

BRANDWATCH

Disney vs. Tussaud's

The destination industry is still learning the tricks of the trade when it comes to branding. In comparison with manufacturers and retailers, most destination makers are new kids on the brand block. Not all, however. To kick off our Brandwatch series, *Locum Destination Review* puts the two original visitor attraction brands under the spotlight: Disney and Tussaud's. Commentary is by Locum Non-Executive Director, [Tony Hodges](#), who has been wrestling with brand issues for almost as long as these venerable destination makers themselves.

Welcome to the Destination Brand Olympics. In the blue corner we have Walt Disney World, all the way from Florida. In the red corner, The Tussaud's Group, based in the UK. Some would claim this is an unequal contest quite apart from issues of gender. Walt's descendants have budgets, expectations and purchase dynamics on their side. Madame's progeny flap their wings in a smaller pool, albeit one they dominate in their own way. It may be Goliath versus David (or David's younger sister) but both participants demand respect. When the Dome is going wrong, whom do the press call for to save the day? If it is not Disney, it is Tussaud's. Just as Bob Ayling brought in the erstwhile PY Gerbeau from Disney to the Dome, he also teamed up with Tussaud's to run BA's London Eye (both rather good decisions from such a heavily criticised executive).

In an attempt to level the playing field, we ignored the boldest examples of brand activity from both parties. Forget Tussaud's TV commercials or Disney's films and whole TV channels. Instead, let us focus on the meanest, most modest missives from these behemoth brands of visitor attractions: those tiny folded A5 leaflets stacked in the hotel lobby or Tourist Information Centre, waiting expectantly for selection, in competition with the Geffrye Museum and Dinosaur Isle. After all, if brands are only

as strong as the weakest link in their chain of communication, might this not be where even our mighty finalists are found out?

The brochure for Walt Disney World makes depressing reading for would-be critics. In case you come from another planet, the cover tells you this Planning Guide is for Disney's 'Resort in Florida', and whom you will meet when you get there (clue: a rodent-like creature with large ears). An odiously attractive child with accompanying stardust completes the picture. Round one to the senior pro.

Contents and segmentation of the Disney brochure are masterful. Colour coding of the individual destinations within the Florida attraction helps guide the reader as surely as signposts on Mainstreet USA itself. As does each map, for each attraction and the whole. Ergonomically, this piece of literature is a masterpiece.



With so many components and such scale – seven entire destinations spread over 28 pages, with Magic Kingdom alone listing 32 individual features – brand identity is stretched until the designer winces with pain. But Doctor Disney is there to administer relief between rounds. How? With firm guidelines, consistently applied. Logo, typeface, typesize, colour code, transparency selection, each is clearly subject to rigorous discipline. This is why, gentle reader, successful designers are so impassioned in their crusade for consistency, so infuriatingly purist in reciting from the pantone bible. Because it works.

Brand stewardship involves more than technical excellence, however. The Disney brand is famously dedicated to making people happy and this small brochure is evidence of that mission. Not just in happy holiday snapshot and enviable dental work, but in the sort of information every visitor will need to ensure happy holiday promises come true. Special diets, FASTPASS, ID requirements, they are all here. How do they fit it all in? The same way you get to Carnegie Hall, lady. You practise.

It comes as a great relief to find something awry in this miniature masterpiece of branding skills. Page 4 (The 'World' at a Glance) contains this thoughtfully anglocentric copy description: 'a total of 47 square miles of fun, which is about the same size as Greater Manchester'. The copywriter has certainly brought the resort's scale to life for the British reader but, in choosing this quantification, has raised the spectre of giantism. This, after all, is Disney's achilles heel, conceptually, socially and, in the case of Disney World, Florida, physically. A frightening prospect for this commentator, 47 square miles of Disney magic. Others might challenge this view, but what cannot be debated is the existence of a typographical error on page 24. See for yourself. Call up Disney for a copy of this A-class brochure, and make sure your marketing staff keep it under the pillow at night. Even Disney can let a typo through the net.

Knowing full well that we shall be assailed on all sides by cries of 'Foul' and 'Send him off, ref', we should now move on to consider the UK champion of visitor attractions and theme parks, the Tussaud's Group. The manifest unfairness of this comparison

goes beyond budgets available and the separate, individual tasks that the Tussaud's brochures address – we here review one for the Group's Annual Pass, one for Madame Tussaud's and the London Planetarium, one for Thorpe Park and Chessington World of Adventures, and one (very skimpy) for Rock Circus – the unfairness lies in the cultural distance between these two worthy destination brands. Where Walt Disney started as an entertainment brand (albeit on film) and has continued to define the entertainment brand (albeit in TV, retailing, merchandise, tourism, etc, etc) as it mastered operations across markets, Tussaud's started out as a visitor attraction, mastered the art of operations in that market, and is now attempting to apply its hard-won brand value to other operations beyond the Marylebone Road. Strong brand with impeccable operations is confronted by strong operator with an enviable brand asset: no contest, at least in this column and on the branded playing field.

Where Walt Disney's brand architecture is clearly defined, Tussaud's is still fuzzy. The brand name is featured in three different styles at the mother attraction, at the Thorpe Park and Chessington experiences, and at Rock Circus (where Madame still seems to be in residence) – quite apart from its non-appearance at a managed destination such as London eye (sic), or a heritage operation at Warwick Castle. Tussaud's brand strategy is not clear. Has a decision been taken not to extend the Tussaud's brand to all its operations? Or is a gradual process under way to rebrand, extend the brand, and brand the partnerships over time, by stealth perhaps? The suspense is killing. Meanwhile, the brand picture is confusing and not clarified by inconsistent logo styling.

The Tussaud's predicament is understandable. Each of the Group's attractions has evolved in its own right, with its own individual brand name and (attempted) identity. [The exception is the London Planetarium, which has always been a rather uncomfortable bedfellow for the dominant Madame next door.] Each attraction has succeeded, for better or worse, on its ability to satisfy the visitor. Each has demonstrated superior marketing on-site than off-site. Offer the brilliant operators at Tussaud's a strategic branding challenge and they will pass the parcel. The brochures reviewed here look like hot potatoes that have been handed hurriedly to the junior members of separate marketing teams, then coordinated with difficulty by a committee incorporating no designer worth his salt.

Madame Tussaud's itself seems to believe it needs no proposition on the front of its brochure beyond an injunction to 'jump the queue'. The art director has translated this to mean an excitable child in front of Henry VIII and Kylie Minogue, one of whom may be doing something worthy of censure by the tabloid paedophile chasers. (George Bush has been dropped in, topically but too late to check for make-up. Or perhaps that is what they mean by 'redneck'.) At least, the London Planetarium, on the reverse of this brochure, promises something – 'Send Your Mind Into Orbit' – though the accompanying text is less well-directed. (How can it be a selling proposition for a planetarium to lead on its 40 years of existence?)



Thorpe Park and Chessington World of Adventures faced the same challenge of promoting two destinations in one brochure. These venues have addressed the challenge in different ways. They have decided to use incomprehensible type, a layout artist from pre-school and a local photographer from Chertsey. This is a visual mess, to be included in any manual on 'how not to promote your

destination'. The brochure does proclaim news and it does show that these attractions understand what children enjoy. As does the Disney artwork. The difference is one of added value, an alien concept for the 'designers' of this brochure.

The Rock Circus leaflet evoked sympathy. No proposition ('Step inside?'). No topicality (Spice Girls on the cover?). No budget (Is an upgrade on the way?). For all the world, the sound is not of music but of udders emptying. An asset is being milked.

The issue with Tussaud's promotional brochures is not, however, about individual strengths and weaknesses of individual attractions and messages. The issue is one of branding policy, commitment and corporate culture.

Defining Tussaud's positioning, proposition and brand values is proving a challenge even when the individual brand assets are brought together: in the Annual Pass leaflet, which appears to have no Tussaud's branding on the front whatsoever. Wait, I am mistaken. It may be under this sticker explaining that 'today's entrance fee will be refunded when you upgrade to an Annual Pass available in the Gift Shop'. Open up the leaflet and there he is, the Group's chosen symbol, a grey plastic court jester with the central message: 'Entertaining People' (just above the London Planetarium message, 'Space Odyssey' (sic) – entertaining people with basic spelling errors?).

The jester symbol and accompanying message appear on other brochures but usually in miniature, almost illegibly. Let us not debate the potency of these devices. Rather let us question the Group's policy on branding. If it is seeking to add value, the evidence in this promotional literature is that it is not succeeding. The evidence suggests a lack of commitment to the Group brand, or a lack of understanding, at operational level, of the implications of commitment to a brand policy. Further, these brochures evidence a cultural distance from the brandmasters at Disney which Tussaud's stakeholders might wish to see bridged.

Tussaud's operations are successful. How much more could this Group achieve if it made a visible commitment to branding?

Meanwhile, here at the Destination Brand Olympics, the team at Disney has walked away with all the medals, leaving the Tussaud's contingent to go back to the Academy and train for another year.