Voluntary Sector Working Paper

Branding the Local Church: reaching out or selling out?

Graham Dover

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Abstract

For-profit organisations recognise the importance of a strong brand. The top 100 brands in the world all have brand values over $1 billion. A brand, a distinct image and identity, helps companies to differentiate themselves from their competition. In contrast, non-profit organisations (NPOs) have not seen branding as essential. However, recent research shows that NPOs with a high branding orientation, (i.e., those that perceive themselves as a brand), experience increased: revenue; member and public awareness; and strategic focus.

This paper examines how a branding orientation has impacted on Christian churches. A survey of UK and Irish church leaders was conducted to identify whether they: (a) perceived their church as a brand; and (b) were aware of the potential benefits of branding, as identified in the literature. The leaders were also asked for their views on whether branding distorts their mission. The study found that whilst the majority of church leaders surveyed perceived significant benefits in branding, they also recognised its potentially negative effects on organisational values.

Drawing on organisational identity theory, the paper argues that tensions lie at the heart of branding in NPOs. NPOs often have ambiguous and multiple identities, formed out of strong ideological values which are perceived differently by a range of stakeholders. It is not possible to simply 'cut and paste' for-profit management/marketing concepts - which may overlook the complexity of the non-profit form and dilute the NPO's identity in a search for a clear and concise image. Navigating these tensions involves giving consideration to the relationship between branding orientation (i.e., the commitment to brand) and branding focus (i.e., those within the organisation or outside it). A new model which can be tested in future research is discussed. This model reveals several organisational types and makes it possible for leaders to consider how branding might assist or detract from their core mission and values.

Acknowledgements

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1.   Introduction: the church & branding

The aim of this paper is to better understand the impact of branding on a specific type of non-profit organisation, in this case, the local Christian church. Beginning with a brief overview of the local church in the UK and outlining the rationale underlying the decision to focus on branding, the paper then reviews the relevant literature. Following the description of the research design and methodology which underpins this study, the results of the research are analysed. The paper concludes with a discussion about the value of the results for practitioners and other researchers.

1.1   The Christian community in the UK

Christianity is the largest faith in the world with over 1.9 billion followers representing one third of the world's population (Brierley, 2001). Perhaps its most tangible expression can be found in local churches which represent active Christian communities. In the UK there are 5.9 million individual church members of which 4.6 million attend Sunday services at approximately 49,000 churches, which employ approximately 34,000 church leaders (Brierley, 2001). Although these churches share some basic foundational values (i.e., Jesus Christ is unique and is both man and God), they differ significantly in relation to governance, decision-making, views on creation, sanctification and the return of Christ (Collinson, 1998).   Such differences result in local churches being connected to different groupings (i.e., denominations) either 'Institutional'(e.g., Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Presbyterian) or 'Free' (e.g., Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Independent). They are all non-profit organisations in that they reflect the characteristics of the structural-operational definition proposed by Salamon & Anheier (1997).

In Europe and North America church membership is in overall decline. Local churches in the UK are experiencing falling attendance (Brierley, 2001). Although some individual churches and denominations have grown in membership, the overall decline equates to a loss of 200 members a day and one church every 2 days (Brierley, 2001).   The local church faces the challenge of appearing more relevant whilst retaining its identity in a post-modern age (McLaren, 2000). This   is a difficult balancing act of being simultaneously conservative in guarding core values as well as radical in the application of them (Stott, 1992). The need to engage in new ways of thinking and action by local churches is seen by many as critical to their long term survival. This has, in turn, led some observers to advocate 'marketing', and specifically, branding techniques (Moynagh, 2001). A review of the literature will identify some of the issues involved in branding a local church.

2.   The literature review: research on branding

This review focuses on the nature of branding. It explores branding in the for-profit and non-profit contexts and considers the literature in relation to the impact of adopting a branding approach.

2.1.   An overview of branding

The earliest examples of branding simply involved placing a symbol or mark on property to convey ownership such as the name of a farmer or manufacturer (Crainer, 1998). Branding, as an area of marketing, was developed in the 1960s to help promote particular products pioneered by companies such as Proctor and Gamble (Aaker, 1996). Marketing experts began to recognise the power of effective branding, seeing that through visual designs, names and symbols, organisations have the opportunity to differentiate themselves from their competitors, creating a unique identity (Kotler, 1988).

The creation of a unique identity allows organisations to build awareness of their product, emphasise quality, and develop customer loyalty. The brand acts as an alternative to competition based on price, enabling a premium to be charged.   Initially, brand identities were shaped by the functional differences in products. However, contemporary brands now create identities or 'personalities', which combine functional attributes with symbolic imagery linking them to concepts, values, lifestyles and experiences. The goal is to transform the nature of exchange from a one-off purchase to a long-term relationship (Crainer, 1998). Brand 'personalities' seek to make connections by either reinforcing personal values or offering ideas that can become a source of individual identity (Moynagh, 2001).

Branding appears to offer significant benefits. For the consumer, brands simplify purchasing decisions in a competitive market (Quelch & Harding, 1996). Brand awareness can also offer security to consumers when choosing services. Their 'guaranteeing effect' acting as a form of 'promise or contract' (Kapferer, 1997) increases the level of trust an individual has in a service without immediate tangible outcomes (Beckwith, 1997). For the organisation, branding can be so successful in generating revenue that brand 'equity' measurements are used to identify their commercial value. The top 100 brands all have perceived values in excess of $1billion and the top brand, Coca Cola, has a brand value of $69billion (Business Week, 2002).

2.2   Branding a business

The main body of literature on branding focuses on the for-profit or commercial sector. Branding is no longer viewed as one of several topics in a general marketing textbook, but as a subject in its own right (Crainer, 1998). In the literature branding is viewed as an essential organisational activity - a strategic focus integral to shaping organisational mission and

reflecting core values (Kapferer, 1997). The literature mainly draws on case study evidence to develop aspects of branding for a for-profit firm – including how to brand quickly (Winkler, 1999), how to avoid failures (Haig, 2003) and how to build strong brands - to become brand leaders (Aaker, 2000; 1996). Branding challenges include: difficulties of finding the small lucrative niche in a very competitive market with the ability for brands to be created quickly (Winkler, 1999); attracting the more informed, fickle consumer; issues relating to controlling and channelling the brand image in an internet age (Czeriawski & Maloney, 1999); and managing employees who are brand conscious (D'Alessandro, 2001).

That said, perhaps the greatest challenge to brands is cynicism. As brands are created, which are less about product attributes and more about artificially created ('fictitious') values, issues are raised about their superficiality. From within the branding industry, copywriters Wood and Allan (2003) argue that brand marketing results in moulding consumers in the organisation's image - people 'live the brand' having been sold a philosophy, values system and lifestyle that is not really their own. However, Davidson (1992) disagrees and argues that powerful techniques are used to develop an impression of dialogue – an illusion that is sustained by symbols, meanings, images and feelings.

Critics argue that brand marketers, in seeking to connect positive values to their products, have extended their reach into non-commercial arenas. One of the best-selling books of the 1990s was *No Logo* by Naomi Klein (2001). Viewing brands from a societal perspective rather than an organisational one, Klein (2001) argues that brands destroy local cultures and have a negative influence on whole sections of society from education to the media. The extension of brands into the development of self-sustaining lifestyles is no longer symbolic but real. For example, 'brand canopies' are artificially designed physical spaces where individuals can live out a brand's values – values designed and implemented by large organisations for profit. Advocates of branding argue that brands can work in the consumer's interest. Increased visibility can lead to greater accountability as companies, in order to protect their image, must be seen to 'do the right things' (Economist, 2001).

Despite a setback in the early 1990s known as 'Marlboro Friday', when Phillip Morris cut the price of its premium brand resulting in widespread re-evaluations of brands, the future for branding looks secure (Crainer, 1998). Consumers continue to purchase branded goods but are potentially more brand aware, sceptical of empty 'brand experiences' (Wood & Allen, 2003) and sensitive to gaps between image and reality (Pavitt, 2000).

2.3   Branding a non-profit organisation
Non-profit organisations are being encouraged to engage in branding activities (Saxton, 2002). Motivations to use branding techniques vary from income generation to more effective

campaigning. For some, branding is a proven commercial technique which allows NPOs to differentiate their activities from other non-profit 'competitors' in order to attract declining donor income (Tully, 2003). Recognising the value of the brand can open the door to co-branding, licensing and partnering opportunities (Rusch, 2003). For others, branding reflects a need to engage with the 'brandscape' by considering how their organisation, such as a local church (when seen as a brand), might better share its message with contemporary culture (Moynagh, 2001). The issue then becomes one of what evidence exists to support such claims and what effects, if any, result from a high brand orientation.

In contrast to the for-profit sector, very little direct research has been conducted on non-profit branding activity. Where literature exists, researchers argue for branding theory and practice to be applied to NPOs. NPOs with a high brand orientation (i.e., those that view themselves as brands) are seen to increase voluntary income, fulfil organisational objectives and create an inclusive employee culture (Hankinson, 2001). The key determinants are said to be: the personal vision of the leader; a supportive organisational culture; the relevant experience of managers (i.e., capacity); and environmental factors influencing objectives (Hankinson, 2002).

The argument in favour of branding orientation draws on the distinctive nature of the non-profit form. It has been argued that because of the non-profit distribution constraint NPOs signal trustworthiness, especially in conditions of information asymmetry (Hansmann, 1980). Often with strong public good missions and described by some as 'human change agents' (Drucker, 1990), NPOs provide good opportunities to develop strong brands as they have foundational values which are trusted and credible. Many have become household names without being consciously aware of any branding strategy. Unlike for-profit firms that have to start from scratch to create a brand, a non-profit brand is one that simply needs to be uncovered and promoted – a question of 'polishing the diamond within' (Saxton, 2002). Branding provides the opportunity to display the passion and beliefs at the heart of the organisation and make them known to a wider public. The recognition by for-profits of the brand values of non-profits is evident in the growth of cause-related marketing and co-branding initiatives (Andreason & Kotler, 2003).

Branding is also viewed as having benefits in dealing with multiple stakeholders – another distinctive characteristic of the non-profit form. Marketing techniques which help to identify and meet stakeholders' diverse needs are essential (Drucker, 1992), and branding offers a means for allowing stakeholders to say something about themselves (Tapp, 1996). A marketing approach offers a way not only to raise voluntary income but also to achieve greater societal change e.g., via campaigning (Hankinson, 2002). Branding can be used to: change a public image; provide a focus to prevent mission drift; and ensure that the organisation presents a consistent image and approach to its activities (Saxton, 2002).

There is also evidence of branding in attempts to raise the professional nature of the sector. NPOs need management and marketing skills more than for-profit firms precisely because they lack the discipline of the 'bottom-line ' (Drucker, 1992). They also need to implement it well - poor emulation of commercial techniques promotes an amateurish image (Anderson, 2003) and a piecemeal approach (Akchin, 2001). With over 180,000 registered charities in the UK, those organisations that present a degree of uniqueness and competency will have an edge over the competition (Wilson, 1992). Branding can prove to be cost-effective as donors donate funds faster to well-defined, articulated visions (Hankinson, 2001). In addition, it is argued that strong brands (i.e., with well-known professional images) are attractive to volunteers; and brand visibility reinforces volunteering behaviour and brings a collective focus to all the different stakeholder groups (Saxton, 2002). This can be extended to 'group brands' where non-profits combine and pool resources to overcome problems of fragmentation and size (Abdy & Barclay, 2001).

In the literature related to the local church, branding is positioned within the broader debate on marketing. For some, a market-orientation is considered essential for the local church to engage with the current culture (Barna, 1988) and branding offers a powerful way of communicating the mission (Rendall, 2002). Barna (1988) argues that the Bible is one of the 'world's great marketing texts':

> He… [Jesus]… understood His product thoroughly, developed an unparalleled distribution system, advanced a method of promotion that has penetrated every continent, and offered His product at a price that is within the grasp of every consumer" (Barna, 1988:50).

> Supporters of Barna's position would draw on text from the Bible to advocate flexibility and the need to use marketing methods – "To the weak I become weak, to win the weak. I have to become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some (The Bible:New International Version, 1973: 1273)

2.4 Branding challenges for non-profits and the church

Resistance to branding is rooted in: concerns about its apparent complexity; anti-commercial thinking; and lack of professionalism. However, Hankinson (2001) argues that the benefits of seeing a charity brand as a strategic resource are so powerful that these concerns are expected to be insignificant. Proposed solutions to addressing such concerns include a change in terminology, from 'brand' to 'image and reputation' (Saxton, 2002). Based on Saxton's (*op cit*) argument all NPOs, including the local church, should gain benefits from branding. Yet, other research more focused on marketing, but with references to branding, reveals some concerns and questions about market-orientation. This includes: does a brand orientation lead to an external focus, where strategy and values are subject to the needs of external actors (i.e., 'their

perception is our reality'), or does branding provide the means of reflecting upon and building the identity of the organisation? Can NPOs adapt to a competitive market without compromising the values that distinguish them? (Ryan, 1999).

i) *The philosophy of marketing*

Some researchers argue that the introduction of marketing as well as generic management techniques are both destabilising and cause 'mission drift' in NPOs (Klausen, 1995). Klausen's (*op cit*) study of small voluntary sports associations in Denmark revealed that implicit in these marketing processes is a growth philosophy that promotes an external focus as opposed to an internal one. This results in pressure to change strategic direction from internal improvements to external measures of success. Branding matters then, as in order to achieve economic standards of success and to gain political legitimacy, the NPO has to communicate favourable images to the external world to secure the necessary funding. The branded NPO adapts to the changing environment and regular re-branding becomes essential. The consequences are that founding values are diluted, the mission is deflected and isomorphism occurs (becoming indistinct from for-profits) (Klausen, 1995).

This view is supported by American Christian researchers and commentators who echo the view that a marketing orientation: (a) is incompatible with foundational principles (MacArthur, 1993); (b) is detrimental to smaller congregations (Webster, 1992); (c) places the focus of non-profit organisations on growth, technique and image (Guinness, 2000); and (d) encourages churches to view success in numerical terms (Pritchard, 1996).

These fears are often associated with a view that branding feeds a consumerist mentality. In the case of a local church, marketing the 'services' of an individual church is said to change the nature of church commitment, as Christians are encouraged to 'shop' for churches that meet their needs, rather than ones where they can serve. For instance, Chadwick's study of church growth in the US argues that:

> McChurch has replaced the traditional home church and its relational values. Fast-food Christians pull up to ecclesiastical drive-through windows, order their McGroups, consume the experience and then drive off, discarding relationships like burger wrappers on the highway of life. Savvy church growth pastors quickly learned that significant growth can occur if a church learns how to market its burgers to capture the appetite of this roving crowd (Chadwick, 2001: 20).

ii) *Marketing principles – exchange, target markets and felt needs*

Critics also point to a number of problems with specific marketing techniques. The theory of exchange works on the principle that something of value is provided for a benefit. The costs are

economic and include sacrifices of time, energy and changes in behaviour. The benefits are economic, social and psychological (Andreason & Kotler, 2003). However, this assumes self-interested utility maximisation on the part of the individual, which runs against the nature of value expressive behaviour reflected in the non-profit sector (Clarke & Mount, 2001). It is also argued that this distorts key foundational principles, for example in a church items such as worship, redemption and love cannot be 'bought' (Kenneson & Street, 1997).

A selective focus on target markets can run counter to more universal foundational values. Whilst market research may identify attitudes and cultural trends, the danger lies in moulding the founding values to fit their expectations and aspirations (Webster, 1992). In a church context, non-believers can become consumers whose felt needs are researched in order to modify the product to meet these needs. Ultimately marketing shapes the communication process and eventually the product itself (Pritchard, 1996). Understanding felt needs can also open the temptation to manipulate target audience emotions and offer a fulfilment theology: church is seen as another place to satisfy emotional desires rather than as a place for teaching that 'individuals should repent and worship God because God deserves it' (Pritchard, 1996).

iii) *Competition vs. collaboration*
The dangers identified with non-profit brands are that the quest for visibility will not only waste limited resources but significantly result in a decline in mutually supportive behaviours. The suggested outcomes include the adoption of strategies which negatively 'reposition' other charities and the hoarding of information (example cited in Andreason & Kotler, 2003). This is consistent with Weisbrod's (1998) argument that the industrial imperative to garner a profit creates an incentive to treat knowledge as private property. What is more, searching for a lucrative niche results in the increased fragmentation of efforts for those fighting similar causes, confusing donors with the vast array of choices (Wilson, 1992). Those that survive are likely to be the larger organisations with access to the necessary resources for promotion. A study of marketing collaborations in the UK voluntary sector revealed that the larger charities have established powerful brands resulting in barriers of entry for smaller charities and less collaboration (Abdy & Barclay, 2001).

A study of church growth in the US revealed how a marketing orientation had grown large churches but at the expense of smaller neighbouring churches. By offering more 'services' and facilities these large churches were growing through transfer growth (sometimes known as 'sheep stealing') affecting any ecumenical spirit and undermining the principle of the universal church (Chadwick, 2001).

iv) *The need for business skills*

The capacity to brand the organisation to the outside world requires certain skills. Non-profit marketing is recognised even by its proponents as being especially complex due to very little secondary data being available; poor research data; issue complexity; and the difficulty in portraying complexity in media (Andreason & Kotler, 2003). This results in the need for those with professional qualifications rather than 'accidental' marketers (Akchin, 2001). Professionalisation, though, can create mistrust and conflict with volunteers who feel displaced as decision-making becomes more top-down. Professionals can dominate boards and the social networks that created the NPO are replaced by recruited agents who are likely to be less loyal to, and less motivated by the values of the organisation, and more focused on strategy and structure (Klausen, 1995).

For the local church, some argue that the leader will be "judged as a businessman – he must be a good enough businessman to keep the church solvent and make it appealing enough for people to attend before he has a chance to impact their lives" (Barna, 1988:14). The likely impact then is that the clergy become more like managers who are no longer as deeply committed to fellowship (Guinness, 1993).

v) *The importance of image over substance*

Advocates of branding argue that NPOs and churches need to be attractive places and they may need to purposely restructure their image in order to become more appealing (Barna, 1988). Critics argue that effective communication strategies and improved relationships with stakeholders are important, but active management of the image can lead to a series of problems. A 'glitzy' brand campaign might trivialise the cause and be seen as wasteful by donors (Wood & Allen, 2003). A survey of British clergy attitudes towards marketing activities cited the example of a recent Church of England logo where one respondent commented, 'Our identity is not about a logo but what we do and say' (Sherman & Devlin, 2000). Others, within the Christian literature, believe that it leads to a temptation to project an image which might be more aspirational than true. When communication becomes self-conscious, and images are scrutinised for effect, the temptation to pretend grows even stronger (Pritchard, 1996).

Some also argue that, in a church setting, focusing on the visual values simplicity over complexity (Pritchard, 1996). Certain foundational values which are less 'appealing' are given less exposure, i.e., judgement, punishment, suffering (Chadwick, 2001). Sermons are viewed as 'watered down' into self-help messages and 'the church is no longer regarded as a repository of truth, nor a source of moral authority, but merely a place to go for spiritual strokes' (Webster, 1992: 92).

Summary

The specific, but limited, non-profit literature on branding views brand orientation as a positive, even essential activity. Applying lessons from the for-profit world, the literature identifies potential benefits for the individual organisation and practical ways to implement a branding strategy. However, this needs to be set against the background of a wide body of literature that is sceptical about marketing techniques such as branding and believes that the essence of a NPO or church is threatened by its use. Further research needs to explore how a branding orientation might affect organisational behaviour in order to support or diminish the case for branding activity in the local church.

3. Research design, methodology & implementation

This section identifies the key questions underpinning this study of how branding affects the local church. The selection of the sample surveyed as well as the implementation of the research plan are also outlined.

3.1 Research design and questions

The aim of this research is to understand how a branding orientation affects the mission and core identity of a local church. Specifically, it seeks: (a) to comprehend whether benefits identified in previous research are evident; and (b) to test the validity of statements which claim that branding is detrimental to NPOs. The three key research questions are as follows:

(1) In order to identify whether branding is a marketing technique with which churches are engaged the first research question was concerned with how individuals perceive branding, in relation to branding as an activity and its benefits.

- How relevant is branding to local church leaders and have they benefited or seen benefits from a high brand orientation? Sub-questions include: What benefits are evident? How are the different levels of branding orientation expressed? Are there any particular variables that are particularly important, for example, are certain types of churches, age, size, denomination more likely to see their church as a brand?

Based on the literature review, especially Hankinson (2001), it is possible to hypothesise that in contrast to low brand orientated churches, high brand orientation churches should be growing.

(2) The second research question is concerned with how people perceive the problems of adopting a branding approach as identified in the literature.

- What evidence is there of branding changing core values and how do leaders perceive branding "dangers"? Sub-questions include: Do they reveal attitudes which are at odds with core values? How do leaders deal with the different opinions on the benefits and drawbacks of branding?

Based on the literature, especially Chadwick (2001), it is possible to hypothesise that high brand orientation churches should exhibit behaviours and attitudes that are considered to be affecting core identity, i.e., these churches should be less collaborative than low brand orientated churches.

(3)   The final research question is concerned with how local church leaders should approach branding.

- In what ways do church leaders assess how branding is affecting their organisation? Sub-question: Is it possible to identify specific behaviours?

3.2   The methodology

A qualitative research methodology was chosen instead of a quantitative methodology for the following reasons.

- The research questions are concerned with understanding behaviour from the leaders' own frame of reference. As such it is an exploratory study and not statistically generalisable (Blaxter et al, 2001). However, it is possible to make analytical generalisations and develop new concepts and explanations (Yin, 1989).
- Qualitative research can convey experiences and perspectives and reveal the complexity of issues thereby exposing contradictions and inconsistencies.

Drawing on the questionnaire used by Hankinson (2001) a tailored semi-structured questionnaire was designed for measuring branding orientation (see Appendix). Although this was adapted to reflect local church issues, the way of measuring brand orientation and of exploring attitudes was kept consistent. Additional questions included a series of questions about the respondent, for example, their position in the church and the length of time they had been in post. Questions were asked about whether the church had a clearly articulated vision, values and strategy and the degree to which this was known in the church and community. A brief definition of branding was given before respondents were asked for their views in relation to a range of statements in favour of, or against, a branding orientation. The statements summarised key themes raised by both advocates and critics of branding. The final statement proposed that branding improved communication but the methods shaped the Christianity presented. Finally, the questionnaire sought answers about the extent to which the respondent viewed the church as a brand and the extent   to which viewing the church as a brand has benefited the church overall. Respondents were given the option to explain any of their responses and engage in an email or face-to-face dialogue.

The questionnaire was piloted with a group of church leaders. This resulted in minor changes necessary for greater clarity. The anonymity of each respondent was considered essential due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions thus each questionnaire was given a unique code. A non-probability sampling approach was chosen to identify a group of church leaders that could be considered 'purposive', in other words representative enough to be credible (May, 1997).

3.3   Implementation

The sample surveyed was constructed from churches who are members of a para-church Association (the Willow Creek Association in the UK & Ireland). This Association was formed in 1992 and has a membership of approximately 600 church leaders. It is part of a world-wide group of more than 9,000 churches from 35 countries and 90 denominations that emerged from the Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago.   Using a purposive sample from the Willow Creek Association allowed for access to a wide range of different denominations and named church leaders.   Accessing senior leaders was considered critical in order to better understand the attitudes of those who make the decision about whether to brand, or not to brand the local church. Membership of the Association also suggested an 'evangelical focus' so these churches were also likely to be dealing with issues such as engaging with culture as well as preserving core values.

The questionnaire was sent to those members of the Association who responded to an email asking if they would be willing to take part in the research. 110 members (out of a possible 400 contacted via email) responded and questionnaires were sent by post with pre-paid envelopes. Respondents were given a two-week deadline to complete the eight-page questionnaire. After two weeks those respondents who had not returned their forms were sent a reminder email. 93 completed surveys in total were returned.

Email was used for two reasons. First, to follow up and clarify some of the feedback given through the questionnaires and second to check how respondents viewed certain questions. This was done in order to reduce ambiguity and interpretation – notable disadvantages of postal surveys (May, 1997). Nine in-depth email interviews (and three face-to-face meetings) were conducted over a period of six weeks to further probe responses and to develop key themes. Questionnaire data was analysed using spreadsheet software and themes were mapped and interpreted using Mind Manager software.

3.4   Issues

The research had a number of limitations. The sample surveyed represented those people who were willing to take part which could result in significant bias to extreme positions (May, 1997). In addition, Willow Creek Association churches, whilst representative of a range of denominations, may not be typical of local churches, as they are willing to be associated with one of the largest churches in North America, renowned for its emphasis on seeking out creative ways to engage with current culture (i.e., 'seeker' services and extensive use of the arts). The methods used, such as the questionnaire, gathered opinions and attitudes which respondents were willing to share but it was not easily possible to verify their statements, for example, regarding membership growth (Blaxter et al, 2001).

Summary

The aim of this research was to understand how a branding orientation affects the mission and core identity of a local church. Drawing on the literature, a qualitative method was chosen, specifically a semi-structured questionnaire together with some in depth interviews was used to survey a purposive sample of church leaders.

4. Data analysis – the results

The results of the questionnaire and subsequent discussions revealed answers to the following research questions.

4.1 Research question 1: Branding benefits and orientation

Table 1: Branding benefits

Principle	Agree very strongly	Agree strongly	Agree a little	Disagree a little	Disagree strongly	Disagree very strongly
Helps differentiate	11	42	31	2	4	1
Provides opportunities to reveal true nature (re-branding)	23	45	18	5	0	0
Leads to growth	17	33	31	5	2	1
Unifies members	17	52	21	1	0	0
More an issue of language	7	44	31	7	1	0
Opportunity to clarify vision & values	16	54	19	2	0	0
Need to be aware of image	60	28	3	0	0	0
Adaptation without compromise	29	46	10	5	0	0

The majority of respondents, even those with a low brand orientation, accept significant aspects of branding theory and practice. They understood that branding enables them to differentiate themselves in their culture and offers the chance to overcome negative images. Branding was seen to lead to growth, to have a unifying effect on the members and to provide for opportunities to clarify vision and values. However, the leaders also recognised problems with terminology and accepted that the organisation emits an image. They also understood their image will affect the way they serve those outside the church. They believed it is possible to adapt to a competitive environment without compromising their values. As such, the evidence supports the views of Saxton (2002), Moynagh (2001) and Hankinson (2001).

Table 2: Branding orientation

Church Leader Sees Church as Brand			Church has benefited or could benefit from seeing themselves as a brand		
Scale	Respondents		Scale	Respondents	
To A Small Extent 1	7		To A Small Extent 1	2	
2	5		2	3	
3	3		3	4	
4	8		4	2	
5	4	**30%**	5	9	**22%**
6	21		6	11	
7	16		7	17	
8	21		8	29	
9	4		9	7	
To a Large Extent 10	1	**70%**	To a Large Extent 10	6	**78%**
TOTAL	90		TOTAL	90	

The majority of church leaders surveyed (70%) perceived their church as a brand (scoring 6 and above) and over 78% believed that the church has benefited or could benefit from such a view (the average score being 6.8).

Table 3: Use of Marketing Techniques

Technique	Respondents
Logo	74 (81%)
Mission Statement (Tag Line)	77 (85%)
Advertisement	42 (46%)
Web Site	77 (85%)
Signage	76 (84%)
Direct Mail	70 (77%)
Other	40 (44%)

The overwhelming majority of churches were using a range of recognisable marketing techniques – such as a logo, website and mission statement (tag line). Only one church used none of the above techniques (though it was in the process of creating a logo and mission statement and perceived the benefits of branding as 10 on the scale). Forty churches also identified a range of additional activities including: church magazines; special events; word of mouth; and door to door activities. Specific examples included: advertising on the London Underground; poster advertisements in the street/roundabouts; articles in the local press; welcome packs for new residents moving into the area; community questionnaires; TV
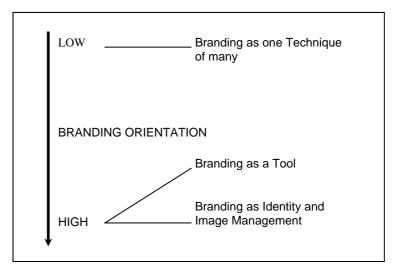
advertisements in the local hospital; radio advertising; mobile multimedia presentations; a community bus; and a charity shop.

In addition, 62% of the churches were undertaking formal or informal market research. 70% of those churches that perceived themselves to be growing undertake research compared with 46% for those who are declining or staying the same. 47% of churches have a dedicated budget for marketing activities and these churches have an average brand orientation of 7.2.

However, although the questionnaire results indicated a high branding orientation among those surveyed it did not adequately reveal the very different approaches church leaders had to branding. Whilst branding orientation explains the difference between those who see branding as simply a peripheral technique (low brand orientation) and those who identify real benefits, the benefits are perceived on quite different levels. The majority with a high branding orientation see branding as a 'tool' to be used to assist them in their mission. A small minority see their identity and image encapsulated by the branding process.

Figure 1: Relationship between Branding Orientation and acceptance of Branding Theory

The decision to brand, or not to brand depends on whether branding is viewed as a technique, tool or an articulation of core identity (see author's diagram). For those who see branding as a technique, there is no coherent strategy and no expectation of significant benefits. For those who see branding as a tool, its benefits depend on its degree of support for existing activities. And for those who see branding as a means of identity and image management, its benefits are viewed as essential to articulating the core identity or heart of the church.

The questionnaire proved to be a catalyst for some leaders to revise their opinions on branding, with the large majority of respondents raising their 'level' of orientation. For example, before taking part in the survey some leaders wrote to say that they did not undertake any marketing activities but were willing to help. After completing the questionnaire, they became aware of a range of existing marketing activities carried out by their church and the need to use these more strategically.

From this research it is possible to conclude that branding is something that these church leaders were willing to engage in and develop. It is therefore essential to understand its effects.

Brand orientation and growth

There appears to be some evidence to support the hypothesis of Hankinson (2001) that those with a high brand orientation have a growing membership base. Of the 62% of churches (68) who responded as having grown numerically in the last few years, 81% (50) of the respondents said that they have, to a medium and large extent (scoring 6 and above), benefited and will benefit from seeing their church as a brand. That said, this finding needs to be viewed cautiously as respondents were not asked to quantify the level of growth and these churches could have been growing due to a range of other factors quite irrespective of branding. What is interesting is that of the 10 churches which responded as having declining membership, 9 replied that they would benefit from a branding orientation (6 and above). So, regardless of whether or not the relationship with branding orientation is in fact a strong one, there is a perception that it is effective.

Perhaps the stronger link is that those church leaders who had a clear sense of identity in the form of an articulated vision, values and strategy had a higher brand orientation (28 churches with an average score of 7.7) supporting the studies of Saxton (2002) and Kapferer (1997). The more active the church leaders were in reviewing their identity, the higher their branding orientation. Those that reviewed their values (62) had higher brand orientation scores increasing with frequency (every 6 months), than those that did not review their values, or reviewed them annually or bi-annually. Different combinations, i.e., a vision, but not a plan or articulated values, all led to lower branding orientation. For example, one church with a plan and articulated values but no articulated vision had a branding orientation score of 2. The 12 churches that had an articulated vision, but no strategic plan and articulated values, had an average branding orientation of 5.

Those churches with a strategic plan, articulated vision and values (28) also had the highest member awareness of vision and values and a higher than average community awareness score of 4.7 (average is 4.1). 60% of church leaders believed the community had very limited awareness of what the churches stood for (4 and below). 5 church leaders believed that the community understands the church (with a score of 8). These churches were of different ages, from different denominations, are growing, had articulated visions and values (only 1 did not have a strategic plan) and had an average branding orientation of 9.

Branding orientation: key variables?

The research also examined how different variables might affect branding orientation.

a) *Position in church*

75 Ministers/Pastors answered the survey of which 68 were Senior Pastors. Lay leaders (Administrators, Elders, Deacons) represented 18% of all respondents. 54 Senior Pastors (79%) and 11 lay leaders (69%) responded with branding orientation scores of 6 and higher. This suggested that branding was supported by both lay and ordained leaders.

b) *Length of time in position*

Table 4: Relationship between branding orientation and length of time in post

Length of Time	No of Respondents	Branding Orientation (6 and above)
Less than 1 year	6	6 (100%)
1-5 years	45	33 (73%)
6-10 years	25	20 (80%)
11-20 years	14	10 (71%)
21+ years	1	1 (100%)
TOTAL	91	

Length of time in post might suggest some link to branding orientation. Those leaders who are new in post appear to have a higher brand orientation. It is worth noting that the Minister who had held the post for over 21 years was responsible for three churches – two had been established in the last two years.

c) *Church age*

Table 5: Relationship between branding orientation and age of church

Age of Church	No of Respondents	Branding Orientation (6 and above)
< 5 years	6	6 (100%)
5- 20 years	18	16 (89%)
20 – 50 years	11	8 (73%)
50-100 years	10	8 (80%)
100-200 years	29	20 (69%)
200-500 years	6	3 (50%)
500 + years	7	6 (86%)

Average Age	169

Although all new churches in this sample (under 5 years old) identified benefits in having a branding orientation, it was still a factor for churches over 1000 years old.

d) *Denomination and independent churches*

Over 14 denominations were represented in the sample with 72 (80%) respondents linked to a denominational group. The main denomination was Anglican (22 respondents) followed by Baptist (11). 18 surveys were from completely independent churches. There were no significant differences in branding orientation across denominations and between denominations and independent churches. The sample size was too small to reveal any substantial differences although differences may exist. For example, Salvation Army churches (7 respondents) had higher than average branding orientation scores.

e) *Organisational size*

Two thirds of the respondents (60) worked in churches with less than 200 members. The highest branding orientation was in churches with under 50 members and this decreased fractionally with church size. However, the drop was very small and rose in the 200-300 member category.

f)   *Number of paid staff*

Different configurations of staff did not seem to affect the branding orientation of the staff, i.e., those churches with more staff were neither more nor less likely to see their church as a brand.

g) *Other churches (potential competition)*

Leaders were asked to identify the number of local churches in their local geographical area. The average number of churches identified was 34. The number of churches in the area did not seem to impact on branding orientation. For example, branding orientation did not increase with increasing numbers of local churches in the surrounding area. Respondents' awareness of other local churches varied; some guessed there were thousands whilst others knew exactly how many there were. Interestingly, those that saw themselves in decline saw the number of churches in their area as being significantly greater than the average. However, overall this finding challenges the view that branding inevitably leads to competitive behaviour (Chadwick, 2001).

It is recognised that the sample size in this study is very small, and that therefore one cannot draw anything more than some tentative conclusions from it. That said, certain inferences can be drawn. First, whether to brand or not does not appear to be critically influenced by any one organisational variable. Second, the most significant factor is in fact the vision, views and the skills of the leader – a view supported by previous research (Hankinson, 2002).

4.2   Research question 2: the dangers of branding

Views on branding issues

Table 6: Branding issues

Principle	Agree very strongly	Agree strongly	Agree a little	Disagree a little	Disagree strongly	Disagree very strongly
Motivation to Brand is losing Market Orientation	4	14	40	17	14	1
Branding makes little difference	2	5	18	26	34	3
Value Dilution	2	12	20	14	34	8
Sustains Church Shopping Mindset (Consumerism)	2	6	35	23	18	4
Technique is not values neutral	1	7	26	28	25	2
Danger of Style over Substance	8	37	33	3	7	2
Distorts View of non-believers as consumers with felt needs	1	13	27	20	27	1
Target marketing – selection	0	9	41	17	21	1
Focus on numbers and technique	1	14	25	22	27	2
Requires specific skill set from business	2	15	36	19	17	1
Size Matters – Large will survive as they have more resources	4	14	31	23	18	1
Breeds Competition	0	8	16	23	38	6
Devalues Complexity	0	10	19	28	25	8
Temptation to manipulate	2	8	44	17	16	3
Branding Shapes Christianity	4	18	33	18	14	3

The majority of respondents (even those with a high brand orientation) recognised there are problems associated with branding. There was substantial variance over the underlying motive for branding, whether it makes a significant difference and whether it dilutes values. There was a strong view that it sustains a 'church-shopping' mentality. Respondents were divided as to whether the techniques are value-neutral. They saw dangers in: elevating style over substance; distorting the view of non-believers; and in being selective about their target audience (target marketing). As such, these leaders understood the concerns of writers such as MacArthur (1993) and Kenneson (1997). A significant number pinpointed a focus on technique, organisational size and the need for the leader to have business skills for branding to be successful. However, the majority did not believe that branding would breed competition or devalue the complexity of the message, but did believe that there is a temptation to manipulate emotions. Perhaps most significantly, the majority saw branding as improving communication with non-believers, but shaping the Christianity being presented, giving support to the research

of Pritchard (1996). As one leader with a high branding orientation indicated, it would be naïve to think it was possible to change communication style and not affect content.

Church leaders recognised the possible benefits as well as disadvantages or concerns raised by branding. All leaders questioned seemed to recognise the benefits, but responded differently to the concerns. Some leaders identified the benefits but for them these were outweighed by the concerns. Other leaders noted both the benefits and the concerns but provided what appeared to be quite inconsistent responses. For example, some saw benefits in branding but did not think it made a substantial difference. Others pinpointed the concerns, to the extent that they recognised Christianity can be shaped by the approach, but still saw real benefits in branding.

Branding orientation and collaboration

74% of churches recorded their involvement in some form of collaborative activity. Collaboration did not seem to be related to age, whether the church is growing, or branding orientation, although those churches who do not collaborate have slightly higher than average branding orientation. However, those churches with high levels of inter-denominational collaboration (14) also revealed high branding orientation (average of 6.7) thus challenging Chadwick's hypothesis (Chadwick, 2001) that high branded churches are less collaborative.

The results revealed significant variations in collaboration. Activities fell into different and sometimes overlapping categories such as: inter-denominational or denominational; community or internally focused; and attitude to collaboration – whether it was pervasive or peripheral. For example, 29 Churches cited the Alpha course (a national Christian Course explaining the fundamentals of the Christian faith), as an example of collaboration. Examples fell into each of the above categories. Some courses were city-wide inter-denominational courses, whereas others ran them alone or with other churches in their denomination. Some churches only collaborated on planning and advertising, whereas others sought to work more closely with other churches in their surrounding area. The result is a wide range of activities. Inter-denominational level examples included: Churches Together forums (minister fraternals); training; prayers; and special events for particular groups or at certain times of the year – such as Easter and Christmas. Community level examples included: marriage courses; schools work; hosting community events; finance workshops; and pregnancy crisis support.

Discussions with church leaders who had a high branding orientation revealed commitments to work with other local churches. This would not support the view that branding inevitably results in less supportive behaviours. In fact, rather the opposite - several of the churches who see themselves as brands gave examples of developing inter-denominational forums. Competition was viewed less in terms of neighbouring churches and more in terms of all alternative forms of

non-Christian activity. However, some leaders admitted that if their churches were growing because of a strong local identity, then it was possible that other churches would suffer, as local Christians would move to places where their needs could be better served. Leaders disagreed over whether they should be encouraged to return to their previous church, which might add support to the view of 'sheep-stealing' and the danger of transfer growth (Chadwick, 2001). This could be said to be the case of the small minority of churches who brand in relation to the Sunday school, target Christians moving to the local area, and specifically focus on attributes which distinguish themselves from other churches. However, the vast majority of the high brand oriented churches saw their approach as focusing on attracting non-believers, rather than believers, and if members of other churches wanted to join their church, it would not be due to them seeking them out.

4.3   Research question 3: a possible model

It does seem that high brand orientated churches perceived themselves to be growing, especially those who have a clear sense of identity and mission. It also appears that while church leaders accepted the potential benefits of branding, they expressed concerns about managing their identity and image using a branding process. A small number rejected branding completely. However, although the majority seemed to be positive they were often inconsistent in their approach. Many respondents indicated that they were 'uncomfortable' with the terminology. A number of respondents were asked about how these tensions were managed, and whether there were flaws in the survey instruments employed that revealed inconsistencies that did not exist in practice. The feedback was that church leaders undertaking branding face a range of issues not previously identified in the research.

Via email and in face-to-face meetings it became apparent that the local church leader faces issues with branding that relate to focus: 'who is the brand for?' and 'what does it reveal?' When serving at least two distinct groups, for example believers and non-believers, do leaders create a brand which connects with one, but not the other group, or can they create a brand which connects with both groups?

As a result of discussions with church leaders, a model was developed to help leaders consider the relationship between branding orientation (high or low) and branding focus (external or internal). This resulted in leaders identifying four organisational types.

Figure 2: How brand focus and orientation combine to create different organisational forms

		Brand Focus	
		Low	High
		Internal (Believer)	External (Non-Believer)
Brand Orientation	Low	*Coalition*	*Conference*
	High	*Club*	*Retailer*

Coalition (or congregation, colony, collective) *Low Brand Orientation & Internal Focus.*
This church would not seek to project an image to outsiders of what it stands for. It would not manage its identity and as such its members would see membership in coalition terms – united under the broad Christian or denominational identity/brand. Its growth would be from attracting existing believers. A number of leaders spoke of starting from this position.

Club (or consulate) *High Brand Orientation & Internal Focus.*
This church would actively manage its identity and provide its members with a clear sense of belonging and unity. Its identity and image would focus on member services. Its growth would be from attracting existing believers in the form of transfer growth. For example, one leader stated:

> The name 'New Frontiers' could be seen as a brand which helps associate our church with a set of values. This has undoubtedly helped us recruit people who have been to other New Frontiers churches (Church Leader 60).

Other leaders identify more negative issues:

> Today there is no 'brand loyalty'. If Waitrose is cheaper, abandon Tesco. If down the road helps my kids – move. [And,] if the consumer is a Christian then a decent argument can be made for branding feeding the self-centeredness of our generation (Church Leader 35).

Conference (or convention, consortium) *Low Brand Orientation and External Focus.*
This church is keen to engage or 'conference' with non-members under the broad umbrella of a Christian identity. It spends no real time on managing its corporate image but makes strong connections. It grows through relationships but many in the community do not know it exists. For example, comments from church leaders include:

> In the short time I have been a pastor we have had a name change which has been significant. On my visitations I have found out that people in the community never realized we were an active church (same location for 50 years!). Better to have some kind of brand than be so neutral and discreet that the church is not noticed (Church Leader 42).

Retailer (or company, market stall) – *High Brand Orientation & External Focus.*
This church is keen to present its identity to the non-member. It offers a range of different services to enable connections. It appeals to non-members but success is determined by identifying, adapting and meeting non-member needs. A comment from leaders include:

> [A] go and get them approach (branding) – a recognition to take the product to the people rather than wait for them to come to you [and] being business-like works for our community which is growing as a business centre (Church Leader 26).

Others express possible problems:

> I guess the danger for the church is becoming the brand. The brand ought to be supportive and descriptive of what the church really is and does. It is very easy in this day and age to create a brand which bears little resemblance to what lies underneath (Church Leader 34).

The model highlights the need for churches and leaders to consider how branding can involve serving different stakeholders and its focus may result in different core values being highlighted or diminished. As many leaders commented, the motivation and integrity behind the branding process are critical. One leader wrote, 'I don't believe branding is the problem, it is the way it is done that could be' (Church Leader 30). 'Living the brand' needs to adequately match the underlying identity of the church and needs to be authentic and not too aspirational. However, being authentic means recognising the different perceptions of those receiving the wide range of messages communicated by the organisation and understanding how these feed back and shape its mission.

Summary
Analysis of the data revealed that branding is a relevant discussion for church leaders. Whilst high branded churches perceived benefits, and are growing, there are also perceptions of problems with a branding orientation. A model was developed to try to better understand the benefits of branding and their impact on mission drift. This model examined the relationship between the level of commitment to branding and its focus. The next section will explore how research into branding can be developed in the future.

5.   Discussion and conclusion

On one level this research supports the evidence of Hankinson (2001) - that high branded churches perceive greater organisational benefits - and the hypothesis that high branded churches are more likely to be growing than low branded ones.   However, the research findings also support the body of literature that is both sceptical of branding as well as concerned by the impact of branding: the findings identified strongly held perceptions that a brand orientation can negatively change organisational mission and values.   Although there was no specific evidence of this in this study (for instance, high branded churches did not reveal overtly anti-collaborative behaviour) most leaders stated there was the potential for mission drift.

The research explored how leaders might approach the issue of branding their church. The model proposed in the previous chapter was developed as a result of the research findings, which identified a relationship between branding orientation and branding focus (internal/member and external/non-member). Four relationships emerged and are illustrated on a two by two matrix. The model enabled leaders to map their position on the matrix and assess the degree of fit between their position on the matrix and their organisational values. This model will need to be assessed for its broader application.

Overall, whilst there were certainly elements of support for the existing literature, the research revealed a weakness in the current literature, which tends to polarise in terms of extremes – either in favour of, or against branding. The evidence from this study however shows that leaders can be aware of both positions and attempt to manage the tensions. Researchers therefore need to better understand these tensions and in doing so, find ways of assisting non-profit leaders to navigate their way through potential problems. Integrating organisational identity theory into the main body of literature on branding could prove essential to this task.

5.1   Organisational Identity Theory: Dealing with Multiple Identities
All those surveyed identified the key starting point in a branding process as the need to define organisational identity before being able to project and manage its image. For non-profits such as a local church, this is perhaps more complex than branding advocates perceive. Those churches who really engage with branding come to realise that they have more than one identity, as perceived by their stakeholders, i.e., believers view the church very differently to non-believers. Organisational identity theorists recognise this tension. When organisations speak about identity they refer to a claimed central character, areas of distinctiveness and temporal continuity (Albert & Whetten, 1985). However classification may be difficult when there are multiple equally valid statements, relevant to different audiences for different purposes, and where the complexity of their activities makes a simple statement impossible. Organisations also face difficulties in distinguishing between public and private identity, with the need to

reduce any discrepancies between the way they view themselves and the way outsiders view them. The greater the discrepancy the more likely the health of the organisation is impaired. The result is that the publicly presented identity will be typically both more positive and more monolithic than the internally perceived identity, which might be dual or multiple in nature (Albert & Whetten, 1985).

This may help to explain the tensions faced by those church leaders wanting to project the identity of their church. Firstly, the need to present a core, distinct and continuous character is difficult when the complexities of its mission, formation and values are hard to define into a simple brand statement, for example, how to present God's character. Secondly, presenting that identity to various stakeholders is problematic. There is a need to reduce discrepancies between outside and insider perceptions, as well as to recognise different ways of engaging with the local church, the national church, the world-wide faith and individual Christians. The result is that, since projecting a brand that reveals such complexity is extremely difficult, leaders often create a positive ('attractive') single identity for one group only, i.e., believers or seekers. In fact, the church may recognise two or more quite distinct identities, but project only one. Multiple stakeholders with multiple bottom-lines are said to be a feature of the non-profit organisation (Drucker, 1992) and other non-profits are likely to face similar tensions.

5.2 Organisational Identity Theory: Projecting Image

Branding involves taking the core identity and projecting an image. It is presented as a straightforward process where projection is controlled by the communicators portraying the core central and distinctive character of the organisation (Winker, 1999, Drucker, 1992). Organisational identity theorists Gioia et al (2000) argue that this is not the case in practice. They argue that there is a dynamic interplay between identity and image, where receivers of the image also construct their views based on other observations. Their views are fed back into the organisation and organisational identity adapts or mutates when there are discrepancies. Perceptions of durability are contained in the stability of labels used by members, to express who or what they believe their organisation to be, but the meanings associated with these labels change, so that identity actually is mutable. The challenge is for the organisation to create and maintain an apparently enduring identity, which is viewed as essential to long-term success. On the other hand, the organization is also expected to possess the ability to adapt to increasingly turbulent environments. In other words, it must learn how to change and somehow stay the same – adaptive instability (Gioia et al, 2000).

Changing the core identity may be acceptable to an organisation founded on a for-profit basis but for a non-profit organisation established on distinct values, mutating identity could challenge their unique form and erode the trust essential for its existence (Hansmann, 1987). This understanding of the interplay between identity and image may help to explain why some

church leaders can see the benefits of branding, but also accept many of the concerns. Some recognise that it is possible, in fact tempting, to project a more socially acceptable image – a false projection. As one leader said:

> There has never been a time when it has been easier and cheaper to produce glossy letter-headings, business cards and now websites which may not be reality. It can all be nothing more than a sheet of paper, or pixel, deep (Church Leader 50).

A false projection such as this can quickly be undermined by the reality of the receiver's observation and experience. Other leaders point out that a fixed image does not adequately express the complexity of church life – to single out some unique characteristics undermines key foundational values and also stakeholder attitudes. Supporting Klausen's research (1995), a 'super-slick' image may prove off-putting to a wide range of stakeholders. Some recognise that discussions about image can result in adaptations to identity and place more emphasis on outsiders' perceptions and needs, rather than foundational values. The leaders agreed with Gioia et al's (2000) view that the created brand could become the identity of the organisation, rather than acting as an expression.

Summary

It might therefore be tempting for non-profit organisations, and in this case the local church, to avoid all discussions concerning branding and to draw support from the wide range of critical literature. However, a non-profit organisation has an identity whether it chooses to manage it or not. As one leader said, "The community will brand the church even if the church doesn't" (Church Leader 69). Alternatively, non-profits can embrace branding opportunities drawing on a wide range of supportive literature. However, the complexity of the non-profit form, with multiple stakeholders and the need to guard key foundational values, means that the branding process is not a straightforward one.

This paper therefore concludes that based on this research the challenge for researchers is to recognise how branding affects organisational identity and for non-profit leaders to use it as a tool to develop practical ways to reveal the multifaceted, dynamic and unique nature of their organisations.

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Appendix

Branding the Local Church Survey

April 2003

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SO15 2WT

Questions about you and your church

		Please tick appropriate box or enter text
Q1	What is your role in your local church?	
	Senior Pastor	
	Elder	
	Deacon	
	Church Administrator	
	Youth Leader	
	Other, please specify:	
Q2	How long have you been in this position?	
	Up to 1 year	
	1-5 years	
	6- 10 years	
	11-20 years	
	21+ years	
Q3	When was your church founded?	
Q4	Is your church part of a denomination – if so which one?	
Q5	What is the approximate membership of your church?	
	Under 50	
	50-100	
	100-200	
	200-300	
	300-400	
	400+	
Q6	In the last few years has membership grown, stayed the same or declined?	
Q7	How many staff are employed by the church?	
Q8	How many churches are you aware of in your town/city?	

Your Church Identity

		YES	NO
Q9	Do you have an articulated vision and mission for your local church?		
Q10	Do you have a formal strategic/business plan?		
Q11	Have you articulated a set of core organisational values?		
Q12	Do you review these values, if so how regularly?		

Identity & Understanding

Q13   To what extent do you think your members know the VISION of your church?
(please circle the number which represents your view)

To a small extent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	To a large extent

Q14   To what extent do you think your members know the VALUES of your church?

To a small extent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	To a large extent

Q15   To what extent do you think your local community is aware of what you stand for?

To a small extent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	To a large extent

Presenting Your Church

Q16	Which of the following do you use?	YES	NO
	i. Church Logo		
	ii. Published Church Mission statement – for example, To know Jesus better and make Jesus better known		
	iii. Advertisements in the local newspaper		
	iv. Church Web-site		

	v. Church signage on building		
	vi. Direct mail – eg leaflets distributed to local homes advertising Easter services		
	vii. Other, please specify:		

Q17	Have you ever undertaken any research on the needs/issues facing your community either formally or informally?		
Q18	Have you combined with other local churches to promote particular services? For example, running joint Alpha courses. Please give an example:		
Q19	Do you have a budget for advertising/marketing church activities?		

Now some questions about the role of brands

The term "brand" may be an alien one. Whilst there are a variety of definitions most define a brand as a unique name/symbol or image for an organisation or product/service. In recent years it is also seen as means of expressing and embodying a series of values.

Branding is a marketing activity which essentially "positions" the organisation to best achieve organisational goals. In case of business, branding is used to differentiate a product to secure additional profit. For a church, it is said to offer an opportunity to express what the church does and that values it holds. In the recent book "Changing World, Changing Church" Michael Moynagh argues that the local church operates in a consumerist world and in order to engage with it he sees real opportunities if the local church sees itself as a brand.

Some reasons for branding and the possible benefits

Q20 To what extent to you agree with the following statements

		Disagree very strongly	Disagree strongly	Disagree a little	Agree a little	Agree strongly	Agree very strongly
i.	We are losing the battle to bring Jesus Christ into the lives of the unsaved because of a failure to embrace a market-orientation in what has become a market driven environment.						
ii.	Churches are fighting to be heard in a competitive world - a strong identity/brand allows them to differentiate themselves from competing forces.						

iii.	Churches can adapt to their competitive market without compromising the values that distinguish them.						
iv	Branding can be used to change a public image that is different from reality. Many people believe church to be irrelevant – a strong local church brand could change that. Values need not be diluted – in fact they could become clearer and better known						
v	A local church with a strong brand/identity presents a professional image and is likely to grow.						
vi	A local church brand can have a unifying effect helping members to understand and feel part of the organisation they serve and are served by.						

vii.	To brand a local church is really about outreach and development – the problem is really one of language.						
viii.	The process of branding allows opportunities to clarify vision and values – it challenges apathy and finds new ways to serve those that are lost.						
ix.	Every organisation emits an image – an impression of what the organisation is like and what it is about. The church should think about the image it presents to outsiders since that image will effect the ability to minister to those outside the church.						

Some possible concerns

Q21 To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

		Disagree very strongly	Disagree strongly	Disagree a little	Agree a little	Agree strongly	Agree very strongly
i.	A church which sees itself as a brand is no better at communicating what the organisation does and what it stands for than those which do not.						

ii.	Seeing church as a brand puts the focus on meeting the needs of an external world – and that will inevitably result in presenting a more favourable image with key values diluted.					
iii.	A church brand sustains the consumer mentality that feeds a church shopping mentality.					
iv.	Marketing techniques are not neutral. Marketing is based on theory of exchange – something is provided for a benefit. The promotion of marketing techniques make us more self-interested, more instrumental and less altruistic.					
v	A church could master the art of marketing but neglect faithfulness, justice and mercy. The successful church may be more entertaining than edifying and more exciting than holy.					
vi	A marketing approach distorts how Christians view non-believers – people become consumers and target audiences. Consumers have felt needs which research discovers in order to modify the product to meet those needs.					
vii	A focus on a target market the church can exalt personal preference over Christian mission and confuse discernment with discrimination					
viii.	A branding strategy puts the focus on numbers and technique seeing "success" in terms of large well-run churches.					
ix	To brand a church requires a particular set of marketing skills. Church leaders increasing be judged on their business acumen.					
x	Large churches will survive as they will be able to spend more on branding exercises and offer more services					

xi	Branding breeds competition – neighbours become rivals who must be overcome.						
xii	Making Christianity more visual tends to make it less verbal. Simplicity is valued and conceptual complexity is devalued.						
xiii	Branding opens the temptation to manipulation – ability to identify and massage the target's audiences emotions.						
xiv	Ultimately, branding may help to better communicate to the unchurched but the methods shape the Christianity that is presented.						

And finally…..

Q22   To what extent do you see your church as brand?

To a small extent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	To a large extent

Q23   To what extent do you believe that seeing your church as a brand could benefit or has benefited your church overall?

To a small extent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	To a large extent

Any other comments you would like to make (ie evidence of beneficial or detrimental branding activities):

Many thanks for completing this questionnaire. If you would be willing to develop some of these concepts and able to spare some time either by email or face-to-face then please email graham@willowcreek.org.uk. Please return in the pre-paid envelope within 2-3 weeks. On completion of the survey, I will send you a summary report of the findings.

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