of the review and renewal process undertaken on the corporate brand, At Source – May 2010.

On the consumer brand the naming, CID, ranging, packaging design, consumer research, website, photography, consumer PR launch and route to market were agreed and implemented through 2009 and into 2010. At this stage the brand was in low level distribution in independent retailers, Spar stores and delis using outsourced sales agents.

In late 2013 based on consumer feedback and the potential gains to be had in digital search and SEO traction on the term “farm”, the brand name was changed from “Cecilia’s World” to “Cecilia’s Farm”. The initial “Cecilia’s World” naming indicated the fact that while much of the fruit at that stage grew on the farm Koelfontein where At Source is based and where Cecilia’s Farm was born, the fruit and nuts in the products were actually sourced globally with the philosophy of finding the single best quality supplier for each ingredient and sourcing from them. While the principles and the sourcing facts remain the same, it was felt that the shift from “World” to “Farm” would more accurately reflect the location and philosophy of the brand and cause less confusion for consumers who could not easily decode the meaning of the “World” without active explanation.



Figure 45: Screenshot of slide from a Cecilia’s Farm brand origin deck showing the brand name change from “World” to “Farm” as represented in the logo, February 2014.

With updated packaging and ecommerce website, the brand once again took a PR approach bolstered by social media and display advertising through 2013 to 2015. They showed steady but slow growth in this period, particularly within retail which proved challenging from a sales agent, margin and shelf-life point of view.



Figure 46: Brand image of the revised product packaging for Cecilia's Farm, 2014.



Figure 47: Photo of a Cecilia's Farm product display at a Ceres community market showing the product stands and new product packaging on display, 2014.

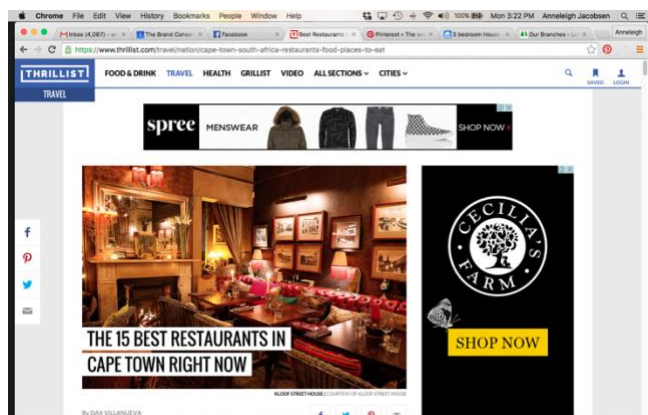


Figure 48: Screenshot of one of the Cecilia's Farm Google display ad as seen on the website Thrillist.com



Figure 51: Cecilia’s Farm range of flatbars featured on the “Food & drinks” page in *Home* magazine, October 2015 as a result of a South African PR campaign.

Equity Partner Change

In May 2015 At Source announced that the In2Food group (the largest conglomerate Woolworths SA food supplier, responsible for approximately 75% of the fresh, prepared and packed food products for the retailer) had bought a controlling stake of At Source. Previously a lower non-controlling stake had been held by Horizon Equity Partners in order to launch At Source as a forward integrated business growing out of the Conradie’s 6th generation fruit farming operation, Koelfontein, in the Ceres Valley. As equity investors Horizon was not as committed to the longer term legacy approach to business as the Conradies are, and so new partners needed to be found.

The standard In2Food model is to acquire top niche food suppliers to Woolworths outright, rebrand them as In2Food and integrate them fully into the In2Food culture and organisation. At Source, as a partial acquisition, did not easily fit into this model and this led to tension between implementing teams as well as lack of strategic alignment on the future of the business, the brands and where to find growth. As a result there was very

minimal investment in Cecilia's Farm as a brand, and none into the At Source or Koelfontein brands during the 5 years of partnership with In2Food. Handri Conradie, as CEO, maintained an internal commitment to the development of the brands (particularly Cecilia's Farm) during this period, often to the frustration of his own team who did not always understand the larger context of the company vision.

Covid & Regaining Full Ownership

As a core food supplier At Source remained fully operational during the Covid lockdowns in South Africa and due to consumers being homebound as well as the global shift to healthier foods and ways of living as the pandemic set in, the dried fruit category was not hard hit by Covid. In fact, through its Woolworths client, At Source had a very strong sales year in 2020, although consumption and sales patterns were dramatically different to historic periods and much harder to predict and manage.

The initial equity agreement with In2Food was structured such that At Source retained the right to buy themselves out of the deal after an initial period of 5 years, and to this end the Conradies re-acquired full control of At Source in late 2021 again. This meant that At Source and Koelfontein Landgoed were now both fully owned by the Conradies (with the At Source COO Anton Erwee holding a small ownership share in At Source too), and that reinvestment in the brands both locally and looking to global markets could begin again.

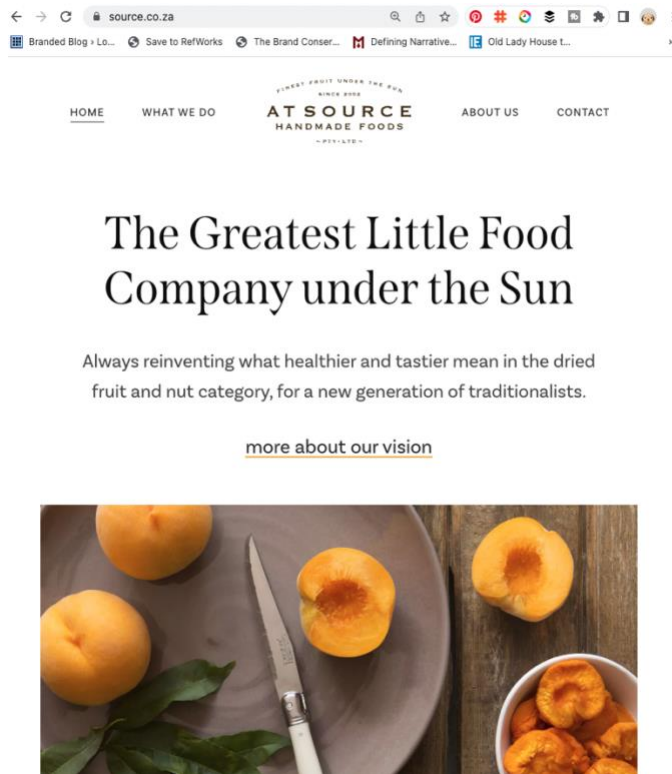


Figure 52: Screenshot of the new corporate website for At Source in recognition of its renewed independence and vision, 2021. <https://source.co.za/>

Although still under low level lockdown in South Africa and in a global pandemic context, 2021 and 2022 allowed a renewed vision and energy to be shared with the At Source team around the future of the company, the strategic pillars of the business and looking ahead to where the future growth would come from.

While projecting a stable forecast (ie. no strong growth) for the dried fruit category, the Woolworths group focus has been on drawing margin from the Woolworths food business to offset the large losses in other categories, notably the poor investment decision into the David Jones business in Australia in 2014 (Mahlaka, 2019; Hyland, 2022). In this context At Source reaffirmed that the brand Cecilia’s Farm represents the future growth of the At Source business both locally in South Africa and globally into new markets. This clarity has meant not only renewed internal enthusiasm for the brand, but also a large investment into new product development to reignite the At Source reputation for globally notable innovation. Alongside investment in updating the brand CID, packaging design, and marketing material for the next phase of the brand’s life cycle, this new phase of brand building has allowed for strategic focus on a “digital only” business approach in South Africa with a shift away from local retail distribution, sales

agencies and intermediaries to a 100% focus on ecommerce plus significant investment in digital advertising to drive awareness and purchase online.

It also allowed for a renewed, brand led engagement with international markets. Having had various niche ranges listed and sold in several large UK retailers under their own brand packaging previously with little success, the first real foothold for international growth came in the form of a listing with the North Western region of CostCo in the USA of large bag format Bon Chretien pears under the Cecilia's Farm brand in 2020. This led to a second order with an expanded range and high volume requirements, and this relationship has continued into 2022.

The shift to a fully digital business in South Africa for Cecilia's Farm was implemented in June 2021, with the advertising campaigns focused on Facebook/Instagram advertising only for the initial period kicking off in July 2021. Growth in online engagement and ecommerce sales showed immediate, dramatic response with new reach going up by 3218% vs previous year (post engaged users) and sales revenue growing by 292% vs previous year in the first month, with an immediate Return on Ad Spend (ROAS) of 3,1:1 that has improved steadily and as of November 2022 is at ROAS of 12,4:1.

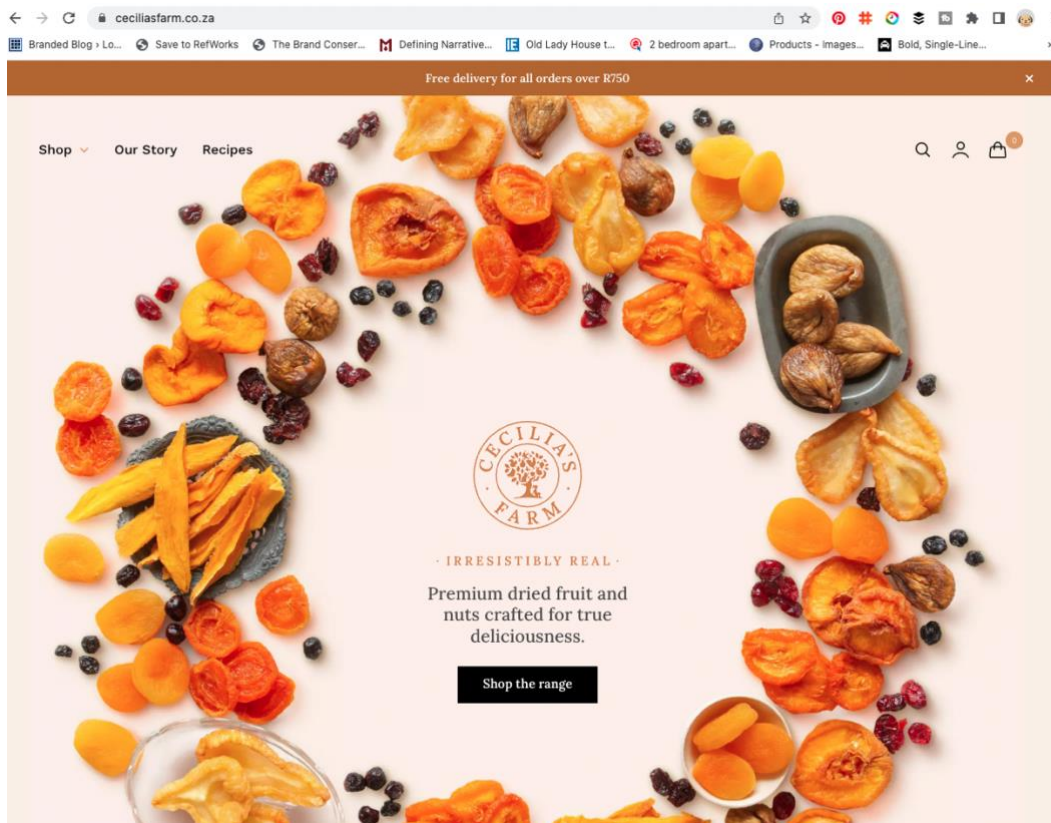


Figure 53: Screenshot of the overhauled Cecilia's Farm website and online store, September 2022. <https://ceciliasmfarm.co.za/>



Figure 54: Screenshot from the introductory deck sharing a category (ie. Premium Dried Fruit) from the revised export ready range of Cecilia's Farm products as launched at SIAL, Paris in October 2022.

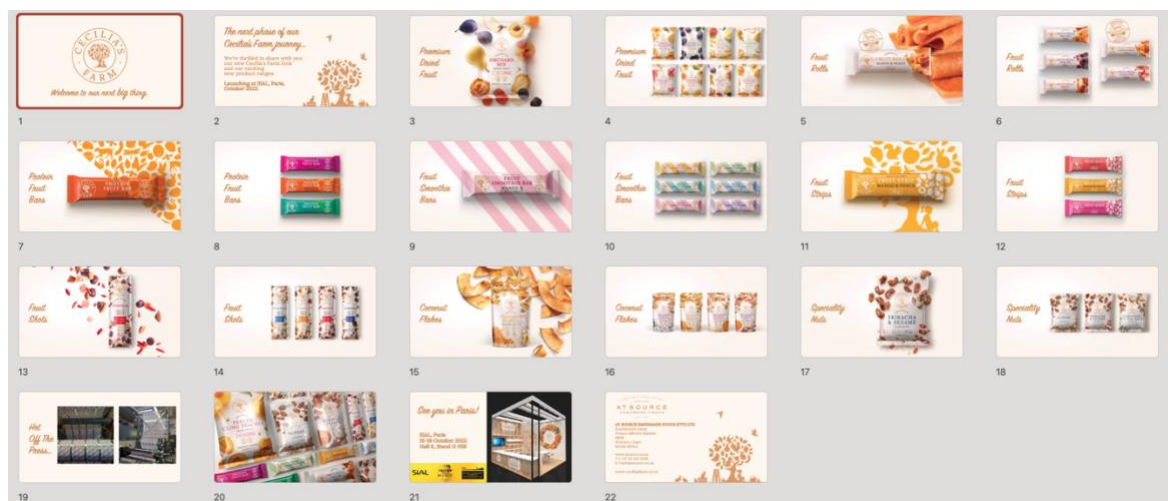


Figure 55: Screenshot of the overview of the introductory deck introducing the revised export ready range of Cecilia's Farm products as launched at SIAL, Paris in October 2022.

Results

Business Results

After the first six months of the digital campaign the ecommerce platform had stabilised to an average ROAS of 7,08:1 per month. Orders (484% vs YA), units sold (740% vs YA), revenue (751% vs YA) and average order value (46% vs YA) all showing significant growth which has created a new baseline for the brand.

As of March 2022 social advertising budgets were increased significantly, and a second stream of Google search ads was added to the campaign. In South Africa Google does not offer all the products or targeting options available in North America and European markets, hence the use of it as a secondary digital medium in this context.

In addition to the continued growth in the local market, At Source is also actively pursuing further partnerships globally and will present the SIAL global food show in Paris in October of 2022. This is to launch the renewed range to top end health and quality sensitive markets and retailers across the world.

Table 9: Business Results

At Source (Pty) Ltd																					
																			Covid	Covid	To Sept
Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022		
Revenue Growth % vs YA	100%	44%	28%	17%	32%	12%	12%	0%	10%	14%	-28%	30%	26%	2%	6%	-8%	13%	4%	4%		
Volume - Units ('000)										5 319	3 821	4 827	6 145	6 955	7 073	5 837	5 108	5 093	4 971		
% Branded	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	2%	4%	5%	4%	4%	5%	4%	5%	15%	12%		
% of Internal Ownership Control	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	<50%	<50%	<50%	<50%	<50%	<50%	100%	100%		

Table 9 demonstrates the revenue progression from the launch of the business in 2004 to the current growth through the periods of majority share by In2Food and Covid, and beyond. This table also shows the emergence of the branded offering in 2012 and its slow growth until the renewed strategic focus viewing the branded offering as the source of future growth from 2021 forward.

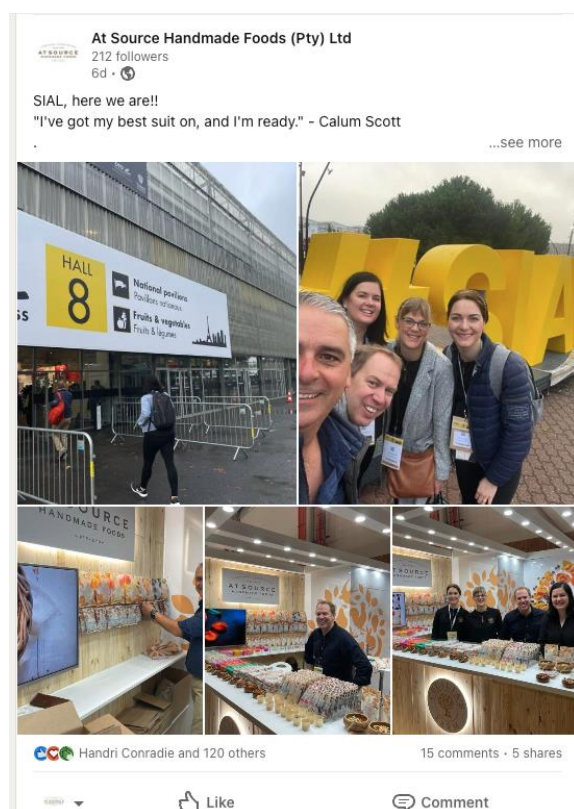


Figure 56: Screenshot of a LinkedIn post with images from SIAL, October 2022

Media Results

Corporate brand

The initial work done on the corporate brand (At Source) was focused on establishing and building a broader awareness profile for the business. This was to ensure that external audiences (including potential employees, business partners, suppliers and agencies) had a stronger understanding and awareness of the business as separate from the retailers for which it had been manufacturing until that point. This profile raising work was done via a new website, industry print features, and a broad PR campaign with a PR agency to gain national awareness. The corporate brand was then allowed to stabilise unsupported until the most recent ownership change in 2021 which saw the brand website overhauled to bring it in line with the matured business phase and improved clarity on offering and purpose.

Consumer Brand

With the launch of the Cecilia's World consumer brand in 2010 the initial approach was low key as retail listings were sought, with a web presence, social media content, boosted posts and some events to drive awareness and engagement. All media at this stage were implemented internally and no agencies were engaged.

With the update of the brand name to "Cecilia's Farm" in 2013 a new PR and social media content and advertising campaign was launched to drive awareness of the brand and drive sales through the retail outlets that were stocking the brand. The complexity of a small brand in a retail environment meant that growth was slower than hoped for, but the brand did show steady growth across this period.

With the change in equity partners came what amounted to a disinvestment from Cecilia's Farm as a brand with only basic social media presence and promoted posts being actively implemented until late 2021 when ownership was reacquired by the Conradie family group.

At this stage a new strategic thinking process was undertaken to map out the growth avenues for the business as a whole and establish new goals, one of which was to do a complete brand refresh on Cecilia's Farm including a full packaging update, ecommerce website update, far-reaching NPD (new product development) program, the first

substantial advertising investment into the local market, and an investment into reaching premium global markets with the brand. All this work was undertaken with the core management team, external advisors, agencies including packaging design, web development, digital advertising, and various data sources locally and globally.

Process

All work with agencies and partners is founded in the brand propositions which are built around the core values of the business and brands, and which is used as the starting point for every brief to an agency or partner in this business.

This approach has helped ensure clarity amongst partners with regard what the brands stand for and how business is conducted in this organisation, and clarity regarding what is needed from each partner is determined internally once the management team is clear and aligned on what the next business objective is, and what is needed from a marketing point of view to support that growth.



Figure 57



Figure 58



Figure 59

Figures 57-59: Team images from the Cecilia's Farm/At Source stand at the SIAL food show in Paris, October 2022, showing the team sharing the range with potential global buyers.

Case Study #4 Prairie Wear

Holli Markwald (Founder, CEO & Owner, Prairie Wear)

Overview

Field: Versatile sustainable compression bras

Primary Market/s: USA and Canada with distributors in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Chile.

Company: Prairie Wear (Pty) Ltd

Organisation size: 4 permanent, 2 consultant

Interviewee: Holli Markwald

Position: Founder, CEO & Owner

Tenure: July 2016 (start of business) to present (2022)

Introduction

I have been involved in Prairie Wear from the inception of the project to the current date, and have been part of the core team developing the brand, the products and the market strategy along with the CEO and Owner of the business.

Interviews conducted at the end of the project indicate that the values and this value-driven marketing approach have been seminal in the success of this business and that this approach has been central to the brand and business from the start.

The values identified at the beginning of the project were collated as:

- Design & collaboration
- Expertise & technology
- Authenticity
- Beauty & Nature
- Intention
- Having fun & doing what you love, and
- Kindness

These values have been used to guide the brand development and marketing implementation from the start although they have evolved as the brand and business

matured, and at the end of this study the core values were still identified as 1. Authenticity, 2. Kindness, and 3. Sustainability – which, although it had not been called out directly in the original values statement, has always been a core driver of decisions made on the product and business approach.

This brand also operates in, and arose from, a very challenging context in terms of breast cancer which is a challenging topic for most consumers. The identity and presence of the brand as it currently stands demonstrates the comfort and support that is experienced by everyone who uses the products, and this sense of positivity and uplifting passionate commitment to the product and the community it serves is evident in the way the brand is presented. The values and value-driven approach inculcated on this brand from the very inception of the opportunity have reframed the grudge purchase of a post-surgical garment in a cancer context to a brand that people love and are passionate supporters and evangelists for, and that truly helps them feel confident, supported and positive in which is a strong indication of the value of using values from the very start of a project, not just in the branding development area, but imbued into the very product development and business model establishment. The community that has developed around the brand and its products has also been driven by the values-driven approach to engaging with customers at all levels, and the identification and adoption of the values that the brand and the business aim to use to guide all their decisions.

Insights

Design-driven Innovation

Attention is shifting from achieving efficiency to creating desirable user experiences and thereby greater adoption...It is in this context that design innovation is becoming a powerful basis for companies to compete in global markets. Design thinking helps companies see new opportunities for innovation that are prompted by a deep understanding of people's needs. (Kumar, 2009, p. 91)

Kumar outlines the shift from efficiency and product or technology driven innovation to an approach centered on the user experience. He goes on to outline and describe a process

of innovation that follows seven “modes” which the process that the development of the Hugger bras by Prairie Wear unknowingly followed quite closely, albeit less formally than indicated here (Kumar 2009).

Design-driven innovation as a field of study started with the idea of two opposing approaches to innovation formulated as “market-pull” and “technology-push” (Dosi, 1982). To this Verganti (2009) added in a semantically driven “design-push” approach, and later Dell-Era et al (2010) argue that the most radical design-driven innovations come from combining “the identification of innovative meanings embedded in new products” with the investigation into technologies and applications in other industries more than looking for “new-to-the-world” technologies as a primary source of innovation.

As the understanding of Design Thinking as a field has evolved, the key insight that has emerged is that the design-driven innovation process is “not only about problem solving approaches... but is a transformational process at the business (not product) level” (Wrigley, 2013, p2; and Acklin, 2010; Ardayfio, 2000; Beverland, 2005). Design Thinking has begun to impact business thinking as a solution to overcoming innovation implementation challenges (Klitsie, Price & De Lille, 2019) by shifting to more focus on the customer’s experience. This is done through “empathy building, deep user understanding and user involvement” (Carlgren et al, 2016; Desouza et al, 2008; Esslinger, 2011; Yannou, 2015) which allows for the development of holistic, “root cause” solutions rather than solutions to symptoms (Klitsie et al, 2019).

Traditionally companies have protected their innovation from competitors through intellectual property rights and patents, but these have been shown to be of limited effectiveness. A relatively recent Italian study found that beyond this companies also use actions such as secrecy, long lead times, high costs, long times needed for duplication, and superior sales and service efforts to benefit from their design innovation before competitors catch up (Filippetti & D’ippolito, 2017).

In creating their Hugger bra products, Prairie Wear employed a design thinking approach by starting with the consumer / user need & really understanding what the literal and figurative pain points were in current product offerings and in the journey the patients and their medical teams take. They then brought together a design workshop team including

patients, surgeons, experts in foundation design and construction, garment and textile experts, and a breast movement expert to develop a garment from scratch based on the needs and requirements of the consumer rather than adapting existing designs (Holli Markwald, Interview December 30, 2021).

This need driven design innovation lead to the development of a final product that has now begun to be superficially copied by competitors, but that is not easily matched in terms of function and comfort due to several factors as outlined by the CEO, Holli Markwald (Holli Markwald, Interview December 30, 2021 and further discussions):

Premium Manufacturing Process

The process employed by Prairie Wear is not proprietary, but is one of the most expensive garment construction processes available in the market. As such it has not been widely copied because of the higher cost of the process and the much more limited availability of this production method globally.

Certified, Premium Elements

In addition to the premium manufacturing process, Prairie Wear's Huggers are also made using proven, high technology yarn, and custom or best-in-class elements such as zippers, hooks, and additives. There is also an antibacterial element embedded in the yarn. This, in combination with the additional step of maintaining an externally certified "Skin safe" rating (Oeko-Tex Standard 100) for every single element and for the garments as a whole make true replication of the product very challenging for competitors.

Acceptable Profit Margin Levels

The higher production and input costs outlined above would normally lead to a higher consumer price point. However, Prairie Wear has been set up with a significantly lower profit margin than the industry average. This is in order to ensure that the product is still within the pricing range that is accessible and acceptable to the end user consumer. While Prairie Wear is prepared to bear the higher cost of production for a significantly better product experience delivered to consumers, most competitors are not willing to absorb the margin impact required to do so.

Ongoing Need-driven and Sustainability Aware Innovation

Prairie Wear also actively elicits and absorbs all product feedback and uses this to constantly make small to medium design improvements to the garments. These improvements are often phased in without creating a new product or SKU (stock-keeping unit) which would increase their range size and thereby add complexity for consumers, stockists and also add to the carbon footprint of the brand. Their carbon footprint is something that they are intensely aware and actively offsetting on an ongoing basis. These factors also contribute to creating a moving target for potential competitive exploitation, though there is an awareness that all these benefits need to be communicated more often and more fully to consumers to ensure there is broad awareness of them.

Some concern has been raised that certain industries have taken customer centric or data-driven design too far, and now need to balance user need and data inputs out with innovation insight and foresight (Ivory, 2005; Speicher, 2022). It is clear, however, that overall design and innovation both improve when they start from a deep understanding of the consumer need and develop iteratively from there.

There has also been research into the intangible aspects of design driven innovation finding that:

Consumers not only aim to satisfy their utilitarian needs but also attribute intangible values (eg. Emotional, social and cultural values) to products. ... The satisfaction of intangible values is becoming increasingly important in highly competitive markets where tangible features and functionalities are easily copied. The inclusion of intangible values enables product differentiation and contributes to the longevity of products. (De Goey, Hilletofth & Eriksson, 2018, p. 107)

Prairie Wear has also demonstrated this integration of tangible and intangible benefits into their product and brand. Not only have they utilised a need-driven design approach developed by a team of diverse experts, but they have also in parallel developed an Integrated Value Proposition that includes a set of values that has been implicitly used to guide all implementation on the brand including product development and marketing, but

has also been made explicit in the communications on the brand as well as the brand website (Holli Markwald, Interview December 30, 2021).

Fast Fashion Versus Sustainability and Innovation – The Role of Values in Fashion

The fashion industry has in the past decade been forced to acknowledge and begin to address its wasteful, short term and non-sustainable approach to commerce. This is , generally referred to pejoratively as “fast fashion” (Brooks, 2015; Muthu, 2019; Peters, Li & Lenzen 2021; Su & Chang, 2018;). Fast fashion is driven by materialistic & ego-based values (Becker-Leifhold, 2018; Das, Jebarajakirthy & Sivapalan, 2022; O’Cass & Julian, 2001). In response “the fashion industry has recently heeded the call for sustainability and ethically sound production” (McNeill & Moore, 2015, p. 212) and is still coming to terms with what the future of the fashion industry could look like based on insights that the consumer is looking for both sustainable fashion and the economic & ego-based benefits of fashion purchases (Hur, 2020; Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

A Swedish study into innovation, sustainability, and organisational values in the fashion industry concludes that “...business model innovation, corporate sustainability, and financial performance are associated with more deeply rooted values in the organisation” (Pedersen, Gwozdz & Hvass, 2016, p. 275) though addressing the sustainability of the industry will require a collaboration across a wide range of stakeholders and likely cannot be achieved by individual organisations in the industry (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Pedersen, Gwozdz & Hvass, 2016). This Swedish viewpoint on the link between sustainability, innovation and a values based approach is supported by studies from France (Sburlino, 2019), Bulgaria (Ermann, 2013), India (Kautish & Sharma, 2018), and the USA (Kim, Yoo, Kim & Johnson, 2012).

In starting a global garment business from a sustainable and values-driven base, Prairie Wear set out to create a product that was (a) crafted to fully meet the consumer and market need, (b) focusing on ethically sourced components and planet-friendly choices at all levels, and (c) designed to be the antithesis of “fast fashion” with a product that is actively built to be as durable and comfortable as possible with no drive to replace the product in the short term either via manufactured obsolescence or marketing drives - ie. launching a “new” version of a product therefore implicitly declaring the existing one to

be “old” (Holli Markwald, Interview December 30, 2021 and follow up discussions July to September 2022).

Niche Brand Expansion into Mainstream Markets

The next challenge facing Prairie Wear is the movement from a strong, growing position in a niche market to competing with much larger, more established brands in the mainstream bra market. This challenge of moving from a successful niche to a larger mainstream market can be found in almost all categories and has been studied in areas as diverse as banking in Nigeria (Maklan & Knox, 2009), wheat farming in Montana (Brester, 1999) and sandalwood production in Western Australia (Tonts & Selwood, 2003), and is always shown to be a complex challenge but one that is increasingly prevalent across a wide range of industries:

“...peripheral organisations are playing an increasingly important role in determining the competitive landscape of industries. Indeed, the increased popularity of peripheral products can be observed across a wide range of industries including microbreweries, artisan cheeses, organic foods, farm-to-table restaurants, and custom bicycle and snowboard manufacturers.” (Verhaal et al, 2017, p. 2547)

In considering plant-based meat analogies in their movement from niche to mainstream markets, a recent study found that some of the key current pressing consumer concerns namely “better for you” and “better for the planet” are driving the growth of this category, supported by reducing prices and better product delivery (Boukid, 2020).

Considering the craft beer industry as a learning ground for niche agriculturalists, a study in 2008 found that similarly to craft brewers, agriculturalists in specific niches are unable to compete on a low-cost strategy. They need to offer a unique, branded and actively marketed specialist product that is hard for corporate competitors to copy (Woolverton & Parcell, 2008). Another more recent large study into the craft beer category found that mainstream movement and growth are being supported by (a) their providence (ie. local identity & authenticity elements) and their wider range of products as compared to mainstream producers; and (b) the fact that larger producers are mimicking their niche products in the mainstream, consumers become educated about, and open to the niche

products and this allows the actual niche craft producers an entry point into the mainstream market (Verhaal et al, 2017).

Organic produce & production also witnessed rapid early growth (Agra Europe Ltd, 1999; Sharples, 2000) followed by adoption into the mainstream in the last 20 years. Although in this instance the mainstreaming of this category did not happen via niche players expanding into the mainstream markets, but through mainstream adoption of organic as a diversification strategy driven by demand (Blank & Thompson, 2004; Yakovleva & Flynn, 2009). Organic produce is considered ‘higher quality’ and initially garnered higher prices, but has not proved to be able to universally hold this value in more recent years. This is likely partly due to the mainstreaming of the idea of “organic” as an entry level requirement for some target markets. And potentially partly due to varying levels of consumer understanding of organic. The broader general focus on “sustainability and environmental issues” amongst especially Millennial consumers rather than the narrow focus on organic production (Sanchez-Bravo et al, 2021) also plays into this dynamic. The food provision industry also generally sets up “many barriers for enabling sustainable eating in the current food-provisioning system” (Parekh & Svenfelt, 2022, p. 305). Looking at organic milk and free-range eggs in the UK specifically, a 2018 paper found that “while purchases of organic milk can be predicted by a wide range of sociodemographic factors, this is not the case for free-range eggs. Here, besides price and green attitudes, there are no other influences on behaviour”. The authors conclude that for sustainable products that become widely available in the mainstream, communications should focus on quality, safety and production health in order to make sustainable products the ‘norm’ rather than the ‘new’ and so facilitate commitment to these greener choices long term (Chintakayala et al, 2018).

Similar to the organic category, the fairtrade industry grew worldwide with “annual growth rates of 22-56 percent volume since 2000” (Davies, 2007). They have also moved from niche to mainstream presence exhibiting increased mass-marketing and is now considered to be in its fourth era, namely “the institutional era” (Davies, 2007) which exemplifies mainstream internalisation. Here, again, the mainstreaming of the idea has been through co-option of it by the mainstream rather than via niche players growing into the mainstream market sustainably. In considering the long term implications for consumer engagement with the idea of fairtrade in the UK, a 2019 study found that “the

fairtrade marketing in the UK is at serious risk of experiencing less consumer engagement and loyalty with the transformative message of fairtrade, which would not guarantee the long-term viability of such an important market for the social movement” (Yamoah, 2019, p. 119). This has likely happened because the embedding of fairtrade into mainstream thinking means that it now serves a wider range of consumers who buy for different reasons than the passionate early adopters held (Yamoah, 2019).

Looking at strategies for sustainable cotton, a 2012 study found that niche players with a “green” positioning struggled to maintain business viability while large established players remained viable. These large players, though, may not be considered genuinely committed to the ideologies of sustainable cotton at a total business level leaving consumers without clear understanding of the proposition or truth of the claims around this product, and thereby constraining its growth from early adopters to early majority (Illge & Preuss, 2012).

Solar power is another category that has moved from niche to mainstream. This has been driven by activism and a shift in consumer expectations and requirements. The subsequent responses of some energy companies like BP (British Petroleum) who have demonstrated a willingness to change are also better situated to create profitable new markets for the future while doing societal good (Foley & Gallagher, 2005). As part of the larger shift to sustainable alternatives, solar power faces the challenges of scaling up to become the new normal, rather than just scaling up on aspects of the concept (Augenstein et al, 2020).

For Prairie Wear the launch of a new, third Hugger in late 2022 / early 2023 will be a significant move out of the original medical niche that led to the creation of the original product. This medical niche has supported the growth of the business thus far (Holli Markwald meetings, various, 2022). The new product poses both a significant opportunity for the brand to drive awareness in a much larger context. It also brings with it the risks of moving into a highly contested and mainstream bra category with much more established, well-known mainstream brands that have significantly larger marketing budgets and existing followings.

The literature on the movement from a niche to the mainstream indicates three things that Prairie Wear will need to do in order to successfully grow beyond their original niche: (1) Build on existing authenticity and sustainability messaging, (2) Maintain brand authenticity and product quality, and (3) Work to “normalise” true comfort, verified product quality and a commitment to durable, non-fast fashion approaches to bras. If they can succeed in these areas, Prairie Wear should be able to grow strongly beyond its original niche and become a mainstream bra brand that drives changes within the industry as a whole.

The Brand Story

The Integrated Value Proposition of the Brand – 2018 vs 2022

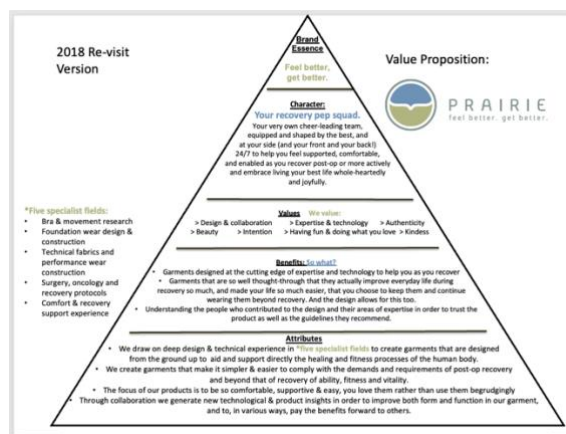


Figure 60: The original IVP

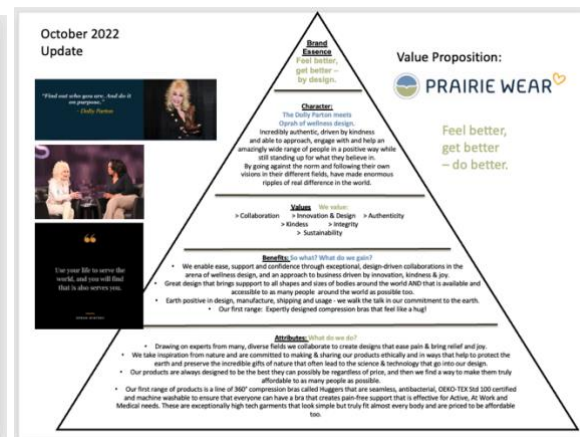


Figure 61: The revised IVP from 2022

Figures 60 & 61: Screenshots of the brand pyramids for Prairie Wear based on the original IVP workshop and updated in 2018 (Fig. 63) and the latest iteration of the pyramid (Fig. 64) as agreed in October 2022.

The original (2018) Integrated Value Proposition version for Prairie Wear grew out of the post-surgical product need and as such reflects the narrow medical focus. In the updated 2022 version of the Value Proposition the business has taken a step back and reframed their proposition around the principles and approaches rather than just the specific products that the business started producing, reflecting a clearer strategic viewpoint and more room for growth beyond the initial medical niche that the business started in. Of

significance is the fact that the Values, although they have been refined and in some instances reworded or clarified, are still largely the same as the original set.

The Starting Point

The story of Prairie Wear has a pre-history. On 6 November, 2014 a group of interested partners came together (virtually) to think tank a start-up concept with the single focus of improving the world we live in through design. The concept was formalised with a brand values workshop held in person in Squamish, Canada in January 2015.

The initial concept for the start-up, later called Abundance, was a range of clothing designed for everyday and corporate wear but drawing on the technical fabrics and design of active and sportswear. This concept has now come to market in several brands, creating a new category. The initial work done for Abundance ran aground after a substantial investment when the fast fashion values really started to clash with the stated values of the original concept. The business concept was shelved in March 2016 (Email re “New Directions” Meeting Agenda, 4 March 2016). In this same meeting, however, a new concept was tabled for consideration – and this new concept led to the creation of Prairie Wear.

The Birth of Prairie Wear

In September / October 2015 one of the Abundance partners was set a challenge by his sister, a specialised oncological breast surgeon in Portland. She held up a flimsy, scratchy ruched pink and white garment that they used on patients post-surgically in order to try and improve their post-operative pain and discomfort. She was not satisfied with the results and believed that the work that the Abundance team had been doing must be able to bring more science and technology to bear in order to create a product to meet this need.

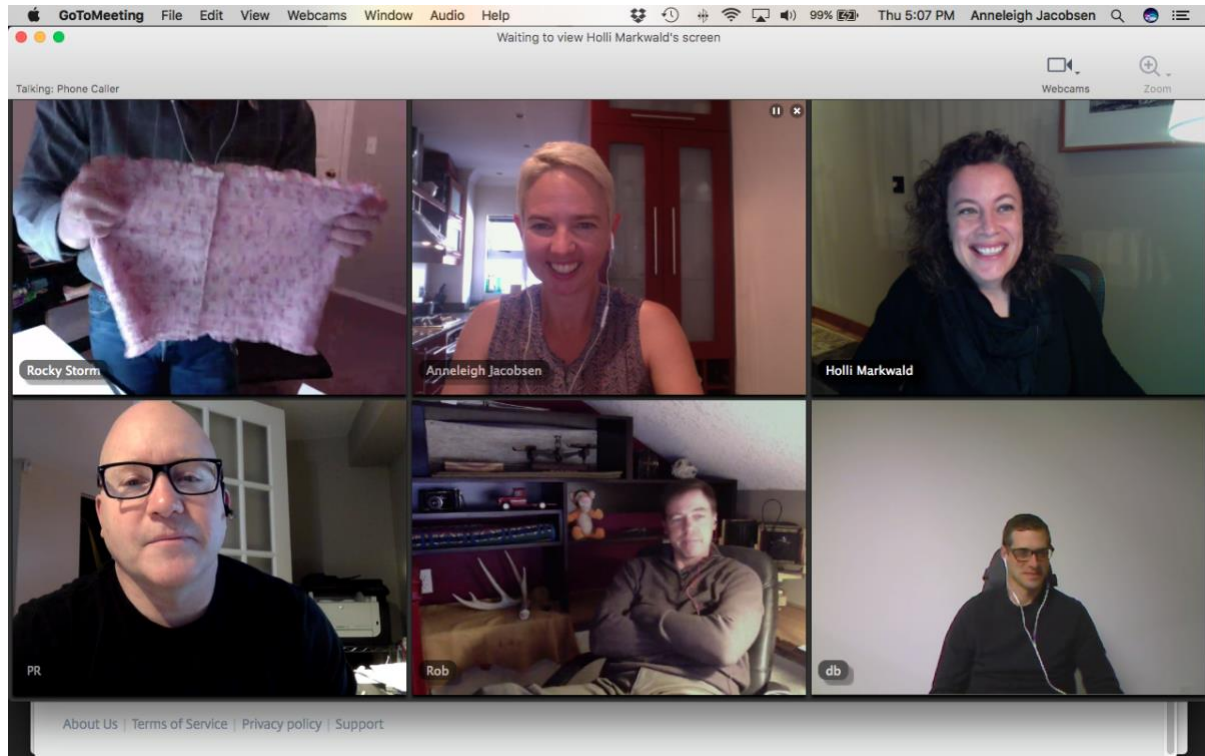


Figure 62: Screenshot of an Abundance Team Meeting on Go-To-Meeting (including myself pictured middle top here) remembering the original pink ruched post-surgical garment example that led to the creation of the HuggerPRIMA (26 January 2017). That product can be viewed on <https://www.zzmedical.com/x-ray-practices/mammography/expand-a-band-breast-binders.html>)



Figure 63: Screenshot from the zzmedical website showing the binder product that inspired the challenge that lead to the creation of Prairie Wear and its range of Hugger bras.

The Abundance team amassed a large repository of knowledge in the form of industry contacts, insight into technical garment technology including:

- the structure and options available in the garment production industry
- understanding of the wide range of yarn and fabric technology available
- exposure to the design and development process of garment construction,
- and insight into the options in terms of manufacturing processes available

This depth of knowledge, they felt, would enable them to not only dramatically improve on the current market offering, but could potentially exceed patient and medical expectations for such a product (Holli Markwald, Interview December 30, 2021).

The garment needed to do a number of technically challenging things that standard bra design and construction were unable to do. It also needed to be usable in the demanding environment of a sterile operating room and be comfortable enough to ensure patient compliance with recommendations on post-surgical compression from their medical teams which, to date, had been a serious challenge (Holli Markwald, Interview December 30, 2021).

In January 2016 the original Abundance team was offered the chance to be part of this new entity, now owned and led by Holli Markwald, and 4 of the original 6 partners opted in, with one choosing to focus on his own primary business and the other acting as an advisor to Holli.

Work on product development, target market understanding, messaging, route to market and business structuring started immediately, with an understanding that the breast cancer market would be the starting point, but that the brand would evolve beyond that.

In July 2016 once the focus of the business had shifted to the post-surgical bra opportunity, a new potential product range and product naming exercise was done over several months resulting in the adoption of “Huggers” as the product name based on their functionality. The “Hugger” replaced the industry term “binder” which had negative connotations and did not endear the products or their use to the patient / consumer who had to wear them. At this stage of the process the post-surgical bra and recovery bandeaux were still being considered two separate garments. They would only coalesce into one compression bra garment after more product development work. The rest of the original conceptual range would also be discarded as the core opportunity came into better focus across 2016 and 2017 (Holli Markwald, Interview December 30, 2021).



Figure 64: Screenshot excerpt from a PowerPoint deck during the process of the Prairie Wear product range and naming development – July 2016.

The business was named “Prairie Wear” by late 2016. The name originated from a team nickname and desk research that showed “prairie” to reflect the symbolism of renewal, resilience and strength found in these landscapes all over the world. This meaning resonated with the need being met and the medical category which the brand chose to reflect on positively in terms of renewal and resilience, rather than focusing on the negative of the illnesses involved (Abundance Brand Name PowerPoint deck, September 2016).

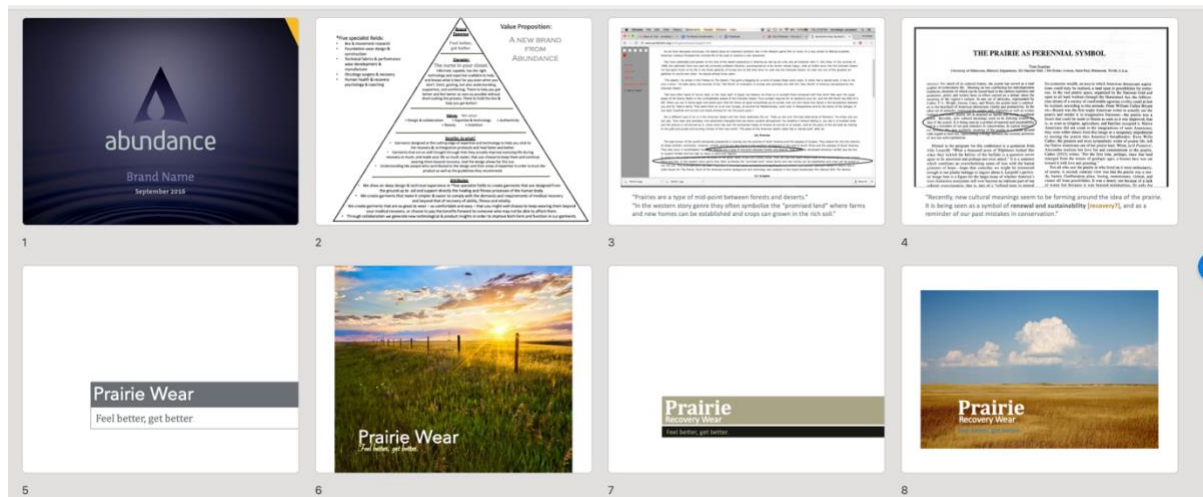


Figure 65: Screenshot excerpt from an Abundance Brand Name PowerPoint deck, September 2016.

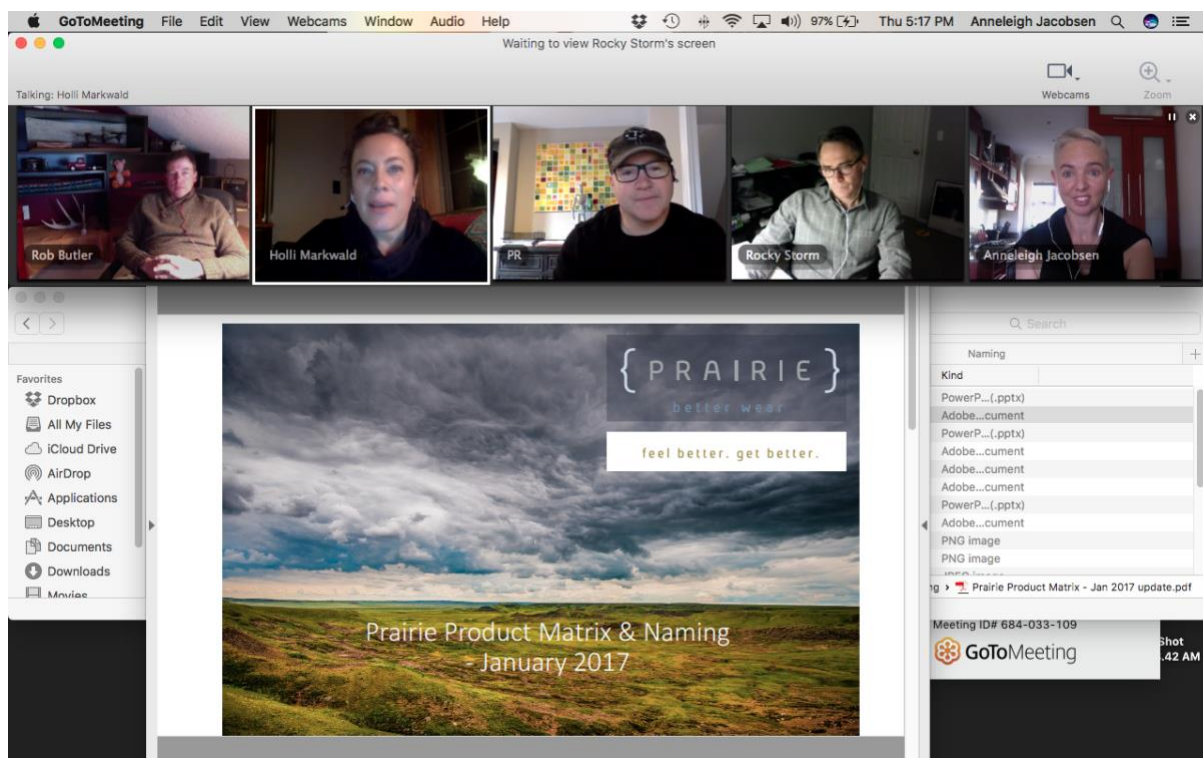


Figure 66: Screenshot of an Abundance / Prairie Wear Team Meeting (including myself – pictured far right here) on Go-To-Meeting 12 January 2017 reviewing product naming and structure options.

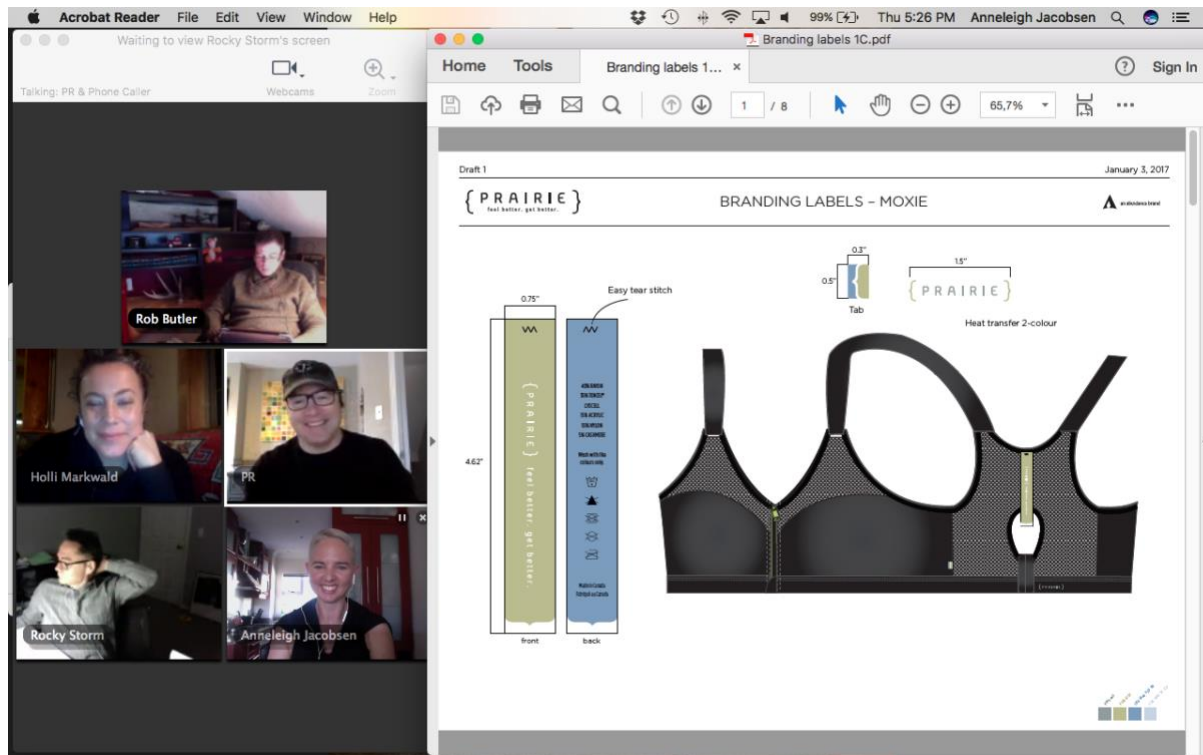


Figure 67: Screenshot of an Abundance / Prairie Wear Team Meeting (including myself – pictured bottom right here) on Go-To-Meeting 12 January 2017 reviewing hang-tag and product ideas.

Product Development

The development process of the actual product began with the assembly of a team of experts who all brought a different technical area of expertise to the discussion and who, the Prairie Wear team believe, would be able to help them meet all the objectives set for the garment (Email confirmation, Holli Markwald, 12 October 2022).

The requirements of this first garment were complex and challenging, and included:

- Substantially more comfortable than all other options including bandaging, existing wraps and other bras, and able to be worn 24/7 while still providing effective compression in the right areas (eg. the axilla under the arm) as required by the medical professionals.
- Operating Room (OR) ready ie. sterile, wire-free, latex free, Velcro free, no seams on or near multiple incision sites, and able to be laid out flat on the operating room table.
- Easy to put on post-surgically with limited mobility, adjustable, expandable, easy to wash (no special care), and really durable.

Working with these experts, the product development process was robust and focused entirely on making “the single best product that could be made”, with the understanding that considering process and pricing would come at a later stage (Holli Markwald, Interview December 30, 2021).

On Friday June 11th, 2016 a product workshop called the “Abundance Design PowWow” was held in a Bra Lab in Portland, Oregon with the expert group. This group was comprised of Dr LaJean Lawson (Expert in breast movement and creator of the first sports bra, Dr Allen Gabriel (Breast Reconstruction Surgeon), Dr Toni Storm (Breast Oncological Surgeon), Katie Foster (Technical Designer), Rocky Storm (Design Director, PW) and Holli Markwald (CEO, Prairie Wear) (Email confirmation, Holli Markwald, 12 October 2022).

The objective of this workshop was to actually create a physical product prototype that addressed as many as possible of the objectives set out by the team. This was done by cutting up existing garments, adding in new fabrics, design approaches, production versions and fastenings, and then iterating on the day by viewing the prototype on a model and then re-working it after discussion by the expert collective. At this stage the team realised that this one product could meet the needs of both the original bra and binder that were initially planned, and so this prototype (called the “Frankenstein bra” by the team) became the HuggerPRIMA. The idea for the “Extender” – an additional insert that would zip into the Hugger in order to reduce compression slightly or give more space depending on the needs of the patient – was also born in this workshop. It would be developed and launched alongside the HuggerPRIMA. There are now two Extenders produced by Prairie Wear, and they are both patent-pending in the USA.



Figure 68: Photos taken by Holli Markwald of the Design PowWow held in Portland, June 11, 2016 with the Frankenstein bras in progress.

Intense product development work, multiple rounds of intensive design updates and wear testing by a representative range of people followed. Simultaneously the sourcing and negotiation of production contracts and the development of final tech packs was done. By early 2017 a final product sample was approved, and the first Huggers went into production for delivery on 22nd November 2017. The very first order for Huggers was also placed in November 2017 – it was an order for 8 Hugger from Southwest Regional Surgery Center in Washington (confirmed by Holli Markwald in email, 12 October 2022).

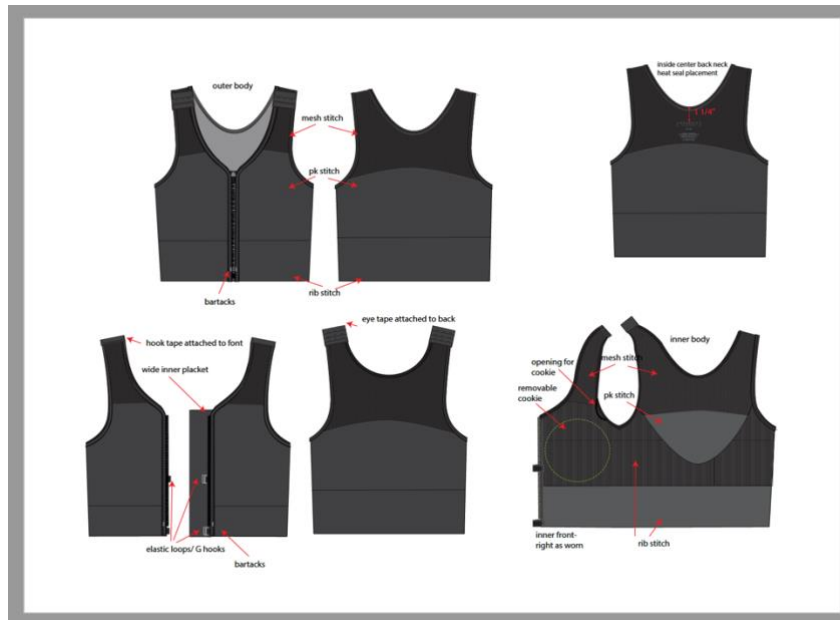


Figure 69: Screenshot of the final original Hugger product design before moving to technical specifications – July 2017



Figure 70



Figure 71



Figure 72

Figures 70-72: Photos from the first Prairie Wear photo shoot with production prototype versions of the HuggerPRIMA (then called the Hugger) and the PrimaEXTENDER (then called the Extender), Toronto, July 2017.



Figure 73: Screenshot of a social media post showing the first delivery of Huggers and Extenders to the Prairie Wear distribution centre in the USA, November 2017.

Launch

The full sales strategy kicked off in January 2018, along with an ecommerce website on the Shopify platform, social media content, and some printed collateral pieces to support the sales strategy which was originally focused more on institutional buyers (hospitals, medical groups, surgical offices).

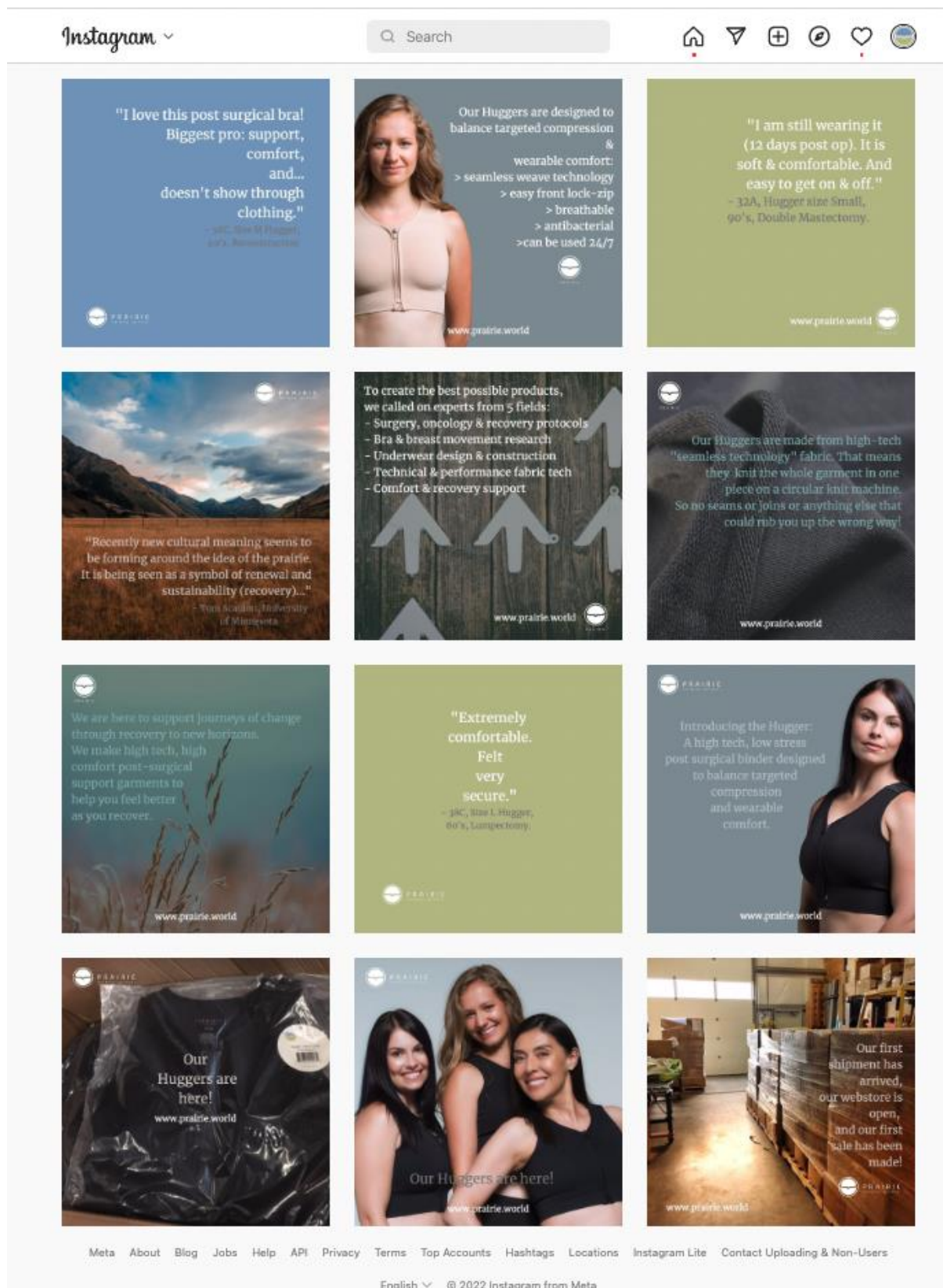


Figure 74: Screenshot of the first 12 posts on Prairie Wear's Instagram profile, starting 22 November 2017.

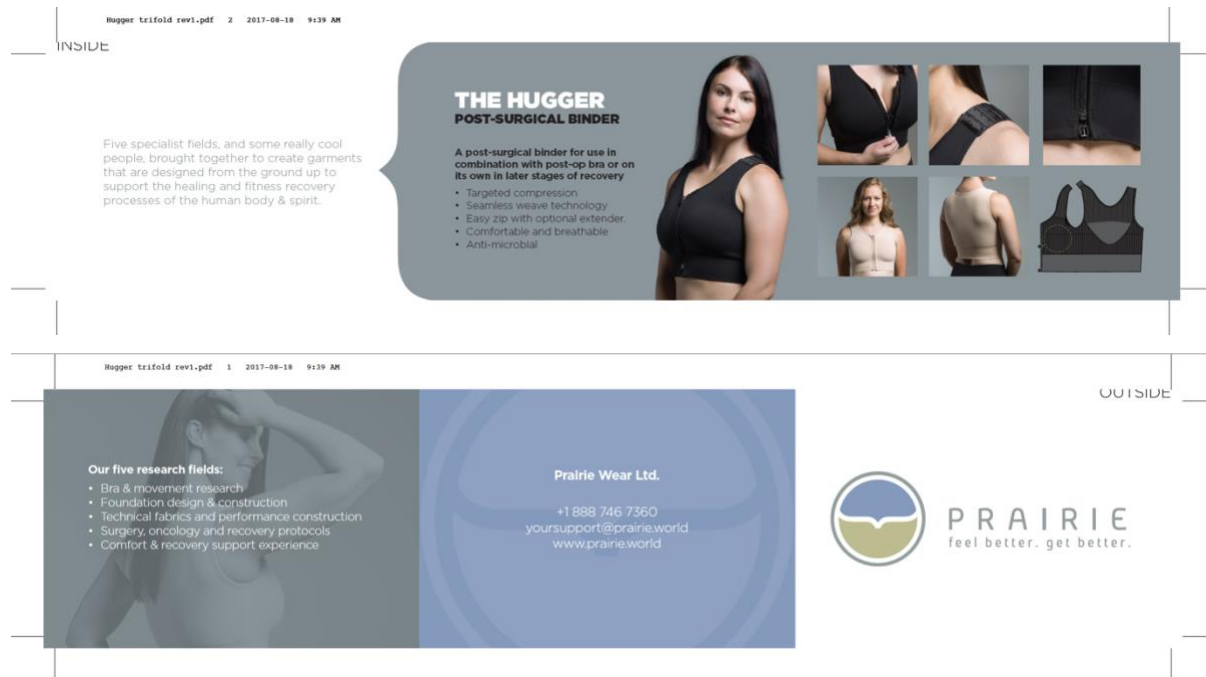


Figure 75: Screenshot of the front and back side layouts of a launch trifold leaflet design still in progress, November 2017.



Figure 76: Photo of printed collateral items, circa Oct 2018 to mid 2019, including images of the second Hugger, the HuggerVIDA, which was launched on 1 October 2018.

The original Prairie Wear website and ecommerce store were on an alternate domain extension (www.prairie.world) due to the high cost of the .com domain at the time. However, the “prairiewear.com” domain has since been purchased and now houses the brand website, webstore, and wholesale ordering environment (Email, Holli Markwald, 13 August 2018).

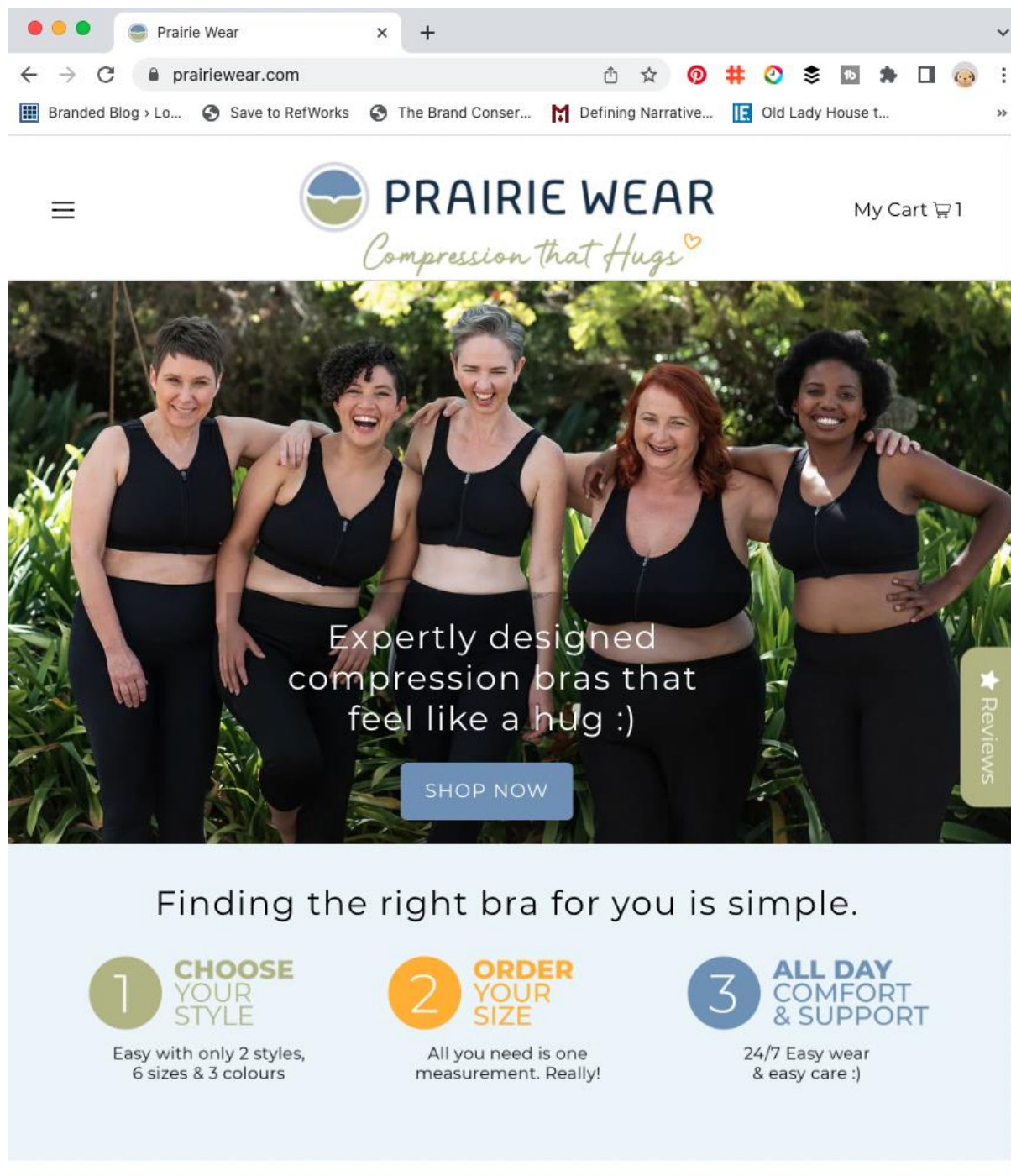


Figure 77: Screenshot of the current Prairie Wear website and webstore built and hosted on the ShopifyPLUS environment, October 2022.

Strong sales growth over the next two years saw the constant balancing of cash-flow with focus going into stock management and availability, and niche brand awareness amongst the breast surgical fraternity via a presence at key shows / conferences, and one-on-one engagement with key surgeons and influencers who could motivate the purchasing committees at institutions to list the products for internal ordering.

Product usage drove entrance into new markets such as lymphedema support, high impact exercise for large cup sizes, and everyday use. Repeated consumer requests for a more “everyday” version of the HuggerPRIMA that had less coverage and less compression lead to the development of the HuggerVIDA which was launched 1 October 2018. The launch of a Vida specific Extender followed in 2019 (Holli Markwald, Interview December 30, 2021).

The Covid Impact

The impact of Covid was immediate because Prairie Wear operates in a “medical devices” primary market. Sales in this market were driven primarily through hospital central buying at the request of surgeons or therapists, and supported by retail bra and mastectomy support stores which do fittings and stock a range of products for breast cancer, surgery and allied patients.

The initial impact of Covid on the business was through the global shutdowns which put elective and non-emergency surgeries of all types on hold indefinitely while the medical world focused on coping with Covid surges and trying to ensure that hospitals were not overwhelmed.

For Prairie Wear this meant that in its primary markets of the USA and Canada the hospital demand for Huggers dropped almost instantly as the global pandemic was announced in March 2020.

In terms of revenue, their lowest month of growth ever was April 2020. April 2020 was the only month since inception that showed a volume decline instead of the solid, continued growth that had been enjoyed since launch. April 2020 figures show sales at

less than a third of the average per month sales levels between October 2019 and March 2020.

What this precipitated, however, was a strategic shift of focus onto end consumers rather than on intermediaries who then supply end consumers in the usual medical institution model.

As of May 2020 the following changes were made to counter the sales impact of hospital shutdowns for non-Covid related procedures:

1. Prairie Wear employed a Google-focused agency in the US to create and drive a google advertising to end consumers to drive both awareness of the brand and products, and direct digital sales via the online store driven in a Shopify environment.
2. They began to offer drop shipping for customers. In this model Prairie Wear delivers the product directly to the end-user on behalf of the customer in order to allow their customers (ie. medical professionals and retail stores) to continue to sell the product without being physically open.

Operationally the impacts of Covid have also been significant. Supply chain delays in manufacturing, shipping and delivery to warehouse meant that timelines shifted from 6 months' notice to 9 months' notice which meant that the organisation needed to shift to anticipating sales 9 months out and had to put the cash out for product 9 months before receiving it – a significant additional pressure on a start-up which is always hamstrung by cashflow. The need to anticipate product split, colour split, and size splits trends 9 months in advance meant that the organisation had to become more keenly aware of how to track inventory, order inventory and anticipate trends in order to survive.

In terms of the team, moments of “covid fatigue” impacted the team despite it being a decentralised organisation: “We’re all remote already, and I think we all felt more remote. And I think it’s been one of the biggest challenges in terms of team leadership – how to bring a team together when we are all feeling so remote. It’s been the most challenging interpersonal two years in terms of leadership that I’ve ever experienced” (Holli Markwald interview, 4 April 2022).

Recruiting and retaining candidates during Covid to expand a very small team under huge pressure also created its own challenges from defining work/life balance to hiring people aligned to the purpose of the organisation without meeting them in person.

All of this, Markwald believes, is underpinned by working in a category that focuses on care, and a business that actually believes in the value it is putting into the world. That it is run and based on values that hold real meaning and are actively used by the company and all its staff and associates is part of the success here, Markwald believes (Holli Markwald interview, 4 April 2022).

In this case, Covid actually underlined that the need being met by Prairie Wear is real and sustained, and is not influenced significantly by fashion, season, or even the state of the world: “We’re here because we need to be here for people, regardless of what is happening” (Holli Markwald interview, 4 April 2022).

Results

Business Results

In terms of business results, Prairie Wear has maintained volume growth throughout the Covid period and continues to grow month over month, which is remarkable given the context.

The business contribution has shifted from 80/20 wholesale / retail pre-Covid, to 70/ 30 wholesale /retail as of February 2022 due to the shift of focus to direct sales.

Overall the pandemic delayed what Markwald calls “our rocketship boost year from 2020 to 2022, yet we really still had a great growth percentage based on what we see industry-wide” (Holli Markwald interview, 4 April 2022).

The business continues to grow at rates above industry norm and as of April 2022 was invited to step up to the ShopifyPLUS platform (Emails, Holli Markwald & Shopify, 4 April 2022) which, for SMEs is by invitation-only based on outstanding business results,

conversion stats and other key measures as identified by Shopify in their search to optimise their retail clients which, in turn, boosts their own profitability.

Markwald also comments that “Core values and ‘why are we here; are the same to me- we’re here because of our core values – it’s why we’re here. I think it’s been a driving force to keep everyone afloat when it’s a challenging day or a challenging time” (Holli Markwald interview, 4 April 2022).

Table 10: Business Results

Prairie Wear Ltd									
				Nov 27			Covid	Covid	Jan- Sept
Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Revenue Growth % vs YA	-	-	-	100%	8131%	167%	59%	106%	12%
Volume (# of Orders)	0			17	573	1568	3101	6275	6760
Marketing Spend Growth % vsYA	-	-	-	100%	491%	200%	-10%	60%	16%
Wholesale (WS) / Retail Split*				WS 100	WS 95	WS 85	WS 80	WS 75	WS 70
# of Employees	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	4	4
# of Retail Outlets Stocked**	0	0	0	0	75	152	210	348	274
New Product Launches	R&D	R&D	R&D	PRIMA	VIDA				LUMA
* Approximate									
** Retail Stores Flagship Location Only - does not include multiple locations (Approx 20) or Institutions: Medical Facilities, Hospitals, etc.									

Table ten shows the strong launch growth and good results despite the Covid impact. The table also demonstrates the shift from Wholesale only towards a more diverse base with direct Retail sales reaching 30% of the total as of late 2022 and forecast to keep growing its contribution.

Media Results

From a media point of view there have been three major phases of focus in the creation and growth of Prairie Wear so far.

Phase 1: 2018 - 2019

Brand establishment and niche awareness: This initial phase saw the brand using web presence, blogs, social media (content and advertising) and direct engagement with the niche medical target markets via email, LinkedIn, referrals and cold calling. In this phase

there was very low marketing investment and the focus was on establishing credibility within the medical niches.

Phase 2: 2020 - 2021

Precipitated somewhat by the Covid impact, phase two saw the brand shift focus to the direct to consumer target market. From a media point of view this meant a sharp increase in advertising spend with a focus on Google search, re-marketing, and display campaigns targeting medical keywords primarily. They also began to broaden out into everyday usage language and keywords in order to increase reach and awareness more broadly and drive direct consumer sales. While the medical world needed to focus on the global health crisis of the Covid pandemic and all non-emergency consultations, procedures and patient care were put on hold, Prairie Wear shifted focus from sales to medical channels to sales to end users directly. During this phase the brand also did some work focused on SEO and refreshed the brand website to ensure direct purchase online was as streamlined as possible.

Phase 3: 2022 +

By late 2020 it had already become apparent that Prairie Wear's products had gained attention amongst much larger competitors and knock-off products started appearing on the market. This trend as well as the large growth in reported everyday use and direct to consumer sales during the pandemic meant that by early 2022, when the world markets started returning to some normality, Prairie Wear embarked on the next phase of awareness growth. They appointed a PR agency with the aim of dramatically step-changing broad awareness levels of the brand and its products in order to ensure that Prairie Wear can own and benefit from the investment in product development and medical credibility and bring the benefits to a larger audience of users.

This increase in marketing spend and number of agency partners will coincide with both the broadening of the communication of the value propositions of the business (ie. from Post-Surgical / Lymphedema / Everyday to Active / At Work / Medical), as well as the launch of a third Hugger product in late 2022 with a focus on broader market appeal. This product is intended to expand the brand beyond its original medical niche, but still maintain the credibility and growth potential within the niche.

In all three phases the media choices, as well as the search for, choice of and working process with the agencies and partners involved, have been based on the clarity provided by the values of the brand, the internal understanding of the stage of business lifecycle and relative available marketing investment, and the specific deliverables that the brand needed in each of the media phases to date. The internal clarity has been key to achieving excellent results and strong agency / partner relationships throughout the brand journey so far.

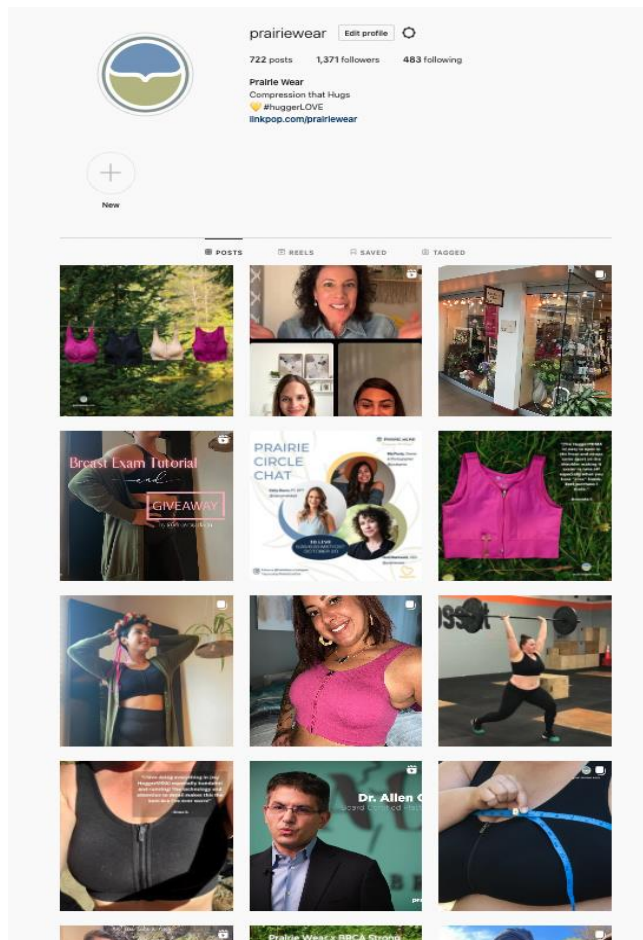


Figure 78: Screenshot of the Prairie Wear Instagram feed showing the shift to including user generated and influencer content in addition to brand-owned content as the focus broadens, October 2022.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

What was discovered in this study was that helping clients understand and articulate what their brands stand for, and what specifically they need from external implementers is a challenge that is often ignored by practitioners. Taking a values-driven approach to branding and marketing can streamline and improve IMC implementation. It can also support improved business efficiency and growth in numerous ways particularly through enabling the practical implementation of IMC with multiple internal and external brand implementers.

The power of values, in particular, as well as creating clarity through brand articulation and, in turn, crafting alignment at various levels of the organisation.

Emerging Critical Success Factors That Bridge the Gap

Based on the review of literature and thinking on the practical implementation of IMC, and supported by the findings in the case studies there seem to be three emerging factors that predicate the ability of these organisations to successfully implement IMC across multiple industries, geographies and business cycle life stages.

These emerging critical success factors are:

1. The ownership and driving of the process of IMC implementation by senior management/brand ownership
2. Clarity on roles, responsibilities, measures and remuneration for all brand implementers in the IMC context
3. Clarity and alignment on the Value Proposition of the brand or business with particular emphasis on the Values embodied by the brand or business – or, differently stated, using Values-Driven Marketing as an implementation approach.

And additionally:

4. Access to Brand Management Expertise

All the emerging success factors are supported by literature and hold true across all current case studies, and indicate similar learnings on these factors:

Ownership of the Process by Senior Management or Owners

The first key factor found throughout the literature on IMC implementation is the notion of top-down ownership of IMC. Differently stated, given the breadth of scope that true IMC includes, it is critical that the person leading the organisation is the person who takes ownership of the implementation of IMC. This person could be the business owner in the case of a small or privately held business, or the CEO in the case of a medium or large, more corporate organisation. This person must also be the person actively explaining the value and benefits of this approach; directing what is to be done and by whom; and allocating resources and funding accordingly. IMC implementation cannot be achieved if it is attempted from a functional or middle management point of view, or does not have absolute support and commitment from upper management.

Clarity on roles, responsibilities, measures, and remuneration

This second key theme demonstrates the inherent relationship between clarity and results. The brand, values and marketing objectives must be clearly articulated and embraced internally within the management and marketing teams of an organisation. There must also be clarity externally on the brand proposition, the values of the organisation and the objectives of the IMC campaign/s as well as the deliverables, measurement and remuneration of each of the external implementers. If this is achieved all parties internally and externally should be able to achieve their objectives and create strong media and business results.

Clarity on the VP of the Brand with an Emphasis on Values – or Values-Driven Marketing as an implementation Approach

The third key success factor emerging in the literature and case studies is the importance of Values and Value Propositions in articulating the intuitive or intrinsic identity of the business clearly. These clearly articulated identities are then used to communicate the brand and its objectives to all internal and external brand implementers.

The interviewees all emphasised that the articulation of the brand values and proposition were critical in allowing clarity for all parties with regard to the identity and objectives of the brand and business. They also stated that the process of getting to that clarity of articulation was key to ensuring they had communicated all the intuitive knowledge and vision they had for the brand. They could also then consistently share this with all internal and external brand implementers easily which ensured everyone involved was aligned and delivering against the same objectives.

Of particular interest here is the role played by values as a key management tool when steering a brand and/or organisation through challenging times such as the Covid pandemic and associated economic and business landscape changes and challenges.

The use of values as a touchstone for the leader and the organisation seem to show that values are used as a short-hand or proxy for what the brand stands for. Since values are easy to recall and are a human construct that has been applied to brands to help strengthen their differentiation, they are the simplest and most compelling part of the proposition. This is particularly true in the midst of actually running a business or managing the implementation of a brand within the high complexity of an IMC context.

Access to Brand Management Expertise

In most of the case studies the brand owner also identified a lack of internal understanding, skill and experience with brand implementation in general, and IMC in particular. In all cases studied here this led to poor previous experiences of working with agencies specifically and also with internal implementers. As a result it may be pertinent to add a fourth emerging success factor as follows:

Access to brand management or marketing expertise on a contract or educational basis in order to leverage this skill and experience in a way that is financially viable for SMEs, and assist the brand owner with both the direct strategy and implementation of the brand, and with the education and up-skilling needed in the rest of the organisation in order to effectively implement IMC internally and with external brand implementers.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

In the world of IMC, the general emphasis is on the “agency” (or in our language, the external brand implementer) as the epicentre in terms of its customary role as the centre of knowledge, the decision maker, and the most critical role player in the implementation of IMC. With the advent of digital media came not only the enormous complexity of IMC, but also the ability for brand owners (or “clients”) to directly engage with, learn about, gather information on and understand their end-use consumers. This shift in the power dynamics between brand owners and implementers alongside the diversity of agency types and offerings, the complexity of the IMC media environment, and the fact that marketing budgets are often a large portion of the total direct outlay make the relationship between brand owners and brand implementers a critical determining factor in the success of the business. For this reason it is imperative that research and theoretical approaches focus on clarifying the roles needed in this new version of the IMC relationship. They also need to provide simple, easy to implement models and guidance to both parties in order to ensure that the demonstrated value of effective IMC implementation is not lost. With clear, easy to use guidelines the benefits of IMC could be made available to a wide range of brand owners rather than just the large national and multinational organisations who can afford the staff and resources for mass IMC implementation.

Interaction with Existing Research

This study supports and helps further frame the previous work done on the cross-over territory of the benefits of Value Propositions and Values in an IMC context. It shows that there are five areas of impact that have been identified in the case studies undertaken here. These can also be found in the extant research although to date they have not been framed in this way. These five areas of impact are:

- (a) As a way of verbalising intuitive founder knowledge (De Chernatony et al, 2004; Edvardsson, Enquist & Hay, 2006 Ind, 2004: Simones et al, 2005)
- (b) As key to communicating with brand implementers (Gould et al, 1999; Mortimer & Laurie, 2017)

(c) As the start of a process that enables media-neutral planning (Grounds, 2003; Merron, 2003; Orr & Cano-Lopez, 2005; Saada, 2006; Tapp, 2004)

(d) As key to hiring and keeping the right internal and external brand implementers (Drucker, 2016; Graham, 2021; Ingelsson et al, 2012; Johnson, 2016; Keller & Richey, 2006; Lipp, 2013; Mosher, 2022; Schueler, 2000), and

(e) As a way of creating internal alignment and supporting growth (Collins & Porras, 1994; DeChernatony et al, 2004; Edvardsson, Enquist & Hay, 2006; Elkington, 2001; Gleeson, 2021; Lencioni, 2002; Morgan 2020)

The current research attempts to bring all this work into focus in order to understand the practical implications of these approaches on the implementation of IMC. Furthermore it helps understand what we can learn across these case studies in terms of emerging key success factors. These factors could potentially be applied to other businesses in order to start to bridge the divide between brand owners and brand implementers in the IMC context.

Implications for Brand Owners

This research shows that implementation of IMC needs to be owned and driven from the top of the organisation. Many studies indicate the fact that C-suite support is critical for successful IMC implementation, but this study goes further to show that the ultimate brand owner (whether they be true owner, CEO or otherwise leading the organisation) must be the *driver* of the process, not only the supporter.

In addition to this, the research indicates that actively clarifying the values of the brand and using them as a touchstone throughout the implementation process is key to demonstrating this ownership. In addition, strategic decision making and resource allocation must be done at C-suite level (whether with the support of an expert or consultant or not). Finally, clarity of scope, deliverables and remuneration are all roles that the executive brand owner must embrace in order to ensure excellence in IMC implementation that supports the strategy and growth of the organisation rather than dilutes them.

Implications for Brand Implementers

Brand implementers must be open to understanding and embracing the values of the brand and take responsibility for the implementation of strategic brand and marketing projects or aspects., Furthermore they should understand how they direct and impact every single aspect of implementation from media choices through to design decisions and product mix.

Internal brand implementers should recognise that unless they have absolute buy-in from the brand owner, and that that person is prepared to actively champion and drive the process as outlined above, it will be very challenging to effectively implement IMC. The internal brand implementers can play a huge role in equipping the brand owner with an understanding of the brand. They can assist with clarification of brand values. They can provide insight and recommendations on strategic brand and marketing choices so that the brand owner is equipped to make these decisions and clearly allocate resources and deliverables to all internal and external implementers. Internal implementers can also play a substantial role in embodying the values of the brand or business, and assisting with the education, internal communications and practices that embed these values at the core of an organisation.

External brand implementers (usually largely agencies of various kinds) should similarly be willing and able to understand the Value Proposition of the brand, embrace the values embodied by the brand or business, and apply them to all work being done on behalf of the brand owner. They must also ensure that they have absolute clarity on the responsibilities and deliverables they are being asked to take on, as well as what the remuneration for the work is before the process begins.

Implications for Research into Values-Driven Marketing and Brand Values

In terms of further research into values and values-driven marketing, this study indicates it would be worth considering the different ways in which values are treated within organisations. It would also be useful to deepen our understanding of the impact of values on IMC and marketing implementation, and not only focus on correlations with financial performance in isolation. The type of person who takes on the role of brand owner may also have a material impact on the extent to which values are truly adopted and used

within an organisation. This is an interesting line of enquiry in terms of factors that ultimately impact IMC implementation.

Study Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited in terms of its scope as it used only four case studies. The focus of this study was first to test the theory that a values-driven approach could lead to much stronger IMC implementation. Secondly, this study considered whether a values-driven approach could improve the relationship between brand owners and brand implementers. And lastly, this study began to consider the “set of comprehensive criteria to guide internal efforts with the firm” (Keller, 2016, p. 300). Qualitatively this work would benefit from a wider set of case studies in which a values-driven approach is used, as well as a control group of case studies in which this approach is not used. In time, a quantitative approach could also be considered when there are sufficient organisations taking this values-driven approach to ensure a robust quantitative sample.

Much work done around understanding and characterising the issue of the widening gap between brand owners and brand implementers from an agency (or brand implementer) point of view. This study finds that the onus now lies more on the side of the brand owner to take responsibility for the process and to effectively direct the implementation of IMC. This is not a new concept in terms of C-suite support, but this study goes further indicating that the brand owner must take an active, directive role in the process. This concept would merit further research and interrogation.

This study has also not focused on the extended, inter-departmental and internal process aspects of full IMC implementation, and integrating this aspect of the implementation with the top level direction would also be worthy of further study.

Lastly, this research has focussed very much on the impact, ie. Does this approach work? Further research on this topic could look at the “why” and interrogate the ways in which this values-driven approach works, and what can be learned in terms of a model to reapply in other business and organisational environments. Such a model would enable organisations to build stronger, more positive relationships between brand owners and brand implementers and thereby enable more effective IMC implementation and drive

business growth on both sides of the relationship. It could also potentially enable more organisations (particularly SMEs) to benefit from clear, objective driven IMC implementation in order to grow their businesses, create jobs, and bring new voices and options to the consumer.

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Appendix: The Integrated Value Proposition Explained

a) What is it?

The tool used here is currently called an “Integrated Value Proposition Workshop” and entails a one or two day workshop that builds the content for a non-proprietary pyramid that encapsulates the value proposition of the brand. This 5 level pyramid structure was chosen for its simplicity and clarity, and lack of internal contradiction.

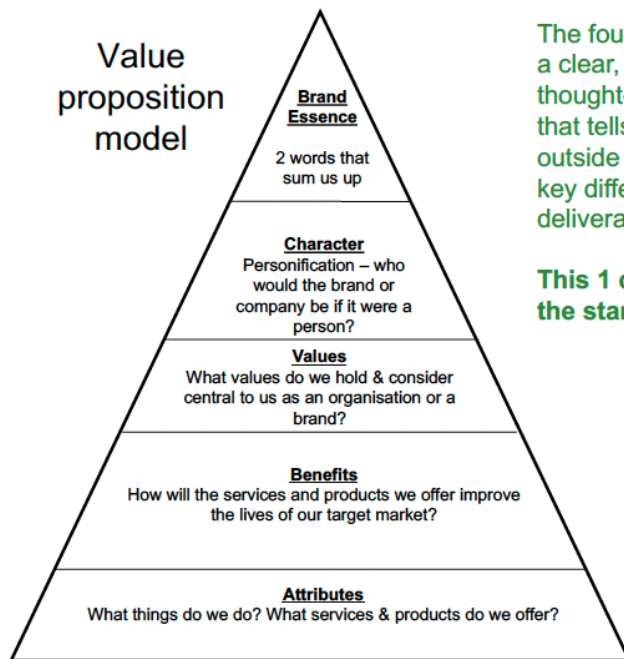
This approach has been used for the past two decades to give clarity to brand owners in a way that is:

1. Quick (one to two day workshop plus preparation & compilation)
2. Clear – driven by questions with either fixed form answers or a text limit
3. Not coupled to any other deliverables – a stand-alone piece that should be Step 1 in the process.
4. Has a simple, clear outcome that is easy to understand and use
5. Has longevity and integrity if well done.

b) The workshop outline

There are several stages to the workshop:

- **Stage 1:** A projection exercise taking learnings from qualitative consumer research approaches to encourage participants to visualise and verbalise their vision for the brand.
- **Stage 2:** A topline look at the market place and competitors from a consumer / target market point of view to encourage thinking about:
 - How people look for us
 - What they find when they do
 - What other players in our field are saying to them
 - Which ones work and why
- **Stage 3:** Thinking, discussing and agreeing answers to the five levels of the pyramid which are:
 1. Attributes
 2. Benefits
 3. Values
 4. Character
 5. Brand Essence

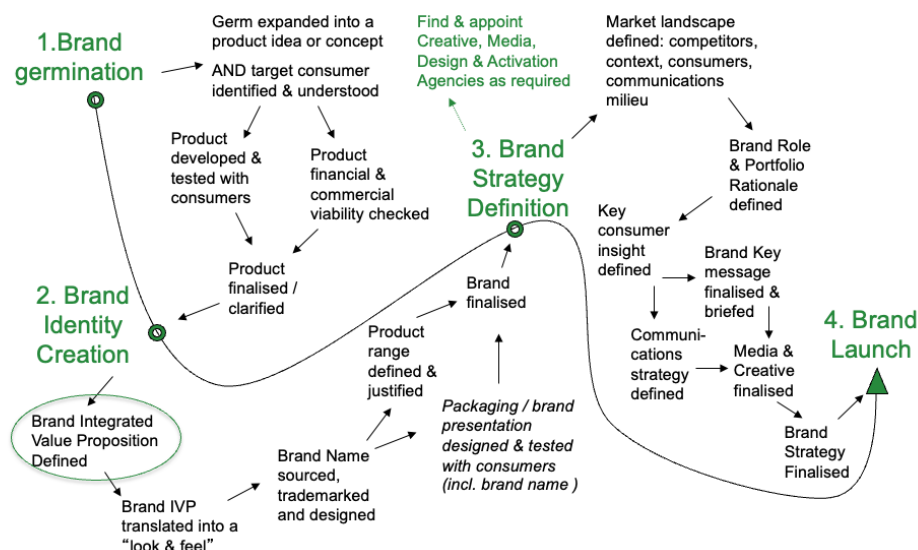


The foundation of a great brand is a clear, well articulated & well thought-through value proposition that tells everyone inside and outside of the business what the key differentiators and deliverables of the brand are.

This 1 day workshop is always the starting point I recommend!

Appendix Graphic i: A visual outline of the IVP pyramid with its levels and what their topline intention is. This outline is found in all the workshop decks and shared with the group at the start of the process.

Building a brand – broad overview:



Appendix Graphic ii: A visual representation from the IVP workshop deck of the holistic brand building process as used by myself when beginning a brand creation or renewal process with a client. This graphic also indicates where the IVP comes into the process.

There are specific questions and exercises for each level, some are initially individual and then brought back to the group for discussion and consensus, and others are done collectively.

c) How does the IVP work?

The process:

The Integrated Value Proposition is built from the bottom of the pyramid up. Each level must build on the previous level. Each level has fixed questions and timelines to enable its completion. Some levels have restricted lengths / quantities: eg. Values are restricted to 5 (or 6 at maximum). There must be an external facilitator who is in control of the process and listening to direct consensus, language, and intent, and who does the preparation for the workshop and drafts the final VP from all the inputs.

What is the outcome?

If well managed and done with genuine commitment to the process, the team will produce a document that articulates the key elements of a brand strategy:

- What do we do? Who do we do it for? (target market/s) And how do we do this in a way that is unique to us?
- Why does this matter? What is the benefit to the target market or markets?
- What values does our brand embody and that align to those of our target market/s?
- What is the persona / character / spirit of this brand? Who is this brand?
- What is at the core of this brand? What is the one idea that runs through the centre of this brand?

In addition to a clearly articulated brand proposition, the process also often has other benefits to the organisation:

- Real alignment & cohesion of the executive team around the identity, purpose and role of the brand in the organisation
- Clarity as to how the brand should be implemented & what the business strategy around it is
- Clarity as to whether the brand requires active investment in marketing or not, and what that marketing could look like given the focus and target market of the brand