

# TIME FOR CHANGE

A guide to branding for social enterprises

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**UPHOLDING THE  
STANDARD FOR  
SOCIAL ENTERPRISE**

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE MARK CIC



# CONTENTS

<i>Page 3:</i>	Introduction
<i>Page 4:</i>	Insight from Lucy Findlay
<i>Page 5:</i>	What is your brand?
<i>Page 6:</i>	<b>Stage One: Brand Definition</b>
<i>Page 7:</i>	Your purpose
<i>Page 8:</i>	Your audience
<i>Page 9:</i>	Case study: Global Action Plan
<i>Page 10:</i>	Case study: Charity Bank
<i>Page 11:</i>	<b>Stage Two: Brand Design</b>
<i>Page 12:</i>	Your message
<i>Page 13:</i>	Your visual identity
<i>Page 14:</i>	Case study: Real Ideas Organisation
<i>Page 15:</i>	Case study: HISBE
<i>Page 16:</i>	<b>Stage Three: Brand Delivery</b>
<i>Page 17:</i>	Brand experience
<i>Page 18:</i>	Communication campaign
<i>Page 19:</i>	Case study: Beacon
<i>Page 20:</i>	Case study: Business Launchpad
<i>Page 21:</i>	Summary
<i>Page 22:</i>	About the author
<i>Page 23:</i>	About the Social Enterprise Mark CIC
<i>Page 24:</i>	Contact details

# INTRODUCTION

It's time for change. Public services are under increasing pressure, and price-led private sector providers are struggling to cope. Consumers are growing skeptical of 'big business' and increasingly looking for companies that operate on a human level and stand for something more meaningful than profit. Digital technology continues to influence expectations, as users demand an increasingly personalised service. The impact of Brexit remains unknown, but it is certain to affect access to customers, suppliers, funding and staff.

Change is all around us, and undoubtedly brings challenges, but it also brings opportunities. It brings the opportunity to do something different. Something new. Something better.

Social enterprises have the opportunity to be the change and bring the solution. But to win a new audience you have to explain why you are the solution. This guide explains how you can build a brand that will do that.

# INSIGHT

From Lucy Findlay, *founding Managing Director of Social Enterprise Mark CIC*



It is important for us as social enterprises to build strong brands, to convey our purpose and the social objectives we are trying to achieve. This also helps to communicate the benefits of social enterprise to the wider public, as a business model that is doing things differently; with a primary motivation of creating positive social change.

Although we may struggle to keep up with the rapid rate of change and uncertainty, one thing is for sure – we need to evolve and adapt to respond to these changes, and take advantage of the opportunity this provides to think a little differently.

For example, customers now have much shorter attention spans and therefore as businesses we need to make our content more visual in order to grab attention and communicate clear and succinct messages.

Technological advances also mean that we need to change the way we work to adapt to new ways of doing business. The important thing is to keep the focus on customers and stakeholders and ensure we manage the customer experience, as this shapes their perception of our brands.

By building a strong brand with clear objectives which address a social need/ challenge, we can stand out from commercial competitors, as businesses delivering tangible benefits to customers and wider society.

# WHAT IS YOUR BRAND?

Your brand is a powerful communication tool that has the potential to differentiate you from competitors, and make you interesting and relevant to your audience. If you can harness the power of your brand it will give you the opportunity to influence what people think and how they behave. It will give you the power to change things.

As a social enterprise your brand is a particularly powerful tool. At the heart of each organisation is a 'purpose' – the reason they exist. This is the foundation of every brand. In commercial businesses 'purpose' can get lost, because the focus is often on making money, rather than making a difference. This is where the opportunity for social enterprise emerges. As a social enterprise it's ALL about making a difference, and that's attractive, not just to your stakeholders, but to the wider community.

In this guide we take a look at the three stages of brand building and share some practical advice, so you can build a brand that will help you to make a difference.

## STAGE ONE: BRAND DEFINITION

The first stage of the brand building process is to bring clarity, so you can communicate clearly. To do that you need to define your 'purpose' (the reason you exist) and your audience (the people you need to communicate with). This clearer focus will help you to communicate more effectively and efficiently.

### **THIS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE:**

Social enterprises need to clearly articulate the advantages their model can offer to each stakeholder group, when compared to the existing solutions available. For organisations that are selling a service or product to customers, differentiating a social enterprise approach from the commercial model of competitors can be even more important.

## YOUR PURPOSE

Your purpose is what drives your organisation. It's the belief or vision that lies at the heart of your organisation and motivates you. A clear purpose helps to give your social enterprise direction, and acts as a reference point for decision making. This clarity will bring many benefits to you, but it is particularly valuable when it comes to communication.

When it comes to defining your purpose, social enterprises often have an advantage, because your purpose is more fundamental to your existence and day-to-day activity. But you still need to articulate it clearly. There are two things to consider when writing your purpose. Firstly, it should be short. You need to capture it in a single sentence. Secondly, it should focus on your customers or service users. Try and describe the benefit you want to bring to them.

A clearly defined purpose will provide a solid foundation for all of your communication, helping you to develop a message that is consistent, in print, in person and online.



## YOUR AUDIENCE

Your audience are the people you need to engage with in order to take your organisation from where you are, to where you want to be. They are fundamental to your success, so the better you understand them, the more likely you are to succeed.

The first thing to recognise is that your audience consists of a number of different groups, each with differing needs, expectations and value to you as an organisation. Your audience could include customers or service users, staff, funders, investors, commissioner, volunteers, suppliers and partner organisations.

Your audience – whichever category they belong to – will only be interested in you if they think you are relevant to them. So for each audience category you need to consider what the problem is you are solving, or what are you helping them to achieve? When that is clear, you can then begin to think about how you will communicate with them.



## CASE STUDIES: BRAND DEFINITION

### GLOBAL ACTION PLAN

Global Action Plan (GAP) is an organisation working to reduce the impact of mankind on the environment. At the heart of its approach is a clear purpose: "To tackle throwaway culture and the harmful effect it has on the wellbeing of each of us and our living world."

To achieve this goal they run a range of projects, focused on tackling specific issues. GAP's Water Explorer project educates children about the importance of saving water. Clean Air Day is the UK's largest air pollution campaign, with the goal to improve public understanding of air pollution and build awareness of how it affects our health.

This focused approach extends to GAP's target market. To change consumption patterns for the future, they recognise that actively involving young people is key. GAP plans to support 10 million young people. To do this in the most efficient and effective way, each project is designed to engage a specific age group.

*[www.globalactionplan.org.uk](http://www.globalactionplan.org.uk)*

## CHARITY BANK

In an environment where funding for charities is under increasing pressure, Charity Bank provides a solution. It was founded to support charities with loans that they couldn't find elsewhere. But in parallel to this, Charity Bank also provides an opportunity for individuals and businesses, to invest their savings ethically, in ways that reflect their own values.

In a sector where there is very little to differentiate the products and services offered by competitors, Charity Bank has claimed a distinct market position: an ethical approach to loans and savings. The limited range of services they offer – loans and savings – is also in contrast to most banks. This gives them a much simpler target market. Their loans are for charities and other organisations with a social purpose. Their savings accounts are for business or individuals interested in ethical investment.

This clarity in the services that Charity Bank offers – and the target market for them – is driven by the clarity of their purpose. Not only does this give them a distinct market position, but it also allows their communication activity to be much more focused.

*[www.charitybank.org](http://www.charitybank.org)*

## STAGE TWO: BRAND DESIGN

The Brand Design stage is all about developing your message, and the tools you need to communicate it. Your message is built upon your purpose, but it needs the flexibility to engage different audiences, through different channels. Your visual identity will provide the tools you need to make your organisation, and your message, distinctive and memorable.

### **THIS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE:**

Engaging, persuasive, powerful communication is fundamental to influencing how your audience behaves, especially when you are offering something new or different. Consistent visual communication will help social enterprises to compete more effectively against what might be considered more 'professional' commercial competitors.



## YOUR MESSAGE

Your message needs to grab the attention of your audience and tell them that you have something they're looking for. It's a statement that can be adapted for different situations, so that it's equally effective in print, in person or online.

Your purpose provides the foundation for your message, but you need to build on it. Think about how to include your values. Share what it is that makes you different to your competitors. There's lots you can include, the challenge is how you blend all of the elements to create something that remains clear and compelling.

Exactly what you need to say, and how you say it, will vary. Your message will need to be translated and interpreted in different ways, to suit the audience you're talking to, and the channels you are using to deliver it. But the truth at the heart of your message needs to remain constant, whether you are sharing it on social media or incorporating it into a tender document.

## YOUR VISUAL IDENTITY

Your visual identity consists of six elements - your logo, typeface, colour palette, imagery, language and a design style. With these tools in place you have everything you need to share your message across all communication channels, print and digital.

Your logo is at the heart of your visual identity, but each element has a role to play. The typeface and colour palette you choose can say a lot about the personality of your organisation. Imagery – photographs or illustrations – can be a great way to bring your brand to life, especially on social media. Language is fundamental to delivering your message, but finding the right tone of voice will help you to engage with your audience. And to make sure that your communication is consistent, you need a design style that can be applied across all of your channels.

In an environment where there is an ever increasing number of opportunities to communicate with your audience, your visual identity will provide the tools you need to be distinctive and memorable.

## CASE STUDIES: BRAND DESIGN

### REAL IDEAS ORGANISATION

RIO (Real Ideas Organisation) is an ambitious social enterprise that solves social problems. It does this by working with partners to deliver a range of projects. To do this successfully RIO needs to communicate well and deliver its message effectively.

The scale of activity undertaken by RIO presents two communication challenges – the diversity of the audience and the variety of topics. RIO's audience stretches from local authorities and funders, to partner organisations and service users. Their projects include business support, training, regeneration and strategic programmes.

RIO solve this challenge with a simple statement - "We're passionate about solving social problems" – which has the necessary scope and reflects their purpose. It also provides a platform for them to explain how they do that through specific activities and projects, with more focused messages: "We support people to develop the skills they need to succeed in an ever-changing world".

Establishing a hierarchy of messages enables RIO to communicate effectively with their diverse audience and drive forward their agenda.

*[www.realideas.org](http://www.realideas.org)*



## HISBE

HISBE is a Brighton-based supermarket that is changing the way that supermarkets do business. They have a clear vision for how they will do this. By making a positive contribution to the local food system and the local economy. By making good food more accessible and affordable. And by championing a fair and sustainable food industry, and putting customers, suppliers, and staff first.

To present this bold concept, they have a bold visual identity: bold colours, bold typography, bold language. The HISBE website has an eye-catching colour palette, balancing vivid colours with vibrant photography. The power of language to tell their story is exploited at every opportunity; from their 'Supermarket Rebels' strapline, to their rallying cry for customers to 'Buck food miles, buck animal cruelty, buck exploitation'. Their typography is simple and clear, reflecting the message it delivers. And all of these elements are brought together, in store and online, with a consistent design style.

HISBE are using their visual identity to make it clear that they offer an attractive alternative to their larger, higher profile competitors.

*[www.hisbe.co.uk](http://www.hisbe.co.uk)*

## STAGE THREE: BRAND DELIVERY

The final stage is to bring your brand to life and deliver your message to your stakeholders. We will look at the importance of understanding the brand experience and how to influence it. We'll also explore the potential for campaigns to help you to launch new products and services, break into new markets or simply build on the success you have already achieved.

### **THIS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE:**

Society is looking for change, but they don't necessarily know where to find it. If you have an alternative solution you need to take it to your stakeholders and present it as a viable option, not some kind of worthy compromise. To do this you will need to look and sound every bit as interesting and professional as your commercial competitors.



## BRAND EXPERIENCE

The brand experience of your stakeholders defines their relationship with you. It shapes their opinion of the products or services you provide. It will determine whether they say “yes” or “no” to what you have to offer. So it’s important to understand how to influence this experience.

Brand experience is formed by every interaction they have with you. Every conversation. Every email. Every product you sell. As a result, your opportunities to influence the experience of your stakeholders are all around you. To make it easier to manage your brand experience, it’s useful to look at your organisation in four dimensions: Your product or service; Your people; Your communication; Your location.

For each dimension you want to consider how well it reflects your organisation, and the purpose and values that drive you. The stronger the link, the better the quality of the brand experience for your stakeholders, and the greater your opportunity to influence their behaviour.



## COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

In a noisy, competitive and crowded market you need to make your voice heard. It's not necessarily about being the loudest. It's about being the most interesting and, ultimately, relevant to your stakeholders.

A campaign can be a great way to grab the attention, whether you deliver it in print, online or on the street. For social enterprises this is particularly important, and challenging. If you're proposing something new or different, simply adding another message to the already swollen channels of communication won't be enough. This is where a clear message and a strong visual identity is paramount. You need to be bold. You need to be confident. If your solution is better, tell people. And tell them in a way that will get noticed.

To make the most of a campaign, you need to be focused. Your campaign needs to be tailored. You need to identify which stakeholder group you want to target, and exactly what you want them to do in response. In this way your campaign can create the platform you need to make your solution an attractive alternative.



## CASE STUDIES: BRAND DELIVERY

### BEACON

Beacon operate retail shops, coffee shops, conferencing and catering, health and social care services, transport and housing for people with visual impairment. Based in the west Midlands, Beacon can trace their origins to 1892, when they were established with a single house providing working space for five adults.

Since their launch, providing a physical space for the visually impaired has been central to the experience that Beacon provide for their service users. Beacon is an example of an organisation where multiple elements of the brand experience – in their case people, service and location - combine, to the point where they become almost indistinguishable, but deliver a single, harmonious experience. However each dimension still retains their individual importance – poor performance in one area would impact the whole experience.

Since its foundation, Beacon has maintained their focus on the facilities they provide, and enhanced and expanded the services they bring to the visual impaired. This approach has consistently improved the quality of the brand experience for Beacon's service users.

*[www.beaconvision.org](http://www.beaconvision.org)*

## BUSINESS LAUNCHPAD

Business Launchpad is dedicated to transforming the lives of young people through enterprise. They do this by providing motivation and support through a team of trained business counsellors and a wider network of partners and associates.

The support delivered by Business Launchpad to service users is built around community, connection and collaboration. This approach gives the counsellors, mentors and trainers the opportunity to be the greatest influence on the quality of the Business Launchpad brand experience, as they combine two of the dimensions that determine the quality of that experience – the people and the service. The remaining dimensions – communication and location – contribute to the experience, but it is the people within the organisation and their knowledge, that have the most significant impact.

The emphasis of the impact within the brand experience will vary from one organisation to the next. The more the Business Launchpad understands about the factors influencing the quality of their brand experience, the more efficiently and effectively they can use their resources.

*[www.businesslaunchpad.org.uk](http://www.businesslaunchpad.org.uk)*

# SUMMARY

The business sector is experiencing change and uncertainty. People are frustrated and looking for solutions - new ways of doing things. Social enterprises offer that new way. This is an opportunity for social enterprise to move from a niche model to the mainstream. But to achieve that transition social enterprises need to communicate clearly. It's time to build a brand that helps you to define, design and deliver your message.

We hope this guide helps you on that journey.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



I'm a brand specialist. I work with ambitious organisations, to help them communicate more clearly, in print, in person and online.

I've been working in design and communication for almost 30 years. Over that time I've developed a strong understanding of brand strategy and how it can create competitive advantage for organisations. A lot of the work I do is with the leaders of organisations, helping them to understand the role their brand can play in achieving their goals.

The aim of this guide is to share some my experience, but if you'd like to know more, and get the answer to specific questions, do get in touch. It would be great to hear from you.

You can email me at [jonathan@alderandalder.co.uk](mailto:jonathan@alderandalder.co.uk) or call me on 07816 870842.

## ABOUT

## SOCIAL ENTERPRISE MARK CIC

Social Enterprise Mark CIC is the social enterprise accreditation authority, which ensures the social enterprise business model remains ethical, credible and commercial through independent accreditation. It is responsible for assessing applications for the internationally recognised Social Enterprise Mark and Social Enterprise Gold Mark.

The Social Enterprise Mark is the only internationally available social enterprise accreditation, which externally assesses organisations against sector-agreed criteria to provide an independent guarantee that a business is operating as a social enterprise, with a commitment to creating positive social change. This includes an assessment of the social impact created by social enterprises, to prove how they are trading for the good of people and planet.

The Social Enterprise Mark provides credible standards for the social enterprise sector, which is currently unregulated, to define what it means to be a genuine social enterprise.

The Social Enterprise Gold Mark offers enhanced accreditation to social enterprises which can show best practice in key business areas, including social impact, financial transparency and business ethics. It is a business development tool that sets benchmarks and an action plan for continuous improvement.

**To register your interest visit:** [www.socialenterprisemark.org.uk/registration/](http://www.socialenterprisemark.org.uk/registration/)

*Organisations interested in applying for accreditation can register their interest online, or call 0345 504 6536 with any questions.*



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