

NO LOGO

An Editorial by Howard Woodhouse

Six years ago Howard Newby, vice chancellor of the University of Southampton in the UK proclaimed that “Branding is necessary for market credibility.” Name recognition is now considered a necessary condition for successful marketing in “the competitive education market.”

Even the wealthiest universities in the western world have succumbed to the price of corporate sponsorship. Oxford University, for example, accepted 20 million pounds sterling from Wafic Said to build a business school which bears his name. Mr. Said was named in a parliamentary inquiry into the sale of a supergun to Iraq as the agent responsible for brokering Britain’s 20 billion pound arms deal with Saudi Arabia. According to journalist George Monbiot, Mr. Said reached a settlement with the Inland Revenue in 1998 after investigators found that his companies had not paid the necessary British taxes. Nevertheless, he appointed six of the business school’s ten trustees. Lord Jenkins, chancellor of the University, announced that the gift would place Mr. Said among those “to whom Oxford has given immortality.”¹

University of Toronto entered into several “partnerships” during the 1990s of which one was a donor agreement with Peter Munk, together with his corporations Horsham and Barrick Gold. The agreement passed through the University’s oversight committees without objection even though it explicitly created a “business-academic relationship.” Mr. Munk agreed to donate \$6.4 million over 10 years to the Centre for International Studies. In return, an advisory board was established that included former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and advised by US President George Bush Senior. Since Mr. Munk could withdraw funding at any time during the 10 years if dissatisfied with the progress of the Centre, he was in a position to exert considerable influence over its teaching and research activities. No mention was made in the agreement of the need to protect academic freedom or other basic University policies.²

Now that the U of S has jumped on the branding bandwagon, one can only wonder at the future that awaits us. This is the starting point for Ron Marken’s satirical article that pokes fun at the antics of the University’s Visual Identity Review committee. In the tradition of Jonathan Swift, Professor Marken makes us laugh at the absurdities of branding while drawing attention to its dangers. Can the goal of public education to advance and disseminate shared knowledge survive the vicissitudes of the corporate market?

-
1. George Monbiot, *Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain* (London: Pan Books/MacMillan 2002), p. 288.
 2. Bill Graham, “Academic Freedom or Commercial License?” in James L. Turk (ed.), *The Corporate Campus: Commercialization and the Dangers to Canada’s Colleges and Universities* (Toronto: James Lorimer 2000), p. 24.

A Modest Proposal:
For Preventing The Post-Secondary Children of Saskatchewan
From Being A Burden to Their Parents or Country, and For Making Them and
the University Beneficial to The Public

By Ron Marken

With special thanks to the Dean, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Jonathan Swift,
and The Visual Identity Review Committee
© Ron Marken, October 2005

Small symptoms can point to big illnesses. A fever, a pain in the left arm, a spike in an ECG chart – each could forecast a life-threatening condition. Sadly, I have found two or three such symptoms in our own university. The exciting URL of the university's "Visual Identity Review Process" and recent reports of their doings in the press have opened my eyes and honed my diagnostic skills.

The Visual Identity Review committee defines its mission as "just one step in the [university's] brand development process, providing a managed degree of flexibility to creative uses of the U of S trademark shield." With the help of a reported \$80,000.00 budget and a generously-compensated external consultant, the committee is designing a new logo for our institution. It is all an essential "part of the broader branding process [providing greater 'uniformity']; we [will be] better able to raise our profile, build[ing] brand recognition" (<http://www.usask.ca/help/logo.html>). Just like Harvard, they reminded us in the StarPhoenix, the University of Saskatchewan can be a distinguished university if it has a distinguished (and distinguishable) trade mark. Create an exalted logo; you will be exalted. Again, I am reminded how much I admire the ineffable precision and elegance of bureaucratic prose: "providing a managed degree of flexibility to creative uses." Is that not gorgeous?

The Visual Identity Committee says, "how we are perceived by our stakeholders is how we want to be perceived" (On Campus, Oct 7/05, 5). If I understand that statement, I believe the committee works from two unassailable assumptions:

1. Every Student at the U. of S. will choose to come here because our signs all look alike.

2. Every Student who applies to Queen's, Harvard, or Oxford will do so because those institutions have developed brand recognition superior to our own. Their enhanced logos means better libraries and more illustrious faculties.

Obviously, it is absolutely crucial that we re-design our signs and our stationery. If we do, and if we make creative uses of them, everyone will register at the U. of S. and our stakeholders will perceive us as we want to be perceived. The logic is impeccable.

Naturally, the Visual Identity Review Committee's documents make intermittent references to teaching, research, reading, and writing, but their more important purpose is that "these new visual elements will ensure continuity of all materials produced by the University and its colleges, departments, and units."

The metaphors are eloquent: materials, production trade mark, logo, brand recognition. Whether those materials are letterhead, business cards, web sites, medieval philosophy, or graduating students, they must all be branded and used creatively. And, because they are materials, they can be marketed more flexibly if they creatively bear our trademark shield.

I urge you to consider the exciting possibilities.

Why stop with signage and letterhead, when there is substantial profit to be made? Astonishing cost cuts can be realized. It is all so simple. Because we turn out product and materials, we can imagine a future, educational utopia where our profile is raised to the ultimate heights.

Say goodbye to inadequate funding.

Silence all the disgruntled students and the rebellious, whining faculty.

Free us from the useless traditions of the past. We need no longer flog dead horses like Russian or Philosophy or Art History or Psychology.

Go boldly forth with the Visual Identity Committee and its mercantile trajectory, its branding process, its continuity of materials produced.

Everyone can be a stakeholder!

How? Simply by going all the way.

Sell our stuff!

Transform the University of Saskatchewan into the ultimate Big Box – the Saskatchewan Credit Union Eduplex!

With our vigorous branding initiative,

- we will have one logo, one identifiable trade mark shield for everything;
- we can advertise internationally;
- we can call our products “Vice-President’s Choice”; and
- we can bring on more multinational corporate sponsors – for colossal fees. We must not be small-minded. Why should Coke and Tim Horton’s be the only companies to call our shots? Invite WalMart to jump in, and General Motors, Home Depot, Proctor and Gamble, Libby’s, and The Gap.

It is all so obvious. Here is how we will creatively raise our profile, achieve our corporate goals, and brand our students.

Coming through the front entrance of our big box Saskatchewan Credit Union Eduplex, Customers (formerly called students) will be enthusiastically greeted by Apprentice Sales Personnel (ASPs; we used to call them graduate students), who will receive an hourly wage (limited benefits) to support themselves modestly while they are away from home, learning marketable skills in retail. These ASPs will wear green vests displaying our trade mark and saying, “Hi, my name is Josh / Debbie / or what have you! Have a nice day!”

Former CUPE support staff will be assigned custodial, stocking, and checkout du-

ties. They will wear trade mark shields on chains around their necks. We will give them a share (stake) in the company and call them Sales Associates, which will make performance evaluation much simpler.

Employees will be required to be keen at all times, working 8:00 - 4:00 or 4:00 – midnight shifts, seven days a week. Placing them on commission, making them stakeholders, will give them flexible incentive to contribute to the success of our strategic directions and raise our profile. Every shift will begin as employees sing, “The Saskatchewan Credit Union Eduplex Brand & Trade mark Song” in the parking lot, with branded flags. Attendance will be compulsory. Imagine how this show of trade mark loyalty will impress prospective Customers, and especially Maclean’s magazine.

Anonymous Demonstrators (formerly called Sessional Lecturers) will wear white vests, each emblazoned with a number and a huge version of our trade mark. They will wear no nameplates. Professors, over-paid whiners and ungrateful complainers, will be creatively downsized, cutting about 1,000 positions. Corporate sponsors like Wal-Mart will endorse such policies, of course, because The Saskatchewan Credit Union Eduplex will have no trouble-making unions and collective agreements.

Now, here is the nitty-gritty.

Our Eduplex will be segregated into transparent, Plexiglas learning silos, each displaying, demonstrating, promoting, and selling high-profile product, materials. Every Customer/Student will purchase a credit card (subject to a credit check by the Credit Union) for \$2,000. Using this card, she or he will shop the learning silos for enough credits to earn a degree of competence in something.

For example, swiping the card and watching a few long-division demonstrations at the “Numbers” learning silo will earn the Customer 1½ or 2 credits in that subject.

Going to the learning silo called “Words,” the Customer can get one full credit for renting the DVD version of any movie based on a book. There will be two Demonstrators per silo, and each will be able to answer Customers’ pene-

trating questions: "Is this any good?" or "What's this show about?" or "Got any flicks with Hilary Duff or Vin Diesel?"

The "E-Learning" learning silo will show Customers how to use Photoshop, download free music, and create marketable, 3D cartoon characters. Future Shop will give great deals on laptops.

Demonstrators in another learning silo, "Chemicals and Household Cleaners," can show curious customers how to turn clear liquids blue, or how to make cool volcanoes or their own toothpaste, using ordinary household products (available in aisle 73). Customers attending six such demonstrations can add a credit to their credit cards. And be sure to check out the bestseller DVD, "Chemicals are Your Friends," with screaming video starring Marilyn Manson.

The "Deep Thoughts" learning silo will sell customers flash cards with slogans to help them defend their cherished convictions: "Might makes right." "Guns don't kill people, people do." "Things go better with Coke."

Demonstrators in the musical learning silo, "A Few Tunes," will push best-selling CDs and give lessons on how to reach the Top Ten on "Canadian Idol."

Our jolly Demonstrators in the "It's Just a Play" learning silo can earn tips as jugglers and buskers.

In the "Décor and Pictures" learning silo, we will stock a selection of black velvet paintings, art posters of subjects that resemble reality, and paint-by-numbers kits, suitable for framing (frames available in aisle 18).

Psychology? Forget it! Teach "Popular Phrenology and ESP."

Astronomy will disappear. But Astrology will pack them in.

Demonstrators in the "Talk like a Foreigner" learning silo will give easy-to-understand tips on how to order food from menus in French, Spanish, Greek, German, Mandarin, Cree, Russian, or Latin. Customers can learn how to pick up chicks in Kiev and Barcelona. Customers can earn a couple of credits AND impress

exotic foreign dates when they tour Europe or the Pacific Rim!

If Customers are not moved to visit the Eduplex in person, they can order online from each learning silo's stock. Mixed media CDs will contain all the information needed to earn full credits, without leaving the comfort of a dorm room. For instance, everything important about a learning object like history (i.e. history of Saskatchewan since 1905) will be available, in point form, on one lavishly illustrated WebCT site, or on a DVD in the "Past Present & Future Shop" learning silo.

Dispensing valuable information this way will creatively eliminate crowded and expensive classrooms, allowing the university to admit up to 500% more customers. At 2005 rates, 18,000 customers pay roughly \$5,500 tuition each, adding \$10 million to the university's coffers. Increasing that population by a factor of five would bring the total to 90,000 customers. Even if we charge them only \$2,000 each, the revenue still leaps to \$180 million, raising our profile and profit by a factor of eighteen! These numbers show that the customers' dollars will make up the entire budget of the Eduplex, effortlessly. Charging non-Canadian customers double will boost the bottom line even more. And if we keep moving them through the Eduplex at a brisk clip, and if we keep our trademark shield prominently displayed, customers will spend more and more.

Administrators, in dark glasses and black suits, with discreet logos embroidered over their hearts, will be spending busy hours behind one-way mirrored windows, patrolling the silos, systematically reviewing each employee's productivity, cash-flow, attitude, personal appearance, hygiene, and enthusiasm for outreach and engagement. Closed-circuit TV and tracking by ankle-bracelets will assure employee efficiency.

And how will Administrators be reviewed? Simple. By their bottom line. Dollars = excellence. No one can argue with a 180% increase in profits.

Finally, with a full shopping cart, 90 credits on her credit card, and at least five books or CDs, a Customer can check out of the Eduplex, receiving a framed, fake parchment receipt, in

Latin, with her name on it – plus 10,000 Air Miles. That should be just enough for a one-way plane ticket to Calgary, where the jobs are. For another \$2,000.00, a Customer can go around again, filling a new shopping-cart, in order to earn Post-Customer status and 20,000 Air Miles.

Once we have definite trade mark recognition, we can do many exciting things:

- Advertise product;
- Offer discounts to stakeholders;
- Sell discontinued product at reduced rates, thereby attracting more Customers;
- Sell stakes on the Eduplex stake market.

Promote market-driven, PRACTICAL subjects. If welding in the petroleum industry is a hot item, for example, we can move it to the front of the plant. If seventeenth-century history does not show profit, we simply ship it to Winners or Value Village. Customers and stakeholders, because they know the true value of all things, will vote with their feet.

We will invent and creatively market Vice-President's Choice all-weather carpeting, gas mileage enhancers, video games about Prince Albert, and pop-up books about Natives, Wayne Gretzky, and Margaret Atwood.

But what about that Big Box? What will happen to our current buildings? Can our aging structures accommodate this brave new world?

Architectural changes to our physical plant will be costly, of course, but huge savings can be realized there as well:

Preserve half a dozen of the nicest physical plants and convert them to administration offices. Bulldoze the rest of the physical plants and set up a one Big Box physical plant right in the middle of the campus, surrounded by acres and hectares of asphalt. Parking will be handy, limitless, and free.

Or . . .

Sell the entire, old-fashioned, inefficient physical plant to the City of Saskatoon, at a profit. Then the City's rotating stable of designers and developers can joyfully bulldoze it for us. They can build the "Joni Mitchell Foods" strip mall where our library used to be. The Eduplex itself would be moved to Preston Crossing, joining all the other big box outlets there, closer to the stakeholders.

As a show of resolve, I recommend that – after we have printed the letterhead and made some lovely new signs – we must take the first high-profile step. Bulldoze the Arts Tower. No stakeholder will object.

Within two or three years, the institution will have realized sufficient profit to loose the icy grip of government funding altogether. The Saskatchewan Credit Union Eduplex will pay for itself, leaving huge resources for what we agree are absolutely essential silos: "Shining Bright Lights on Stuff," "Building Better Pesticides," and "Controlling Global Warming with More Hot Air."

Governments, unencumbered by secondary learning budgets, will be free to buy their own airplanes, pay large salaries to their friends, lavishly celebrate their many anniversaries, and steal chewing gum. They will have no frets or worries about the university grant. Taxpayers and whatever-the-conservatives-call-themselves-this-week will cheer often, and in unison.

Right now, you are probably saying to yourself, "You are dreaming! Such a utopia could never materialize in my lifetime."

I beg to differ. The Saskatchewan Credit Union Eduplex has already set out its Great Plan. Remember the Visual Identity Committee's published statement: "this is just one step." The groundwork has been laid. The first sod has been turned. Brand recognition and trade marking are the new reality. Missing only is the vision statement and the courage to move forward – all the way – into this brave new world of educational marketing. Holding their stakes aloft, the important people will celebrate our courage, creativity, and conviction. And they will absolutely love our new logo!

I desire those politicians and administrators who dislike my overture, and may perhaps be so bold as to attempt to contradict me, that they will first ask the parents of these student customers, whether they will not think it a great happiness to have been educated in the manner I prescribe. The student customers will thereby avoid such a perpetual scene of debt and unemployment as they have since gone through by the oppression of tuition, and the impossibility of paying that debt without money or trade, and the general uselessness of most of their current education for purposes of getting themselves lucrative employment.

I profess, in the sincerity of my heart, that I have not the least personal interest in endeavouring to promote this necessary transformation, having no other motive than the public good of my country, my province, and its children by advancing our trade, improving our usefulness, relieving the uneducated, and giving some pleasure to the rich. I have no children by which I can propose to get a single penny of benefit from this elegant scheme. My

own children, graduates of this institution, sadly unable to afford a stake, live in penury as actors, teachers, and Sessional Lecturers.

Or . . .

Some might argue that a still more challenging objective would see us focusing our resources on providing an affordable, rigorous, and liberal undergraduate education, fully preparing future generations of graduates to be critical, informed, creative, and humane citizens. As is the case with all other universities, our graduates would then be our trade mark. Through them we might achieve brand-recognition.

But, argue as you might, common sense will reveal the obvious dubious logic behind this soft-centred idealism: there is no bottom-line profit in that kind of foolishness. As is any other business, we are ultimately accountable to our stakeholders. We must plan and act accordingly.

The Vox Editorial Board would like to thank Professor Marken for his assistance in editing this issue of *VOX*.

Submissions to be considered for publication in *VOX* should be addressed to:

VOX
Room 20, Education Building
28 Campus Drive
Saskatoon SK S7N 0X1

Or they may be sent by email to: johanne.brassard@usask.ca

VOX is sponsored by the University of Saskatchewan Faculty Association and is published by an independent Editorial Board, whose members are:

Howard Woodhouse, Educational Foundations
Len Findlay, English/Humanities Research Unit

VOX may appear up to eight times a year, depending on the volume of submissions. All articles remain the property of the authors, and permission to reprint them should be obtained directly by them. All opinions expressed in *VOX* are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the position of the USFA or the Editorial Board.