

# Can branding save a village? Let's hope so...

Tim Nicol, *The MIH Centre*

I hope Richard Reed of Innocent Drinks will forgive the plagiarism of the title, shamelessly lifted from his excellent Brands Lecture three years ago.

I have just spent almost two years helping to revitalise a village and its economy via enterprise. You may even have heard about it, as we were the subject of one of the six programmes that made up the BBC1 Village SOS series broadcast this summer and presented by Sarah Beeny.

The basic premise of Village SOS is an experiment between two of our great public sector bureaucracies, the BIG Lottery Fund and the BBC, to see if the application of enterprise can inspire a rural revival in villages throughout the UK.

More than two years ago a call went out to villages to apply for the chance to win £400,000 of funding for projects which were inherently financially sustainable and not just the usual approach of a capital grant for a construction project. Village SOS had a couple of interesting twists in that the BBC would follow the process and televise six winning villages in their quest for funding and their experiences in making something out of it.

Furthermore, each village was to get the services of an external expert, a so-called Village Champion, to help manage the project and provide some full-time expertise for the first year. I was daft and vain enough to apply to be a Champion, having spent ten years in consultancy and at an age when thoughts turn to doing something more lasting and worthwhile than writing proposals and reports.

To cut a long story short, I was selected by the handsome village of Tideswell in the Peak District to help plan and execute something called 'Taste Tideswell'. Taste Tideswell is an innovative project to boost the local food economy and bring more prosperity to Tideswell, and by doing so preserve and develop local food retailers and manufacturers. Taste Tideswell helps locals and visitors alike to

appreciate their food and drink for what it is, what it does, and where it comes from.

When people understand more about their food, we believe they will want to shop and eat more locally. The project follows the local food chain from 'plot to plate' and offers activity and learning in growing, making, cooking, brewing, and tasting good food and drink. At its heart is Tideswell School of Food – a cookery school with a commercial kitchen, nano-brewery and conference room included. This is where half the grant money was spent, in converting a property in the centre of the village and setting it up as a commercial business and a community asset for the village. Taste Tideswell now employs nine people (5.5 FTE) including an Education Officer who goes out to teach growing and cooking to schoolchildren at Key Stage 2&3.

I started working with the village in November 2009, at the stage when Tideswell was one of 25 or so shortlisted villages for the lottery funding and the plans were still on the drawing board. I worked with a team of very competent and enthusiastic village activists to develop our plans and the lottery bid, and in May 2010 we heard we had been selected as one of the lucky six villages to receive funding and TV coverage. As a consequence it was time for me to hit the pause button on my own business and move to Tideswell for 12 months to make things happen.

Why? For many years I have felt uneasy with the public image of the so-called profession of marketing. In the minds of many of the general public, 'marketing' means persuasion – typically selling – and is typified by dodgy promotion techniques and irritating advertising. I trust I am on safe ground with the readership of this newsletter by saying that there is more to it than that. I have been in marketing and branding for most of my 30-year career and I learned from an early age at Mars that true marketing is at the centre of most successful enterprises and that branding

is an essential technique that builds the balance sheet and the bottom line whilst giving pleasure to consumers.

One of my motivations for taking part in VSOS was to see if marketing and branding techniques could do some wider good for communities as well as companies. I have lived in a village myself for more than 20 years and have learned that the more you put in to a community, the more you get out. Villages die through neglect, inertia and apathy, and we all regret it when they become soulless dormitories rather than thriving communities. So marrying my professional experience with a personal mission, I set out to see how branding could help Tideswell.

The first lesson was to avoid using marketing terminology or jargon. This even extended to the word 'brand'. I was continually pulled up by the BBC producer/director if I used the 'B word' on camera. I might have got away with it on BBC 2 but on BBC1 it is a different matter (and audience, apparently). Even when I was filmed talking about the 'Tideswell Made' brand itself, I had, reluctantly and inaccurately, to use the word 'label'.

In my dealings with local shop owners and producers, I had expected a little more marketing literacy than I found. I thought the general public was supposed to be marketing savvy and switched on to all the techniques we regard as common currency. Not a bit of it. My experience was that most local traders specialise in their craft or trade and I needed to talk their language, not expect them to learn mine.

So, for example, I didn't talk about 'developing business'. I said I was trying to 'put a queue outside their shops' or 'increase trade'. Of course before you can communicate effectively you have to earn the trust of your audience. This wasn't always easy or fast but I found that by not aligning myself too definitely with any of the wonderful tribes ►

## Can branding save a village? Let's hope so...

that make up English society, and just getting to know people, I managed to keep the lines of communication open and mutual understanding followed soon after.

One of the key expectations of me was to develop the brand proposition and identity for the project as whole and the two main commercial arms, The Tideswell School of Food and the 'Tideswell Made' branding scheme. Being in my comfort zone of brand planning for once was a pleasure and it made a change from discussions on kitchen worktops, accounting software and job descriptions.

From the start I wanted to ensure that whenever the project was discussed or communicated, a clear and consistent message was used. We developed a one-page summary as a team and used simple labels like 'Grow It, Make It, Cook It, Sell It, Share It' to frame the project. When it came to brand planning and design I needed expert help, so I ran a selection process for local agencies in Sheffield and Derbyshire and was delighted with the general quality of response.

I went with a branding and design-led communications agency, Peter and Paul of Sheffield, and I am pleased I did. It may have seemed like overkill to many but we went through the disciplines of research, immersion in the village, planning and a thorough approach to the brand architecture and positioning. Not much of the material we developed made it to the shopkeepers but it was proof to me that you can translate the attributes and personality of a village into a brand. Identifying the emotional and rational buy-in to the proposition was crucial and as a team we developed a better understanding of the role of 'village pride', for example, and the distinctiveness of the village that is rooted in its history and geography.

The execution of the logos and liveries was, as always, a milestone on the development of the business and, as you may have seen on the TV programme, we had two options to show the village. I foolishly opted for a democratic approach and at the first showing the majority went for what I considered to be

the wrong one. I did feel the need to sell the virtues of the route I felt was right and fortunately the village came round to my way of thinking. The logo is a solid, straightforward capital letter 'T' but with a cheeky bite taken out of it. It works on the 'Taste Tideswell', 'Tideswell School of Food' and 'Tideswell Made' brands equally well and each one pays in to the other.

We think we have a real property in the logo and the names and, following good practice, we have managed to register the word 'Tideswell' and the logo as trade marks, thanks to Dawn Franklin of BrandRight®, a member of the British Brands Group. The accompanying liveries and design guides also reflect the true qualities and personality of the place, and we have had nothing but positive feedback on how it all looks. We have a brand manual, positioning wheels and templates for communication and I hope it shows in the consistency.

The marketing budget wasn't huge but we chose to spend a hefty chunk of it upfront on getting the designs and positioning right. After that, signage, stationery and interior design suddenly all fell into place.

The project overall is still young and has had the massive boost of a one hour prime-time programme on BBC1, so the village, not surprisingly, is buzzing. Tills are ringing, a couple of new shops have opened and the School of Food is taking record bookings. We have had hugely successful corporate day events and artisan businesses are starting to use the commercial kitchen and sell food outside the village. The true test of financial sustainability will come when the novelty peak is past, but by lodging the village in the minds of millions in a way that predisposes them to buy our wares, we hope to keep putting those queues outside our doors for years to come.

[www.tastetideswell.co.uk](http://www.tastetideswell.co.uk)  
[www.tideswellschooloffood.co.uk](http://www.tideswellschooloffood.co.uk)  
[www.mihcentre.co.uk](http://www.mihcentre.co.uk)  
[www.peterandpaul.co.uk](http://www.peterandpaul.co.uk)  
[www.brandright.com](http://www.brandright.com)

### The power of brands

Why are brands important to retailers? Belgium's brand association BABM commissioned research house GfK to investigate. GfK identified consumer groups that were 'brand lovers', particularly double income couples with no kids, high-income retired households and high income households with children. It found that 'brand lovers':

- spend more per household, contributing more to retailers' net profits;
- shop more frequently;
- are more loyal to a specific retailer (when compared to 'switchers' or own label lovers), visiting fewer retailers;
- spend more on high margin categories;
- generate more impulse purchases.

Brands were also found to drive category growth, from which own label products also benefit. A copy of the research is available from John Noble ([jn@britishbrandsgroup.org.uk](mailto:jn@britishbrandsgroup.org.uk)).

### British Brands Group

The British Brands Group represents the interests of brand manufacturers in the UK. Membership comprises companies of all sizes across a wide range of product sectors.

The role of the Group is to build in Britain the optimum climate for brands to deliver choice and value to consumers, through constant innovation and fair competition.

The Group is the UK representative of AIM, the European Brands Association based in Brussels.