



JAMAICA



BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY



# Brandwatch

## Forty years on

**Nations' tourism advertising is higher profile than ever, as the world's destinations seek to rebuild confidence in travel. Even Britain has now entered the fray. In this Brandwatch review, our resident branding expert, Locum non-executive director Tony Hodges, compares recent winners and losers in national tourism with the origin of the species.**

### The challenges and challengers of tourism promotion

If you are fortunate enough to live under the beam of BBC Television, you will have noticed, this summer, some splendid documentaries celebrating the 40th anniversary of Jamaica's independence. Such delicious irony. Release from imperial thrall celebrated by one of the last relics of the Empire itself: its broadcasting service. How perfectly British.

At the same time as we were enjoying these documentaries, the unwitting citizens of Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and the US were receiving the dubious benefits of a £40

million media campaign promoting British heritage, countryside and cities.

What is the connection between these two separate but coincidental media events? Simply this: the Jamaica which celebrated its anniversary of independence was also the Jamaica which changed the history of tourism. The press advertising which you see on this spread influenced virtually all tourism promotion that followed. The television advertising which ran alongside was literally the first travel advertising ever on television. Jamaica went on to suffer grievous social and economic woes but back then, 40 years ago, tourism soared. As a result, the echo of that work is there in the best tourism advertising today, if not in Britain's.

### Tourism and the economic imperative

Centralised advertising of Britain's own brand of tourism, unlike Jamaica's, is a relatively new phenomenon. Individual companies like British Airways (or BOAC) have spent years marketing and exploiting Britain's various attractions and BTA has manfully coordinated individual efforts for some time. But 'Only in Britain. Only in 2002' is that rare campaign: it is what it says on the can. The importance of tourism to the British economy is finally - in the wake of Foot and Mouth, let alone transatlantic terrorism - being recognised. As new kids on the block, the Brits might have spent some time studying other celebrated examples of tourism promotion, but that would



have involved a strategic approach, preparation, long term thinking, even a recognition that others (for whom tourism really matters) do it better, and that would never do.

To the newly independent Jamaica, tourism really mattered. Jamaica is big for a Caribbean island but still only half the size of Wales. Economic sustainability on the back of agriculture alone would never be a realistic prospect. Its sounds and sights, people and pleasures, they could bring in dollars and pounds beyond the dreams of plantation owners. (How it makes even objective observers weep to see social unrest scar that idyllic picture, but that is another tale.)

Closer to home, tourism really mattered to Spain, and the Spanish wrote their own chapter in the history of successful tourism advertising when they recognised its cultural as well as economic importance. Just as Jamaica's famous tpestyle climbed the side of the magazine page (so that you automatically stopped to read and explore) so Spain's Miro-esque identity intrigued, seduced, and took you by the hand to a Spain far beyond the coastline. To discover its culture.

Whereas tourism was the economic imperative for Jamaica, for Spain it was this and more. For Spain, tourism was the litmus paper of its national identity. There is a direct line between Franco's *Parador* and Bilbao's Guggenheim, between the *Vinos Espana* art promotions of the '80s and the chords of Barcelona's Olympics, between Seville's Expo and that much-mimicked *Espana* logo. This,



'This, the land of Cervantes and Gaudi, knew instinctively that successful positioning would owe more to culture than costa'

## When you're only No.2, you try harder. Or else.



Little fish have to keep moving all of the time. The big ones never stop picking on them.

Avis knows all about the problems of little fish.

We're only No.2 in rent a cars. We'd be swallowed up if we didn't try harder.

There's no rest for us.

We're always emptying ashtrays. Making sure gas tanks are full before we rent our cars. Seeing that the batteries are full of life. Checking our windshield wipers.

And the cars we rent out can't be anything less than lively new super-torque Fords.

And since we're not the big fish, you won't feel like a sardine when you come to our counter.

We're not jammed with customers.

### Avis: the original challenger brand

the land of Cervantes and Gaudi, knew instinctively that successful positioning would owe more to culture than *costa*.

The Spanish are a proud bunch, almost to a fault. Yet not too proud to recognise that tourism unmanaged could become a blight. Nor too *laissez-faire* to ensure that promotion of tourism, exports and inward investment were linked. Nor too short-sighted to foresee that their brand identity, like their culture, should be unique to Spain and protected over the long term. The Spanish are in the process of changing their advertising (hence its absence from these pages) but they would be insane to change their brand identity, or even try.

Yet, just as the World Cup broke all records for images of St George's cross, Britain's tourism campaign lets the Union Jack billow. What price a constant approach to brand identity, let alone national identity?

### Tourism and the challenger brand

The pages of the marketing and advertising press are full of debate about 'challenger brands'. This is partly because of Sir Martin Sorell's ambitions for his half-formed fourth network called Red Cell, (which, intriguingly, is the agency for Wales' tourism advertising - have the Welsh spotted challenger credentials in their pugilist history?). In truth, it makes sense for most agencies to hone their skills in supporting challenger brands, since there are very few market leaders to go round and market leading brands normally feel most at home in market leading agencies. So Sir Martin's position on challenger brands at Red Cell will not remain distinctive for long.

However, there is value in recognising the position of a challenger brand. The classic example of making a virtue out of this secondary status was, of course, Avis: 'We're only No. 2. We try harder.' By an unremarkable coincidence, this - the original challenger campaign for the original challenger brand - was also born around the time of



Jamaican independence (and in the same agency as the Jamaican campaign). The power of its central argument is the same power that propelled David's slingshot towards Goliath. Enjoy the wit of the Avis manifesto - 'No. 2's of the world, arise!' - but then ponder: is that not exactly what the best recent exponents of national tourism advertising have done? Is that not the secret of the challenger brand?

Consider, first, New Zealand. This is the outstanding example of effective national branding in the English-speaking world and one of the finest examples of national tourism advertising on the printed page. Perhaps there is a connection. Or two.

First, New Zealand's activities started out as a much-needed export drive. Twelve years ago, the CEOs of the top ten foreign currency earning exporters got together and agreed the need for a unified New Zealand proposition. (Note: the process started with private enterprise.)

Second, the proposition was required to embrace not only exports, but also inward investment and tourism. So it had to embody the truth of provenance and reflect values shared proudly and unanimously by New Zealand's various stakeholders, particularly its citizens.

'The New Zealand Way' was a textbook example of how to affect behaviours by publishing and promoting an agreed set of values. The New Zealand tree fern became a much-envied symbol of the country's green provenance. 'The Orchard of the South Pacific' delivered a competitive positioning of which the Avis brand's creators would have been proud, and which Australian neighbours could only covet.

Now, over a decade on, tourism advertising promotes the national brand as '100% Pure New Zealand', connecting powerfully with the original claims about the country's fine produce but displaying a confidence beyond the early 'Far and away the finest' story. Kiwi

'You have come a long way, Kiwi, and we can all learn from your example'



HEADSTRAW WHICH BORE THROUGH COUNTY BERRY IN APRIL.



*His and mine. A road each. One was wrong  
and we took it because we knew that even if it  
went nowhere and end up somewhere  
How can I tell people back  
home it was just a little ride?*




The island of memories. **Ireland**  
© 2002 Ireland Tourism Board

## True to Irish strengths ...

advertising no longer needs to mention how long it takes to get there. It has the confidence to sell itself on mineral rich hot springs, the wit to welcome you to Middle Earth, the chutzpah to run an ad called 'Skinny Dip' (albeit in the *Guardian*). All this from a country that was so clutched up in Victoriana that one of its finest examples of '100% Pure New Zealand' - its wine - was not permitted supermarket distribution *on its own turf* until 1989. You have come a long way, Kiwi, and we can all learn from your example.

Running New Zealand a close second in the challenger stakes is Ireland, the Irish Republic, that is. Our much respected *Review* contributor, Creenagh Lodge, likes to quote Ludovic Kennedy on Scotland's relationship with England as akin to 'being in bed with an elephant'. This is presumably how New Zealand feels about Australia too, but in Ireland's case it saw a more attractive elephant over the water: Europe. Whereas New Zealand started by focusing on exports and its produce, Ireland found itself by focusing on its inward investment priority and a wholehearted commitment to the European Union. Visiting a god-daughter some 25 years ago, I remember being told that this was 'the garden of Europe'. Every time

We wanted to paint the town red  
but someone had got there first  
with every colour under the sun.



Geoff & Moira from LONDON STEFFLE  
OUT FOR A DRINK IN COUNTY KERR.

The island of memories. **Ireland**  
For more information, visit [www.visitireland.com](http://www.visitireland.com)

... charm and romance and storytelling

I revisited, there seemed to be more Mercedes on the roads. How subtly the Irish repositioned themselves, with their charming tax breaks for creative spirits, their intelligent focus on how many nationals enjoyed further education and their consistent insistence on being 'the island of Ireland', i.e. not attached to Britain.

The national tourism advertising for Ireland connects subtly to other aspects of national branding because it is true to national strengths: charm and romance and storytelling. Certainly it runs second to New Zealand in the unity of that nation's approach, but it too has created a popular school of national tourism promotion. The casual, almost spontaneous, handwritten style of copy works in the advertising (even harder than in Ireland's brochures where credibility of the 'quotes' begins to wear thin). 'The island of memories' works hard as well, continuing the island theme and linking stories that seem right in an Irish context. That, in the end, is what saves the campaign from generic status. It feels Irish and typically attractive at that.

You would have thought that Scotland enjoyed similar advantages as a challenger brand. It has its obvious 'elephant' across



## VisitScotland: 'If you cannot be original, at least try to be persuasive'

the border with which to make pointed comparisons. It has strong, widely recognised cultural values, which are admirably exposed in its national brand work beyond tourism: 'People who keep their promises', 'The brains of the British Isles', 'Scotland. The expressive'; all strong stuff.

Yet with all these advantages - akin to Ireland's in sound and vision too - the VisitScotland advertising is disappointing.

First, the campaign which looks seductive on television looks dull, drab and depressing when transferred with palpably inadequate thought or imagination to print. A classic case of advertising agency people caring more about what appears on their show reels than in print.

Second, the advertising lacks an idea, let alone one that Scotland can own. The visual thrust of this print work has more to do with 'Shipping News' than a uniquely Scottish welcome. 'Live it? There? No thank you.

Third, and perhaps most crucially, we see here the inbuilt limitations of the so-called 'portmanteau strategy'. This is the approach adopted by those who cannot devise a single-minded strategy and instead pack the advertising full of different individual elements in the forlorn hope that something, anything, is carried away. This means that, even with the evocative TV film for VisitScotland, most of the points made are not recalled.

[The VisitScotland agency allegedly purloined the idea for this campaign from a modest but lively visitor attraction called SENSATION: Dundee. Yet this science centre had a reason for claiming 'live' status: it specialised in life sciences and, literally, brought them to life. It re-presented itself to its family market, well before the VisitScotland campaign, as 'the seeitfeelithearitsmellit-tasteit experience' and won an award from the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions for its promotional literature. When confronted with the observation that his copy approach had been 'borrowed', the VisitScotland client reacted defensively, I am told. He should change stance forthwith; apologise to SENSATION: Dundee; make up for the gaffe by featuring the Dundee attraction - prominently and gratis - in his 2003 marketing activity; and inform

his agency that only original work will be acceptable in the future. As the consultant behind the SENSATION: Dundee work, I will accept an apology too.]

Note to the VisitScotland agency: check out the other challenger brands and if you cannot be original, at least try to be persuasive.

### Originality: a very British trait

On better days, originality is a strength the British can usually claim. How good it is to see, from Jonathan Griffin's article in this journal, that *originality* is to be celebrated in the imminent British trade events around China. Doubtless it will feature prominently in the V&A's upcoming 'Rewind' exhibition of D&AD's contribution to British culture these past forty years (That is quite enough 40th anniversaries. Ed.) Book your place in the queue now; it starts 7 November. Originality has always been a hallmark of advertising out of the BMP agency: from Pepsi and the Smash Martians of yesterday through to the John Smith and Volkswagen campaigns of today. So we all breathed a sigh of relief when BMP was appointed to clean up Britain's national tourism advertising, after 'UK OK' was so obviously not.

Indeed a professional job has been done, within the constraints of the hydra-headed client and brief. 'Only in Britain. Only in 2002' makes no bones and no enemies either. Nor does it break new ground or open up new horizons. How could it do so? In a matter of weeks, this multi-media, multi-lingual, multi-sponsor show had to get on the road. The government had finally got around to decreeing the need. The sponsors had been rounded up, for their marketing skills as much as for their vested interests and match-funding (judging from the luminaries on the panel). There was not time for measured thought, exploratory research, the trial and error that precedes most original creative work. Time only for professionalism, rather than originality.

If only politicians understood that marketing and advertising are not the same as spin. Great advertising takes more time to nurture than soundbites.



If only the corporate partners in this campaign could recognise that a greater good might be served by insisting on one brand per advertisement: in this case, Britain - not BA/Radisson/P&O/Thistle. And even Avis, dammit. If anyone should understand the virtues of single-minded branding, it is Avis. Forty years on, indeed.

And if only a proper, national debate could be enjoined on the cultural issue at hand. Which is, what is our true national idea? Is it political, as represented by the Union Jack? Is it geographical, as represented by our sceptred isle? Or is it cultural, as known to the world by the English language?

If only.

Yet, let us be practical. £40 million had to be spent, sensibly, on promoting Britain as a tourist destination. It will have been. The administration of the branding guidelines has been exemplary (shame about the logo). The focus on key markets has been properly researched as, I am sure, has the translation of text (not to be sneezed at). The town criers and guards and Morris dancers have been wheeled out to celebrate Britain's unique quaintness (what politicians and flight attendants think of as heritage). And the procession of corporate identities across the top of each page is as measured as the accountant's calculations. (Trust those if you will.) At least the work displays wit.

All that is missing is a simple, singular insight into what makes this destination unique. Not just for tourism, but for exports and inward investment too. Forty years ago, Jamaica found it with a helping hand from BMP's natural father, Bill Bembach. More recently, New Zealand did too, with a glass of Sauvignon Blanc and a seat at the preview of *Lord of the Rings*. So did Ireland, if you please. Can it be that difficult?

The answer floats plaintively across from Westminster. 'What you don't understand, you see, is that it's much easier for countries like Jamaica or New Zealand or Ireland. They are, after all, small islands and far too dependent on tourism for their own good..'

A professional job, but if only.....

