

JOHN SPENCER, MAX DU BOIS
AND PHILIP LAWDER
SPENCER DU BOIS

INNOVATION

Engineering the future

John Spencer, Max du Bois and Philip Lawder of design consultancy Spencer du Bois discuss their involvement in the re-brand of The Royal Academy of Engineering.

What is a visual brand?

First, we need to define terms. 'Visual brand' is often confused with 'logo'. Consequently, many organisations have a misplaced confidence in a logo's ability to tell the whole story. A logo is a vital component of a visual brand because it is the principal means by which an organisation is identified. So it must be practical; it must work as well in black and white as in colour; it must be effective at small sizes and be easily reproduced on both page and screen. But in our experience, to be memorable and to have longevity a logo must 'capture the spirit' of an organisation (see 'Capturing the spirit' on the next page.)

To be really effective, a logo must work hand in hand with the style of an organisation's materials; its 'brand language'. Visual brands are a means to an end. They are an expression of an organisation's ambition. They're about communication. And in the words of management consultant Tom Peters, 'If it isn't communicated, it doesn't exist.' Typography, the use of images and the layout of materials are all crucial to the impact that is created in the marketplace and a huge influence on an organisation's ability to communicate in an engaging way. And the closer the relationship between the logo and the overall style of the materials, the more successful its communications will be. So from the outset, our intention was not only to create a distinctive logo for the Academy, but one that was capable of informing the design of a unique range of materials.

Reasons for change

Re-branding must never be undertaken lightly. There should always be compelling reasons for change.

The Royal Academy of Engineering's strategic priorities of enhancing national capabilities, recognising excellence and inspiring the next generation and leading debate, call for it to appeal to a new, younger audience and to be seen as a relevant and active player. Thirty thousand young people are involved with the Academy's Best Programme and the number is rising. But the old logo didn't appeal to them. They saw it as ultra-conservative, lacking in inspiration and 'exclusive'.

The Academy's fundraising aspirations require it to stand out in a crowded marketplace. Well-designed and visually appealing materials are needed to help secure funding for a wide range of activities. Replacement funding is also needed for Gatsby. From a technical perspective, the old logo brought with it no clear corporate style, so it failed to unify and strengthen the Academy's visual communications. It also suffered from legibility problems, particularly at small sizes.

Step by step

One key to success is to follow a step-by-step process to ensure that ideas are fully tested and developed. Our project structure ensures that creative work is rigorously tested against the brief for appropriateness and fitness for purpose and that input and opinions are sought from the right people at the appropriate time. For this project, the key steps were:

Defining the message

A workshop to clarify the values and ambitions of the Academy.

Visual audit

An analysis of the Academy's visual materials and an investigation into the logos and visual brands of the Academy's 'competitors'.

Capturing the spirit



Reaching out



Harnessing emotion



History meets the future



Maximising impact

Our logo for the National Archives, with its traditional and modern elements, was inspired by the thought that it is the place where history and the future meet. The logo for the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund harnesses the spontaneous outpouring of emotion at the news of Diana's tragic death. The Multiple Sclerosis Society's logo, with its 'interrupted' M, reflects the unpredictability of this devastating condition. And our development of Visa's universally recognised 'flag' logo was driven by the need to maximise impact.

Creative concepts

Generating a broad range of ideas for the logo and visual brand.

Creative development

Refining the agreed logo concept and indicating how it will influence the overall design of the Academy's materials.

Master references

Preparing master references from which the logo can be reproduced both on paper and on-line.

Visual brand guidelines

Preparing an on-screen document that will ensure the correct and consistent use of the logo and visual brand over time.

Defining the message

So how did we go about creating a new visual brand for The Royal Academy of Engineering? It was vital that the creative process was underpinned by a clear, shared vision of where the Academy wanted to go. To tie this down, we set up a workshop with senior members of the Council to explore, in a highly imaginative way, the potential for the Academy and how the visual brand could get it there.

The workshop used a wide range of projective techniques to get away from current assumptions and look at where the really exciting challenges for the Academy might come from. Putting themselves in the shoes of the Academy's various target audiences, the participants dreamed up advertising slogans to try to capture

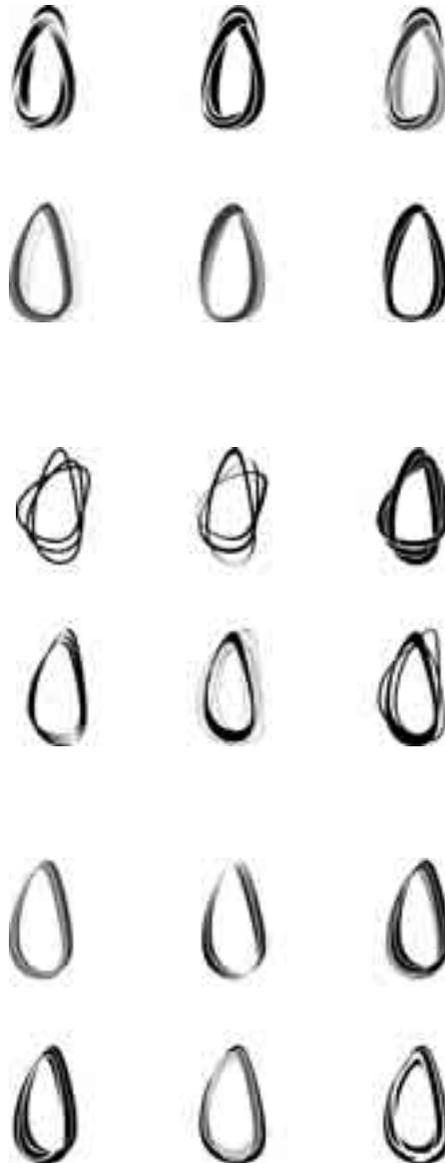
the essence of what the Academy wished to say and worked through a wide set of images to start to create a visual language for the Academy. Very soon, it became clear that communication would benefit greatly from a shift in focus from the hardware of engineering to its social benefits and from celebrating past success to concentrating on the future. This refocusing would ensure that the Academy is seen to be engaged with the big issues of the day in an extremely well-informed, honest way.

Bringing the vision alive

In parallel with this work, we conducted a visual audit of all the materials the Academy needs for its day-to-day business, such as stationery, printed materials and signage. This enabled us to assess the implications of our creative recommendations and to investigate the visual context in which the new visual brand identity would appear. We looked at the logos of other engineering bodies, royal institutions and royal academies. In particular, we were struck by the varying degrees to which their logos establish a relationship between heritage and modernity. For example, RADA uses the acronym, its full name and its coat of arms. In contrast, the Royal Academy has chosen to abandon any historical graphic reference in its logo and opted for a modern, minimal logo.

What inspired us?

We were inspired by the challenge of helping to change public perceptions: 'Engineers fix washing machines, don't they?' We were inspired by the opportunity to create a clearer understanding of the contribution that the whole field of engineering makes to wealth creation and our quality of life. We were inspired by the notion that engineering is about ideas that touch every part of our lives, and we were



From the old to the new –
development visuals for the new logo

inspired by the people who bring those ideas to life for the benefit of the public. We were inspired by the realisation that in the end engineering, in all its forms, is about people.

Creative explorations

In all, we explored seven distinct 'creative directions'. We considered retaining the 'monogram' device and creating a new logo by changing its relationship with the name, and then reinventing the visual system of which it is a part. We explored 'refreshing' the monogram, redrawing it in a more contemporary style.

But as the consultative and creative processes unfolded, doubts began to surface about the monogram's effectiveness in communicating the Academy as a 'progressive organisation that is responsive and energetic to the demands of a changing marketplace'. In the end, monograms are traditional devices that are ideally suited to communicating heritage and continuity. But they cannot, in any way, be regarded as future-focused. In short, we believed that a logo that featured a monogram would be severely limited in its ability to communicate with the next generation of engineers.

So the door was open for a major rethink. We viewed that as an opportunity to give the Academy not what it had thought it had to have but something that it thought it could never have. We began to consider radically different creative approaches to the design of the logo and explored the symbolic representation of, for example, the Academy's quality of thinking and its 'people-centricity'.

The genesis of the concept that the Academy 'thought it could never have' was inspired by the first technology: the Neolithic hand-axe. Its creative development into a simple, elegant and striking symbol parallels the evolution of the ever-changing relationship between people and



Thinking out loud – brand language concept roughs

technology from the dawn of human intelligence to the latest technological advances. The symbol is both the focal point and the support for the name. And the logo is having a profound influence on the overall style of the Academy's materials. It has enabled us to completely reinvent them and help to move the Academy away from a predictable, 'geometric' visual style to an 'organic' brand language.

What has been achieved?

Our job is to help organisations to make a difference. The new logo and visual brand resolve the old logo's technical problems. It reflects and supports the Academy's refreshed strategic priorities and provides it with a clearly differentiating voice that will engage its new, wider range of audiences. The new visual brand is vibrant, dynamic and future-focused. ■

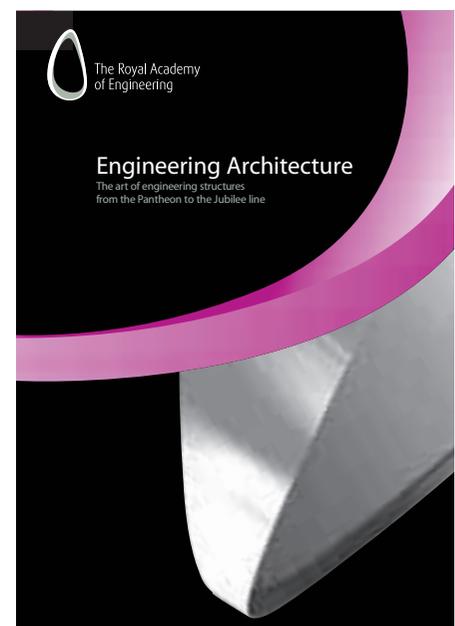
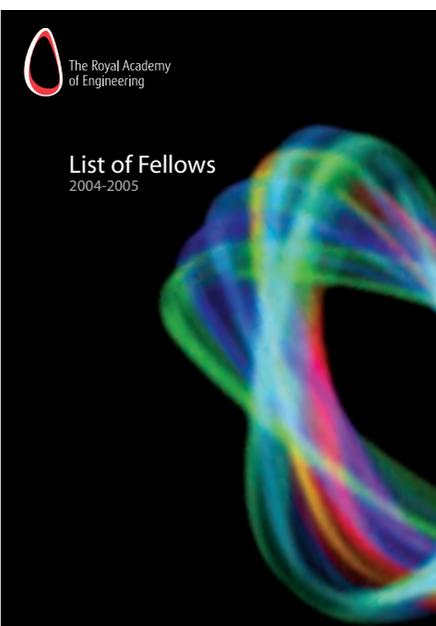
John Spencer is creative director of Spencer du Bois. His work for not-for-profit organisations aims to challenge attitudes and change the way people think. John is a Fellow of the Chartered Society of Designers.



Max du Bois is director of Spencer du Bois. He works with clients to identify where and how projects can make a real difference to an organisation and to guide their effective implementation.



Phil Lawder works with Spencer du Bois using his expertise in brand, research and planning strategy to help clients define their values and develop a powerful brand positioning.



Brand language – corporate cover, brochure, leaflet