

# Looks aren't everything: branding and culture

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As Physio First has now launched its new brand, logo and website, and we have recently been discussing branding with delegates on our Ethical and Effective Marketing module as part of the partnership between Painless Practice and Physio First, it seems timely to explore the issues of brand within the world of private physio, and to provide pointers to what you need to consider before, during and after any rebrand in your own clinic, to make the most of the opportunity and avoid the many potential pitfalls.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

- 1 Understand a path to creating or refreshing your own brand.
- 2 Recognise the key elements in a branding exercise.
- 3 Comprehend the many elements of branding and how to ensure consistency.

## Introduction

Does your clinic have a logo, some sort of image with your name in a certain font and your preferred colours, all representing your brand? If you have one, are you happy with it? When was the last time you refreshed it? If you don't have a logo, are you considering one? Irrespective of an actual logo, how does everything else you do, and the way you do it, contribute to your brand?

## So, let's start with colour

Well, no. We will get to that, but colour is just one expression of something far deeper with regard to your brand. First, consider the reasons you are reviewing your brand at all.

- Have you been inspired by an article in *In Touch*?
- Do you want to modernise, or move with the times?

- Would you like to re-engage your patients and your team with your brand?
- Will you be more motivated and energised if you update your brand?
- Do you want to raise your game, bring your practice to a new level, and hope that a new brand will give a spurt to your growth?
- Or do you have another motivation?

Understanding your reasons will indicate how committed you are to the process as well as the amount of resources you might invest. In turn, your level of commitment will inform how wide-ranging your review will be, and what external professional support you will bring in.

## Know your purpose

Your wider brand, i.e. not just your logo but also the impact you make on your community and marketplace, is arguably the most fundamental tool in achieving the purpose of your clinic, so your next step is to determine, or review, that purpose.

Simon Sinek, in his publication *Start with Why* (2011), perfectly sums up the meaning of a purpose by asking "Why do you get up in the morning, and why should anyone care?"

Sinek's idea of the Golden Circle, encompassing your why, how, and what, has been presented previously in

*In Touch* (Butler 2015), so you may want to revisit this article before reading further. Once you understand your own purpose, and realise why you and your team get out of bed in the morning, you can then start to consider how that translates into how you want people to react to you, and what words you would like people to use if asked about your clinic. This is the definition of your brand.

What people say about you could indicate your business values and this will inform how you convey the many aspects of your brand. For more on establishing your clinic values, see the exercises in the Personal Pillar section of our publication *Seven Pillars of a Painless Practice* (Butler & Champion 2012).

## Compare your brand with others

In our workshops, we often ask clinic teams to consider how they compare to global brands. This can be a useful exercise to really understand the aims of the broader "brand experience". So, what global brands do you identify with? Not in terms of colour and typeface, but in what the brand means to you.

## CASE STUDY ONE

Our client was asked to name four global brands that he felt he and his clinic identified with. The four names he came up with can be seen in table 1, with the second column showing details of what he realised, through coaching, each

## "UNDERSTANDING YOUR REASONS FOR REVIEWING YOUR BRAND WILL INDICATE HOW COMMITTED YOU ARE TO THE PROCESS"

meant to him in terms of how he wanted his clinic to be viewed.

These answers can add to the words that describe our client's own values and put him in a better position to know what his brand is trying to convey.

### What appeals to your target market?

Just because you love Radio 4 or thrash metal band Slipknot, your target audience might not, so it is necessary to be aware of what appeals to the demographic you are trying to connect with. This is easier if you concentrate on just one section, for example, mothers and babies. However, if you are targeting a wider group, perhaps in the range of young sports players to post-operative geriatrics with total knee replacements, your brand will need to have a much wider appeal.

When what appeals to you, and chimes with your values and your purpose, overlaps with what appeals to those in your target market (figure 1), this is where you will find what best conveys your core brand identity.

### Conveying your brand

Armed with half a dozen or so words to summarise the brand identity you connect with – in the case of our example, quality, luxury, honesty, service and performance – it is time to consider the ways in which your brand will be conveyed. Whether consciously or deliberately, your brand is likely to be communicated through the following elements:

- Clinic name
- Colours in your materials, website, furnishings and uniforms
- Font or typeface
- Logo design
- Written and spoken language you use
- Style of communication, i.e. levels of

friendliness, professionalism, distance, engagement, humour etc

- Physical environment; the colour of the décor in your clinic, quality of furnishings, choice of music if you have any, temperature, smell, soundproofing etc
- Choice of reading material and children's toys in the waiting room
- Quality of the experience offered to patients; how they are greeted and treated from first call to post-episode contact

- Culture of your team; how they interact with each other and with patients, what they believe about treatment philosophy and how they act every day in their respective roles.

With this list, hopefully you can see why we chose "looks aren't everything" as the title of this article. Your brand is so, so much more than the look of your logo. 🕒

GLOBAL BRAND		HOW THESE BRANDS WERE VIEWED IN TERMS OF RELEVANCE TO OUR CLIENT'S OWN CLINIC
Waitrose	→	Top of market, compete on quality – not price, great customer service, values staff and shares fruits of success
BBC Radio 4	→	Honest and independent, knowledgeable, informative and educational
Bang & Olufsen	→	Luxurious, modern but with pedigree, quality design, funky
Jack Wolfskin	→	High-performance, aspirational, technically excellent, sporty

TABLE 1

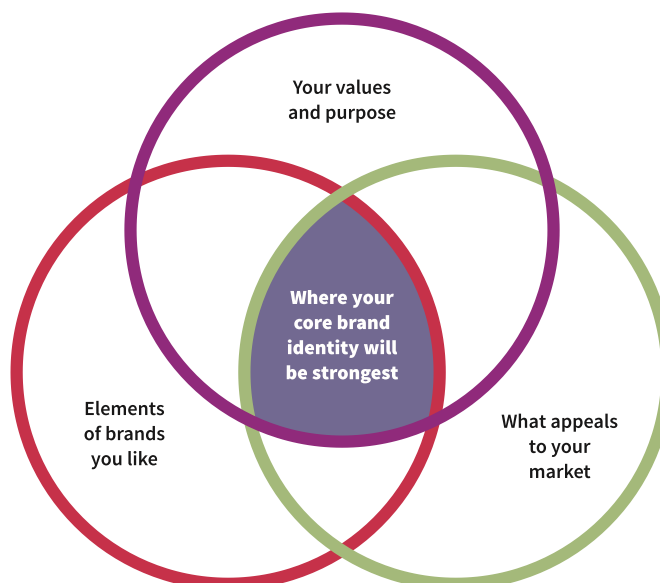


FIGURE 1: The place where values and purpose overlaps with what appeals to the market gives the strongest core brand identity

**"IF YOUR FAVOURITE COLOUR IS GIRLY PINK, BUT YOUR PATIENT DEMOGRAPHIC IS BURLY WEIGHTLIFTERS, THERE MAY BE A MISMATCH"**

### **OK, can we talk about my favourite colours now?**

In a small business where the owner is integral to its running and success, one should not underestimate the motivation that comes from having a brand that deeply resonates with the principal. If you are proud of, excited by, and passionate about your brand, your clinic is likely to be more successful. You should, therefore, have that pride and passion in all the elements of your brand, including the colour. Of course, this still needs to overlap with the preferences of your target market and reflect the values and sentiments you want your brand to communicate. For

instance, if your favourite colour is girly pink, but your core patient demographic is burly male weightlifters, there may be a mismatch!

### **Translating your values to an actual brand**

Now is the time to engage professionals. In over a decade of helping clinics with their strategy and marketing, the brands that have been self-designed have always been obvious and have contributed to holding back the clinic's growth. In addition to obtaining expert help, engaging someone to professionally design your brand could be an opportunity to engage with your

local community, perhaps by attending networking events as part of your search for the right professional, you could find that your rebrand contributes to raising awareness of your clinic before it is even designed. Conversely, someone who has experience of working within the healthcare sector will understand some of the limitations and considerations they might encounter.

Choosing a designer and then choosing the brand you want at the end of the process is a significant exercise, with notable risks and certain factors to consider (see "managing the design process" below). Invest the time, attention and money to get it right.

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## **Managing the design process**

It is important to get the overall look of your brand just right. It will be used in any number of places, on items such as stationery, signage, uniforms, websites, promotional material, advertising etc, where some or all of the money spent will be wasted if the look isn't right. Here are a few tips on how to best invest money, time and attention into the design process.

**HIRE A PROFESSIONAL:** design work by amateurs is usually obvious. Conveying your brand with consistency is likely to be beyond someone unskilled or inexperienced.

**BE WARY OF FRIENDS, FAMILY OR PATIENTS:** while they may be highly skilled, offer mates rates, and you may feel pressure to use those close to you, consider it carefully. If you don't like the design, or need to be firm to remain on track and meet a deadline, it can help if the relationship is purely professional.

**HIRE THE BEST YOU CAN AFFORD:** with design, you generally get what you pay for, especially if your designer is a small business, not a big agency. Be aware of your budget, but don't cut corners and regret it later.

**DON'T ASK FOR THE DESIGN AS PART OF THE SELECTION PROCESS:** a good designer will want to understand you, your business and the overall brief before committing to any design ideas.

**PREPARE A CLEAR BRIEF:** know what you want from your branding process before meeting with possible designers. Do you want one design to review, or a few options to stimulate your ideas? Do you just want a logo or an overall plan for the whole of your brand? Do you want the designer to work just with you or to liaise with others such as your website manager, or your printer? Include timescales and deadlines to keep the rebrand moving along.

**HOW TO CHOOSE:** ask to see a portfolio for examples of previous work. This will

give you an idea of their creative and design styles. Chemistry and rapport is crucial; your designer will need to "get" you and your clinic for the process to work best.

**ENSURE THE DESIGN APPLIES ACROSS NUMEROUS MEDIA:** make sure your brief includes all the elements you want the brand to cover; colours will need to work in print and online and will need to co-ordinate with uniforms, soft furnishings or carpets. Brand elements will need to look good on small appointment cards and large signage.

**ITERATE THE DESIGN:** it is possible that the first idea you see will be perfect – more usually there will be a process of reflecting, altering and market testing.

## Test the market

Remember, marketing is not just what you like, although that will help your motivation. It is also about what your target patients like. Your design needs to be in that Venn diagram overlap (figure 1), connecting your preferences, your brand and purpose, and the marketplace.

The design process usually takes a lot of time and energy, all well-spent, but it will place a pressure on your daily business in the clinic. In the final stages, you and your designer will be hugely invested in the project and very attached to the designs you have created. This can reduce your ability to be objective. You are too close to let go of personal attachment, or even to see the blindingly obvious wood when you are just seeing trees. Before finalising your design, it is, therefore, crucial to get feedback from people who are outside of that design “bubble”. This is the time to engage with those around. Ask your friends, your colleagues, even trusted patients. It is important to ensure you get honest feedback. From experience, mothers are too close and supportive, drinking friends too brazenly forthright. You may want to consult people in the middle.

Even then, friends or patients can feel awkward about providing feedback they think you might not want to hear. An independent third party, such as a marketing consultant, is likely to get honest and frank responses by asking standard questions and collating the feedback for you.

## Launching your brand

Finally, you have the brand you are happy with and proud of. Now is the time to roll it out and reinvigorate your marketing, patient experience and clinic environment. Doing all that at once, or even over a short period of time, can stretch personnel and the bank balance, so it is worth giving some thought to what will suit your needs. Consider which of the following options might work for you:

- The soft launch – where you phase the various elements in over many months, thereby managing your workload and cash flow
- The big launch – accompanied by a fanfare and using the opportunity to raise your profile with existing patients, local press and the wider community. Getting a new logo probably won't make the local news (unless you live in a very quiet town), but you can get a complete refurb of your practice and new signage noticed.

Whichever way you decide to roll out your new brand, make sure you take the opportunity to purge old marketing materials, modernise your website, update patient forms, refresh the look of your uniform and clear out the old stuff. One of our clients donated their old branded polo shirts to a charity, so their clinic is now very well known in one school in Africa!

## Sustaining your brand

Unfortunately, when the brand has been launched, the work isn't over; in fact, it has barely started. It is now important to focus daily on ensuring consistency, watch that your “old” brand doesn't creep out unexpectedly, that everyone is living the values of your new brand, not just wearing the new polo shirts.

By working with your team on your clinic's values and purpose; on its “why”, you can ensure your brand is personified through your service, not just objectified by your business card.

## CASE STUDY TWO

Our client established that one of their core values was education; to educate patients on wellbeing, fitness and staying healthy. They decided not to change their logo, but instead they fundamentally changed a whole range of activities undertaken in their clinic so that they truly could educate their patients. This became a key part of how they were known locally, how what they offered as a brand differed from other clinics in the area.

Of course, the best people to tell you how you are doing in sustaining your brand are your patients, so don't be afraid to ask them. Reception staff can engage them on the topic in the waiting room and, without interfering with their clinical treatment, rather than discussing the weather, or the latest news, you can get their feedback on your brand while you are undertaking soft tissue work. If you prefer to get more independent feedback, you might want to engage a third party to ask such questions professionally.

Brands evolve and require ongoing refreshment. If you have read this far, it could be because you intend to refresh your own. Reviewing your “why”, your purpose, how your current brand is communicating and whether you need to update, modernise or strengthen any part of it, is an ongoing process that never ends. In fact, with marketing trends and developments, especially online social and multimedia moving ever more quickly, a brand review every two to three years may be essential 🔄

“IN THE FINAL STAGES, YOU AND YOUR DESIGNER WILL BE INVESTED IN THE PROJECT AND ATTACHED TO THE DESIGNS YOU HAVE CREATED”

## "NOW IS THE TIME TO STEP BACK AND LOOK HOW YOU ARE COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR MARKETPLACE"

for a growing, ambitious clinic. Perhaps arrange an annual discussion with your team to review your values and purpose, and how you deliver it daily, to maintain engagement.

### Looks aren't everything

Hopefully, having set out the variety of factors for consideration in rebranding, you will also see that a brand is so much more than a logo.

Physio First has worked for years on developing culture, purpose and uniqueness before embarking on changing the physical areas of brand image.

So, unless you have rebranded in the last 18 months, and possibly even if you have, now is the time to step back and look at how you are communicating with your marketplace. Is your current design looking tired? Is the overall experience consistent with, and correctly communicating, your purpose and values? Where can you improve?

It may be worth recognising that this exercise is a project in itself, one that

needs to be properly resourced with time, attention and money, and a team of people to help you deliver it. It will be a sound investment, but it should not be entered into lightly.

Offering physiotherapy services is an inherently positive role. Your success results in increased wellbeing, reduced pain and improved function in the people who come to you for help. If your clinic is working well, attracting new patients and succeeding in their care, you already have an incredible impact on your community. Looks may not be everything but, just maybe, making the world a better place is.

### About the author

James Butler is Director of Painless Practice, a Physio First strategic partner in terms of business coaching and training, providing assistance to physios who, through one-to-one support, CPD training and published materials, want to develop their practice to meet current challenges. James is the co-author of *The Seven Pillars of a Painless Practice* as well as two other publications on running clinics. He and his team deliver

practice-building CPD and speak widely on practice-building techniques, including the suite of six modules offered by Physio First.

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### References

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Butler J, Champion C. *The Seven Pillars of a Painless Practice*. 2012  
[www.painlesspractice.com](http://www.painlesspractice.com)

Sinek S. *Start with why: how great leaders inspire everyone to take action*. Portfolio Penguin 2011.

### Useful websites

Painless Practice:  
[www.painlesspractice.com](http://www.painlesspractice.com)

Simon Sinek, Start with why:  
[www.ted.com/talks/simon\\_sinek\\_how\\_great\\_leaders\\_inspire\\_action?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action?language=en) ❌

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