To create a brand you first need to know and understand everything about the client through research, workshops and regular meetings.

Step one: problem-solving
One of the reasons why many clients choose to come to branding agencies like Landor is to receive expert help with a commercial problem or opportunity. “Rarely do we get someone who says: ‘We’re already very successful, give me more success’ – it has happened once or twice, but this situation tends to be the exception,” begins executive creative director of Landor’s London office, Peter Knapp. “Typically there’s a shift in the marketplace, a shift in the commercial paradigm that they need to respond to, or there are new products or new technologies that they’re adapting, which means the brand is subject to scrutiny, to see whether it’s still in good condition to express that change. That’s what happens normally,” he continues. “People will come with...

Global branding expert Landor Associates shares its experiences, insights and insider tips for creating excellent brand strategies, in this exclusive six-page branding masterclass.

From Apple to Zippo, branding is key: it defines what you are, the way you work, what your products should be and how you present your public face to the world. In return, creating a brand helps you attract the customers you want to serve, gain their trust and keep them coming back for more. In rare cases, branding can even be rewarded with love, devotion and a quasi-religious zeal. But just like good product design, good branding is about more than surface good looks. It goes right to the heart of everything you do.

Just ask Landor Associates: the creative agency established by branding pioneer Walter Landor in 1941, which now spans the globe with 21 offices located around the world. Landor Associates has been responsible for the creation of some of the world’s most iconic brands: Coca-Cola, Levi’s, Alitalia Airlines, Del Monte, the World Wildlife Fund and many others, and the creative agency continues to work with hundreds of big-name clients including FedEx, Volkswagen, Microsoft and Rolex. Over the next six pages, you’ll gain an exclusive insight into the way that Landor sets about creating iconic brands, whether the audience is local, national or global.
a commercial problem or a commercial opportunity and they need to see whether the brand is fit for purpose.”

To solve the problem, Landor’s creatives first embark on an audit of the company or brand to find out where it’s at in terms of its commercial prospects, its appeal to its audience, and whether there’s a mismatch between what the company or brand thinks it is and what opinion-formers, consumers and other influencers think. For Landor, carrying out a brand audit is fundamental to its whole approach: to get a brand to where you want it to be, you first have to understand where it is, and then create a strategy that helps bridge that gap.

This is exactly what Landor did when it created a new identify for Russian airline S7, as Knapp explains: “You can’t pick a colour, pick a logo, have your fingers crossed and hope that it might work. We did an extensive competitive analysis, we did a lot of customer interviews, and we did a lot of data analysis to see where the business was going and to look at where the society of Russia was changing. What were the new influences for the audience they were trying to attract?”

S7 was trying to attract a young, upwardly mobile audience to its airline. To create the brand, Landor looked at the kinds of things this audience was attracted to: “That meant not by any means looking at other airlines,” says Knapp, “but looking at fashion trends, retail trends, what hotels were doing, the automotive sector – and asking what are the cues here? What are the trends? What are the things that we can learn from in
Landor has adapted BP’s helios logo to show its support for British athletes competing at the 2012 Olympics. The branding will appear in all of BP’s print, billboard and TV advertising.

02 BP’s branding for the 2012 Olympics extends to merchandise – like these branded trainers – as well as internal promotions that help create support for the event among BP staff.

03 BP is also showing its support for its six athlete ambassadors with local and regional branding for its filling stations and fuel tankers in and around the athletes’ hometowns.

CASE STUDY: BP

BP wanted to prove that there was more to its support for the 2012 Olympics than simple sponsorship – and with Landor’s help it succeeded.

Landor has been working with BP since the 80s and has been instrumental in helping shift the perception of the brand away from being purely about petrochemicals, to alternative and future sources of energy instead. It came up with company’s now-controversial green and yellow flower logo as well as its tagline ‘Beyond Petroleum’.

Landor is currently involved in a joint-branding exercise with advertising agency OgilvyOne to show BP’s support for athletes attending the London 2012 Olympics. Its work on the project began before the Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2010 and aims to show that there’s more to BP’s involvement in the 2012 Olympics than just being one of the official sponsors. It’s showing its support for six British athlete ambassadors, including Lizzie Armistead, William Sharman and Jessica Ennis by not only providing them with fuel for their vehicles, but also helping them to reduce the amount of CO2 they use through its Target Neutral programme.

To give a visual expression to BP’s support, Landor came up with the idea of a helios ring – based on the BP logo – which symbolically appears to be supporting the athletes as they compete. The helios ring logo appears in all of BP’s 2012 Olympics promotional advertising and branding, including its petrol station and tanker liveries. BP staff are also being encouraged to volunteer to help out at the Olympics as a way of showing its support on a human level as well as a corporate one. BP is also sponsoring the US 2012 Olympics team – something that is helping BP staff in the country feel proud of the company again after the genuine shock and public vilification endured in the weeks and months following the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

01

To order a brand that’s going to be attractive to these guys?” In the end, Landor created a bright green livery and branding for S7 Airlines that was a world away from the conservative image used by its rivals.

At Landor, there are four tenets that define its branding and rebranding work: relevance (to audience), differentiation (from competitors), preference (among audience) and loyalty (from customers). They’re also key to any brand’s commercial success.

Step two: defining the brand strategy

Once you’ve carried out an audit into your client’s brand, the next step is to define what the brand is and what it stands for. Landor combines the data it has gleaned from its audit and field research with a series of client workshops that help both sides identify the brand’s self image and values. Landor asks a series of questions based around visual metaphors – such as: if your brand were a car, what kind of car would it be? – to really get to the essential truth, or truths, about the brand.

These can then be used as a springboard for the creative expression of the brand – the visual, design and voice cues that trigger recognition, preference, loyalty and so on among the target audience. “The whole point of brand strategy is to limit your options and to laser-focus the brand, so that it is really clear about what it stands for; what the intent is,” Knapp says. “A really good brand strategy helps you land on a pinhead creatively. That’s the point of brand strategy. If not, you’re just doing cute design.”

In other words: if you find yourself presenting dozens of wildly different options to your client, it means you haven’t got a handle on what the client really wants, and you both have more work to do before you can get on with the fun, creative part.
Step three: creating the brand expressions

Once you’ve agreed a brand strategy with the client, the next stage is to create its brand expression to tell the story of the brand. As Knapp explains, it’s about a lot more than just creating a cute design: the colours, style, visual language, copywriting – every element – that you use in your clients’ branding has to reflect both the brand truth and the way that you approach the client’s current or prospective audience. You wouldn’t normally use street slang to talk to high class, educated customers, for example, or vice versa.

One of the other, most important, elements to consider is how your choice of colours, language and branding will play out across different cultures or countries around the globe. After all, what might be appropriate in the UK, for example, might not be acceptable elsewhere.

The creative expression of the brand also has to extend across the whole gamut of a user’s senses: from the quality of the materials used by the brand – plastic, leather, wood, steel and so on – to the way staff are expected to treat the brand’s customers. When Landor helped British airline BMI create a brand for its new transatlantic service, this approach even extended to the kind of music that would be played when customers boarded the plane and what kind of food should be served.

In BMI’s case, that meant ‘Young Americans’ by David Bowie – a British man singing about America – with a menu of typically British fare like bacon butties and Marmite. “That’s what we aim for,” says Knapp. “The experiential component of the brand where all your senses are engaged in making sure everything adds up to the right perception. Because if you were onboard and suddenly heard Kraftwerk, for example, you might have a very different impression. If you’d read the in-flight magazine and it came over in a very stuffy, pompous tone, this would be a dislocation of the perception and the experience that you’re trying to create. So engaging as many of the human senses as you can through all of the experiences is what you try to do to make it a truly immersive brand experience.”

Step four: putting the brand into practice

The true test of any brand or rebranding exercise, of course, is how well – or badly – your strategy and its creative expression are handled ‘out there’, where your ideals bump up against reality. The best strategy in the world won’t work if the public face of the company – your clients’ employees – don’t believe in it or fail to...
How a Landor rebrand breathed new life into BA’s frequent flyer programme, creating new membership tiers, clearer branding and a sharper customer focus.

Landor was asked to revamp British Airway’s frequent flyer programme – Executive Club – last year with the aim of making it much more customer-focused. This involved revamping its existing structure with something less disjointed and monolithic, and more coherent. Matt Comboy, design director at Landor, says: “There was a strong need to refresh their identity and to give a much greater sense of belonging to something. Our whole positioning, structure and process was intended to create a unique, never-been-done-before interpretation of the structure of a frequent flyer club. So rather than having one monolithic structure, we have created four very different clubs-within-a-club, so that our consumer is quite rightly put at the heart of the brand. The key difference between the old and the new structure is that the clubs – Blue, Bronze, Silver and Gold – not only have genuine differences between them, but are clearly delineated for each other, while retaining a strong sense of unity. The entry-level Blue tier, for example, focuses on the joy and wonder of flight, and uses visual metaphors like groups of parrots and kites to communicate this excitement, while Gold is all about stillness, serenity and refinement – perfect for frequent fliers, for whom moments of genuine downtime are rare.

Tying each of these strands together are BA’s red, white and blue corporate colours to give a sense of belonging: “We wanted to make sure that people understood that it was a group of clubs, to make sure there was a sense of a thread, or threads, running through the whole Executive Club,” say Comboy. “Typefaces, colour palettes and the presence of photography were the three main branding visual assets that we wanted to maintain. We also visited the overall Executive Club identity – a simple steel grey that’s very pared down as an introduction to where you’d like to go.”
Landor turned an ‘image problem’ into a brand’s greatest asset by focusing on Caffrey’s ability to bridge the gap between ale and lager

Landor deals with a lot of beer brands, but Caffrey’s is arguably one of the trickiest it’s had to handle. Consumed like an ale, yet served cold like a lager, Caffrey’s appeal was tainted both by the ‘old man’s drink’ image of bitter in general, and by lager’s popularity as a social drink on the other. Landor’s challenge was to bridge the gap between the two: just as the actual drink does.

“It was a good opportunity to redefine an old favourite, because it had disappeared for a number of business, distribution and relevance reasons,” explains creative director Ben Marshall. The solution was to come up with the idea of balance: “We are quite explicitly sitting astride the lager and bitter market, which no-one is doing. And the product is good for it – I would like to think we’re summing up the brand experience pretty well,” says Marshall. “It’s a genuinely unique product in its own way.”

As well as creating can and bottle labelling for Caffrey’s that reassured its target audience with the quality of the product inside, Landor also saw the opportunity to have some fun with the secondary packaging – the box that the bottles or cans sit in on the supermarket shelf. “We knew we could get people having a bit more of a social experience on the pack, so we got people in the office and I used my iPhone to create a social scene – but obviously not one where everyone is looking drunk. We did the photographic equivalent of a social network.”

One of the things Landor did for its Caffrey’s rebrand was to sit down around a table with other agencies involved in the brand – advertising agencies and PRs – to make sure the brand strategy and brand message were strong enough to withstand use across multiple media and platforms, something that Landor is very confident at doing.

For many of Landor’s biggest clients, creating or refining a brand isn’t a one-off problem that needs to be solved: it’s part of an ongoing, constantly evolving process. Brands need to continuously attract and remind customers of the products or services they offer, and adapt to market conditions. As Landor believes, branding is also about making changes to existing offers for a client’s customers or creating new incentives to engage them – its work on the British Airways’ Executive Club (see page 38) being a case in point.

“If you don’t keep the relevance,” says Knapp, “the brand starts to get dry and dusty and people overlook it, so the brand needs to be very well managed internally by the client to still make it attractive to the customers. If not, at that point you find you start to lag badly. But a brand should never been seen as finished. It’s always an ongoing project.”