

Project Selkie

*The recommended brand strategy for Shetland
Report*

Prepared for:

SIC and HIE

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1 Introduction

In March 2003 Corporate Edge was appointed to develop a brand strategy for Shetland by the Shetland Islands Council as a preface to the development of the brand itself.

The process adopted for this strategic stage consisted, in the first place, wide consultation with key people in Shetland and the analysis of relevant data. The most influential document was the SIC Economic Forum 2012 document. We also drew heavily on the insights gained from and the extensive international research Corporate Edge has carried out on other location branding exercises; and on various academic papers. From this data a first hypothesis was developed and subjected to a 'stress-test' by the Steering Group, whose responses helped shape the final recommendations.

Four focus groups with Shetlanders were conducted towards the end of the project, for which specially designed creative material was developed. The two major topics covered were: attitudes to the notion of developing a Shetland brand; and reactions to the idea of establishing an overall quality mark for Shetland, with accompanying quality control mechanisms. The findings from these groups are referred to throughout this document but can be found in greater detail in a separate document 'Research with Shetlanders on branding Shetland' which also shows the creative materials used.

Note: This document should be read in conjunction with Powerpoint presentation of 29.5.03 which deals with the points summarised below in greater detail and which contains a list of the sources which helped from the recommendations.

2 Why brand Shetland?

The reasons for developing a brand for Shetland are very clearly laid out in the SIC Economic Forum 2012 document. They were also articulated forcibly not only by those interviewed and the Steering Group but also by the Shetlanders consulted in the research.

The two major reasons are: first, that Shetland needs to develop a new strategy to direct the economy in the wake of the oil boom as these revenues decline; and a brand was felt to be a prime tool for this initiative; and second, on a more emotional level there is strong feeling that Shetland needs to reclaim its brand. The 'Shetland knitwear' application, for instance, was never established as a protected appellation which could be used only on knitwear emanating from Shetland.

Further directives were: a need to justify the high margins imposed on all Shetland produce and products by the distance from key markets and the small scale of production; to increase repeat purchase, especially from those visiting the country, and thereby add more profitable revenue; to inspire higher quality delivery and added value; and to reposition Shetland as 21st century.

The task of the brand thus emerges very clearly. Overall it is to reinstate the Shetland brand for the 21st century. Externally it must persuade the world to buy what Shetland offers. And internally it must inspire the people of Shetland to unify behind that offer and deliver its promise.

3 The factors that shape the brand

Focus on exports and tourism

All the economic data indicate that the focus of the brand has to be exports and tourism, as these are Shetland's main revenue streams; with a slightly greater emphasis on exports. Other studies have shown that money spent on promoting exports achieves a disproportionate impact on an economy. Promoting exports also helps build the right kind of image for tourism.

Concentration on the target market of 'successful idealists'

Shetland's distance and scale and the nature of what it offers rules out a mass-market audience. The people who currently buy what it offers are at the top end of international societies: older, affluent but putting a value on values and liking 'rarity'. They prefer to visit a place which is not only different but also highly distinctive; and to buy produce and products from a culture whose values they admire. The ambition for Shetland is better to understand these people and thus deliver more fully; and thereby increase the repeat purchase rates which are currently unnecessarily low.

Positioning as 'a small, clever country'

Shetland is in danger of being seen as a 'pre-modern society': simple, admirable but lost in a time warp. In line with the strategies adopted by Brittany and Ireland, Shetland needs to join the 21st century group of small countries which have achieved economic success by showing the world that they are highly focused and have sophisticated minds. Singapore and New Zealand are two shining examples of this.

A premium and quality offer

The impact of distance and scale has always meant that what Shetland sells is expensive. But the quality of what Shetland offers is thought to be high and this, plus relative inaccessibility, means the expense is thought to be justified by the target market; with the caveat that poor quality examples seriously undermine this belief. The narrow range of Shetland's products and produce indicates that the Shetland proposition needs to centre round Shetland as a special and specialised place, whether as a place to visit or a source of premium products.

Can Shetland deliver this quality promise?

The Steering Group and other key people interviewed expressed considerable anxiety about the ability and willingness of Shetlanders to deliver the quality promise. This was felt to stem partly from the "feather-bedding" of the oil boom years; partly from the Shetland mind-set which, it has been said, can interpret 'service' as 'servitude'. The clear directive for the brand is that it should persuade and inspire the delivery of higher quality rather than dragoon or bully people to conform.

4 Finding the spirit of the brand

To be persuasive a brand needs more than the bare bones of the strategic intent – it needs inspiration as well. And for it to be persuasive to Shetlanders it needs to reflect the islands' character in a way that is recognised and approved of by Shetlanders.

Shetland's character is formed by the nature of its landscape, its people and its products and produce. The influence of each of these on each other produces the following three elements.

Soul

Shetland may be said to have 'soul'. The landscape has been formed by the people who in turn have been influenced by the land and sea environments. Shetland's built heritage is witness to the depth of its culture and the vitality of its music, for instance, is witness to its breadth. Vitality is also evident in the abundance of wildlife and the strength of community bonds. Shetland's past and present are thus integrated.

Origins

One of Shetland's characteristics which is highly attractive to the identified target market (see above) is that its characteristic products originate there; whether these be the produce of the sea and land or, in the case of knitwear, uniquely designed and crafted there. The magic of the unique landscape and the enduring vitality of the culture enhance this originating authenticity. Shetland's products and produce therefore carry the attractive aura of Shetland itself.

Fineness

This has a double derivation. First it comes from a set of admirable values which Shetlanders demonstrably share and enact (like trust and honesty); and second from the quality and type of products for which Shetland is known; epitomised by the subtlety of the renowned heirloom shawls, fine enough to pass through a wedding ring.

These aspects of the spirit of the brand were strongly endorsed by the focus groups which gives confidence that the brand, if it reflects these elements, will be resonant with Shetlanders and thus recommended as the 'brand essence' (see below).

5 The recommended Shetland brand template

Vision – *what do we want to be?* – self-reliant, successful Shetland

Self-reliance is innate in the Shetland attitude so this constitutes the heart of the “give Shetland back to Shetland” ambition and is thus the antidote to the feather-bedding of the oil boom years.

Goal – *how will we know if we have succeeded?* – export + tourism goals achieved

These are the goals which the brand is designed to achieve and against which the brand should be measured. Quantitative goals ensure a brand is effective. Without them a brand lacks essential bone structure and is open to accusations of wasting time and money.

Philosophy – *what will inspire us?* – excellence

Shetlanders have demonstrated a philosophy of excellence in certain fields and, according to the focus groups, one to which people would like to return. This constitutes a call to action for quality delivery, but through voluntary agreement rather than externally imposed rules. It is essential if Shetland is to justify its necessarily high prices.

Positioning – *where do we want to be ‘placed’?* – a small, clever, specialised country

Shetland needs to avoid classification with struggling small communities who are “primary and peripheral”. To do this it is essential to demonstrate ‘cleverness’ i.e. proactive astuteness about what is offered and to whom. And to be focused. Shetland is a special and specialised country. Being focused and demonstrating single-mindedness can, like Singapore, achieve disproportionate impact.

Focal customer – *who do we focus on?* – successful idealists

As described above, Shetland’s scale of production, the nature of what it offers and its distance dictates its target market must be one of quality not quantity. Shetland already attracts this target market, but gets insufficient repeat purchase. It will be important to learn more about these international customers and to design the brand to speak their language.

Proposition – *what’s our offer?* – a rich, rare quality experience

This derives from what Shetland, at its best, already offers. It is what the target market seeks and what Shetlanders believe can be delivered. It applies equally to exports and tourism (including corporate tourism) and is capable of flexing to promote inward investment, sport, culture, education and special events.

6 The implications and recommendations

The brand template exactly fits the economic directives laid out in the Economic Forum 2012 document and, on direct evidence, suits the Shetland character and what it offers.

But there are three extremely important implications or caveats which need to be addressed if the brand is to achieve its objectives. Our recommendations show ways in which these issues can be managed to suit Shetland *and* achieve disproportionate impact i.e. help Shetland get more publicity for its brand than its promotional budget would normally allow.

6.1 Brand personality and application

The brand template is true to Shetland but not yet unique to it, much of it being generic to other small, northern European communities, especially Orkney with whom Shetland shares many if not most of its cultural and product characteristics. This problem can be overcome if Shetland can lay faster, better and more dominant claim to the brand territory. It can establish its dominant claim by developing a fresh, new, distinctively Shetland visual style and by managing the application of the brand to advantage.

The brand, as expressed in a visual style, will need to be designed with two roles in mind. First, as a 'master brand' it must seek to be used as widely as possible, the ambition being eventually for the logo to be displayed on everything Shetland and influence a general Shetland visual style. As such it must be persuasively 'user-friendly' and compatible with other logos. Second, as a 'component brand' it must seek to be compatible with other overarching brands, yet be distinct enough to make its particular point.

In other words, the brand template's structurally sound elements need careful and brilliant execution, plus excellent brand management systems, if the brand's potential is to be realised. High on the desirable brand management systems are the development of a 'style guide' to ensure the brand is always expressed correctly and the provision of a 'brand architecture' system to guide how the brand is used with other brands.

6.2 Quality delivery

The core issue for the brand.

The recommended role for the brand is that it should act as an inspirational and persuasive encouragement to Shetlanders to take an acute interest and pride in delivery quality. But it also needs mechanisms to be tough.

Thus we recommend that the Shetland logo should be a country-of-origin device which can only be used on products, produce or services which satisfy stringent quality standards.

The establishment of those standards will of course have to be set by each sector. We are aware that many sectors, particularly salmon, are already subjected to a range of externally imposed quality standards but if the Shetland brand is to assert itself as the master brand it must be master of what quality means.

New Zealand's pioneering of what a country of origin device can do to raise quality levels shows the way. The device is not open to all but must be applied for and it can be taken away if quality levels drop. Products or services which flourished the device were found to be successful in overseas markets so others increasingly applied. In other words the strategy worked by becoming desirable rather than being dictated. And unsanctioned usage, at home or abroad, was immediately denounced – which produced the added bonus of free publicity which considerably accelerated the quality claim of the brand.

Beyond standing for quality, as in the New Zealand example, we recommend that the device should also seek to emulate the Spanish model and engage the target market with a bold statement about 21st century Shetland. The now well-known España logo told the world, in one glance, that Spain was no longer solely interested in the cheap and cheerful end of the market but increasingly wanted the sophisticated top end customer. Shetland needs to show its target market that it may be small but it is also clever. There is no more instant and dramatic way to declare this than through the logo design values. This is another demonstration of disproportionate impact and, given the Spanish evidence, an equally instant way of telling Shetlanders that 21st century Shetland is about to make its mark.

6.3 Shetland commitment

Shetland is too small to allow for anything other than wholesale commitment to what the brand stands for and whole-hearted participation in its delivery.

This means not only the public sector which has initiated the branding process, but the private sector and the population as well showing a united front.

The brand template has been developed with this in mind. It has linked the economic objectives with the Shetland mind set. As such it should be not only intelligible but also persuasive to everyone in the islands. We have seen from the response to the initial creative work that both the ambition and the spirit of the brand make logical and emotional sense to people. How this can be achieved is described in the next section (A road show for Shetland).

7 The recommended brand realisation mechanisms for Shetland

The three key mechanisms strongly recommended to Shetland are: a road show to communicate the brand to all Shetland; the establishment of a brand task force to develop, monitor and promote the brand internally and externally; and aligning the Shetland portal to reflect the brand to the outside world.

7.1 A road show for Shetland

As yet the brand as it might be has only reached a minority of Shetlanders. But when the brand in its visual manifestation is created we recommend that a road-show be developed which takes the brand out to the whole population of Shetland; and that the heart of this show comprises a short film which explores and vividly expresses what the brand means; engages the interest of those who see it and inspires them to adopt the brand's principles. This film should be an integral part of the development of the brand personality (see above) and should be modelled on how commercial organisations now seek to communicate a corporate brand to their staff.

Shetland may also wish to consider developing the Shetland equivalent of the 'New Zealand Way' – a sort of 'how we do things now' credo about Shetland's quality platform and how the promise can be kept.

7.2 Establishing a brand task force

The brand task force is there to act as brand guardian and brand monitor. As the adoption of the brand increases, especially by the private sector, it will need dedicated and empowered personnel. This is the body which will own and direct the visual style and application of the brand and be expert in the use of the style guide. As such, marketing will be the key skill, but it is also recommended that the team be headed by a chairman who can fulfil a 'brand ambassador' role and a chief executive with as much overseas experience as possible. Both these roles will be key drivers for the export focus of the brand and to utilise the 'ex-pat' Shetlanders' wish to help promote Shetland overseas.

The brand task force will also constitute the quality control body. This will entail determining what quality means and deciding where the country of origin device can be awarded. (It is worth noting that in the early days of the Scotland Brand device many of those approached to carry the device were reluctant because these quality controls had not been established.) Advantage can be taken of the many existing QC standards in many sectors. The brand task force will not have to invent QC standards, though it should have a clear, declared policy as to what quality means overall.

7.3 The Shetland Gateway

The Shetland portal, the gateway, constitutes the no 1 promotional tool for the brand because it is how customers will frequently first encounter Shetland (and the target market is e-literate) and because it is wholly in the brand task force's control. It must thus immediately communicate Shetland's positioning as a small, *clever* country and its proposition of a rich, rare *quality* experience. The developed brand personality and the ensuing style guide will dictate much of how this is managed visually and verbally; but 'cleverness' and 'quality' will need to be demonstrated by excellent site management. Existing portals for Canada and Iceland represent good best practice models for Shetland.

7.4 Shetland 'icons' and experiences

Beyond these three essential mechanisms there is also the desirability of establishing and using Shetland 'icons' to work for the brand. The old icons of knitting and fishing will not be enough to establish Shetland as 21st century and while Jarlshof is an icon for Shetland's ancient past it is not enough to demonstrate Shetland's living vitality. Two initiatives are underway which will start to embody this: the development of the new Shetland Amenities Trust museum and the proposed development of a Shetland 'experience' at Sumburgh airport.

These two have the potential to deliver intensified versions of the Shetland experience and thus endorse a key element of the proposition. The airport initiative emerges as a significant factor in increasing repeat purchase (and promoting of Shetland products and produce). And the museum should be a really important mechanism for outsiders to access the 'magic' which has drawn them to Shetland and for Shetlanders to take increased pride in themselves. Through what is shown and how it is shown, these two initiatives can deliver the brand's ambition to embody a 21st century brand for Shetland.

8 End note

In the end a brand like Shetland's will be as much deduced as declared – if not more so. That is, customers will learn more from what they experience than what is officially expressed. This is desirable because what people deduce for themselves is far stronger than what is messaged 'at' them and this is particularly true of the target market of successful idealists. It is even more desirable if Shetland wants to pull off the ambition to achieve disproportionate impact, which can be summarised as thinking cleverly rather than spending money.

All the evidence from Project Selkie strongly suggests that Shetland has the reputation and the mind set to deliver the brand promise. Shetland may be currently preoccupied with anxieties about quality delivery, but quality is what Shetland is already associated with and Shetland opinion, as ascertained, shows interest in lifting the standard. So it is not the 'what' that is key to the brand's effectiveness but the 'how'. The brand template so far has been well received, as has the initial creative thinking round the brand essence. The key to full delivery is how it is executed in design terms and how the people of Shetland can be inspired to deliver the brand in full.