

MARKETING EXCELLENCE

British Airways

Reigniting brand
confidence

headline sponsor



Foreword

By Amanda Mackenzie

What is marketing excellence?



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Marketing excellence can drive breakthrough business results for the short and long-term. Marketing excellence requires great strategic thinking, great creative thinking and perfect execution.

But how do we assess marketing excellence? First we choose brilliant industry judges who are all experienced and successful practitioners of excellence and we ask them to pick out the cases which they see as remarkable. We ask them to look for two key qualities from our winners: creativity and effectiveness.

But marketing continuously changes and evolves, as consumers become more sophisticated and demanding and the media for communicating with them ever more diverse. So the standards for marketing excellence change and in turn become more demanding.

We believe that The Marketing Society Awards for Excellence in association with Marketing set the standard of marketing excellence in the UK.

They have established this reputation over a period of more than 28 years, and they have always been based on the principle of searching out the best examples of different marketing techniques in action, that showcase great strategic thinking, great creativity and perfect execution.

In order to be a winner of one of the Society's Awards, marketers have to demonstrate that what they have done is outstanding in comparison with marketing in all industries not just their own particular sector.

If a marketing story has been good enough to impress our judges, then all marketers can learn from it – however senior they have become. The collection of case histories brought together here is the best of the best from the past two years of our Awards, and I am confident that it truly demonstrates marketing excellence. As you read these case studies I hope you are inspired by them and impressed at the talent and expertise in our profession which created them.

British Airways

Reigniting brand confidence

Snapshot

A radical marketing strategy that embraced both internal and external audiences helped restore the brand's fortunes.

Key insights

- Over the last decade the British Airways brand had been under pressure from severe market upheaval.
- It decided to mount a vigorous campaign based on a marketing master plan which was centred on its core ethos of 'To fly. To serve.' and covered every touchpoint.
- Well aware that as a service brand success would stem from staff engagement, BA targeted its internal audience as firmly as its customers with the refreshed brand message.
- The result has been steady growth in key success measurements, including an enhanced profile through its social media presence.

Summary

The last decade has been a time of enormous change for the airline industry. For the UK's flagship airline, British Airways (BA), it has meant focusing on restructuring the business, transforming its operations and, more recently, entering into strategic relationships with other airlines.

By 2010 the time was ripe for revitalising the brand's relationship with customers. This centred on a comprehensive campaign to underline its commitment to its core ethos: 'To fly. To serve.' The starting point was to put service back at the heart of the business. This was bolstered by an integrated campaign spanning TV, social media and print, while a film was created to win both internal and external backing for the 'To fly. To serve.' message. To ensure that it struck the right note, it featured those who embodied the culture: BA pilots.



Figure 1. Leading the industry

Source: ba.com

Other elements included documentaries with customers, extensive blogging, outdoor ads and print. By 2012, with the arrival of the London Olympics, thanks to these internal and external efforts, BA was ready to take its place as the official airline partner with pride. More significantly, improved brand and revenue performance measures continue to reflect the success of the campaign.

Facing testing market challenges

BA spent the majority of the 20th century leading the commercial aviation industry since its early beginnings when it operated as Imperial Airways. The airline was instrumental in helping pioneer the technology needed to make global air travel a viable reality while acting as a torchbearer for premium customer service in the air. From the British royal family to famous UK footballers, everyone chose to fly the airline (Figure 1).

However, from 2001 there had been a series of external and internal challenges that took the world-class airline from leadership to a fierce competitive battle for consumers' hearts and minds. Not only did the airline also face increasing competition from an evolving category of lower-cost competitors who were challenging its short-haul European routes, but foreign premium

airlines were squeezing the brand's global long-haul network.

By 2010 the company was at a crossroads: continue to chase short-term sale revenues or take a step back and figure out how to be a leader again by reminding customers of the brand's strengths (Figure 2). The result was its first major brand campaign in more than ten years.

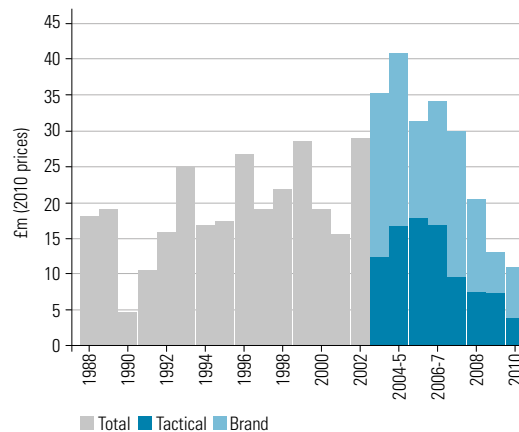


Figure 2.

Source: Nielsen & ZenithOptimedia

Getting the airline back on track

The company began to prepare for its comeback by embarking on Project Flight Path, which aimed to uncover those areas where the brand could claim leadership. It went back to basics, asking questions such as:

- Who should the brand be targeting?
- What is the airline's brand difference?
- What are the must-win battles?

The answers showed that flyers still had a latent love for the brand, and that the brand's core foundations remained intact: passion and expertise for flying coupled with human, 'British' service. This helped determine the three pillars of strength for the BA brand:

- Superior flying know-how
- Thoughtful service
- British style

(Figure 3).

Superior flying know-how

- 90 years of flying heritage
- Pilots recognised as the best in the world
- Safety and engineering setting world standards
- Innovation that makes travel seamless

Thoughtful service

- Service that is warm
- Recognises and respects individuals
- Staff are trained to handle any situation

British style

- Understated design elegance
- Champions of contemporary British style and talent
- Partnering with the best of Britain

Figure 3. Three pillars of strength

Source: Project Flightpath

Marketing renaissance

The challenge for the company's agency, Bartle Bogle Hegarty (BBH), was to take these learnings and bring them to life through an idea that would put the brand back on a leading path (See: 'A manifesto for the brand's rebirth').

The result was a long-term, three-step approach to execute 'To fly. To serve.' in order to build confidence and commitment and regain leadership. First, the idea of 'To fly. To serve.' had to be given meaning. The ethos had strong provenance, having once been painted on all the airline's aircraft and was still stitched into every crew member's jacket and every pilot's hat. If brought to life at every touchpoint, this ethos would have the potential to reignite the brand's leadership ambitions (Figure 4).



Figure 4. 'To fly. To serve.' crest

Source: BA/For People

A manifesto for the brand's rebirth

"In a situation like this there is no point in promising something the brand cannot deliver. No point making claims that the customer can easily refute through their own experiences. No point hiding behind a glossy ad campaign that simply attempts to paper over the cracks. This is a moment in time when an airline must speak about itself. And for itself.

We need to reach back inside the brand in the knowledge that we are seeking the rebirth of a brand, not just the creation of the next ad campaign. To do that we have to find the fundamental truths that remain alive in British Airways, even if dulled by events of the last few years. Truths that can resonate not only with the customer but also help re-energise a disillusioned and demotivated staff.

For, at the end of the day, British Airways' product is its people. Deep down in British Airways still lie the values of expertise and passion. What has and still does define British Airways is its passion and unrivalled expertise for flying and commitment to making the experience special for everyone.

It is that expertise, built over decades and generations, that lies at the heart of the deep trust we believe still exists for British Airways, notwithstanding all the problems of recent times. These are the values and truths that need reigniting. We make no apology for proposing the return to centre stage of the four words that are, as we have said before, literally stitched into the fabric of the airline. Words that capture so succinctly the truths we are talking about: To fly. To serve."

Nigel Bogle, BBH, 24th February 2011

The three steps would then encompass the key elements for revival: colleagues, customers and culture. Restoring colleague morale and putting service back into the heart of the business would be critical. With the staff on board the airline could reach out to customers and, through successive marketing campaigns with the opportunity of the Olympics in London in 2012, reassert itself firmly back into contemporary culture.

1. Engagement strategy

An engagement strategy was created to affect the turnaround. It would reach out first to colleagues who would then help deliver it to customers. It was important to develop a series of assets that appealed simultaneously both to the internal and external audience (Figure 5). It started with making 'To fly. To serve.' a visible commitment by painting it back onto the planes.

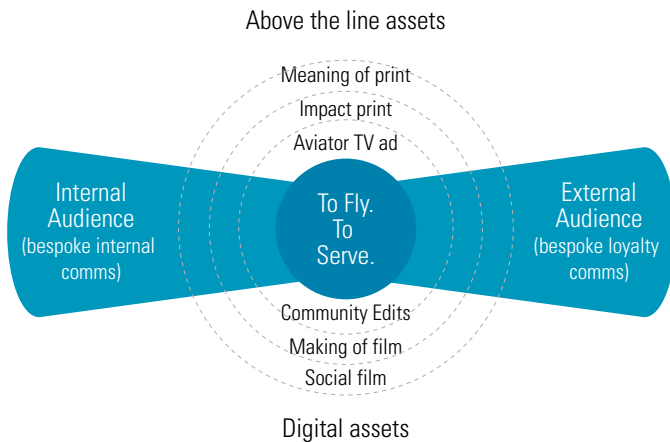


Figure 5. Engagement strategy.

Source: BBH

2. Media strategy

It had been ten years since BA had been involved with brand-led marketing. The airline needed a big impact to get its brand message across to customers and demonstrate to staff that the brand was again aiming for the top.

In 2011 yoghurt maker Yeo Valley and BBH described how they had employed a 'Super Bowl/ Super Social' media engagement strategy. For this relaunch campaign, BBH took this further with a Super Bowl /Super Social Plus campaign strategy (Figure 6).

3. The campaign

A film was then created to act as the heart and soul and to align internal and external audiences with the new ethos. It was essential that it was representative of the people who would live it: the BA staff. 'Aviators', a 90" and 60" film, featured thirteen BA employees and focused on the most iconic examples of 'To fly. To serve.': BA pilots.

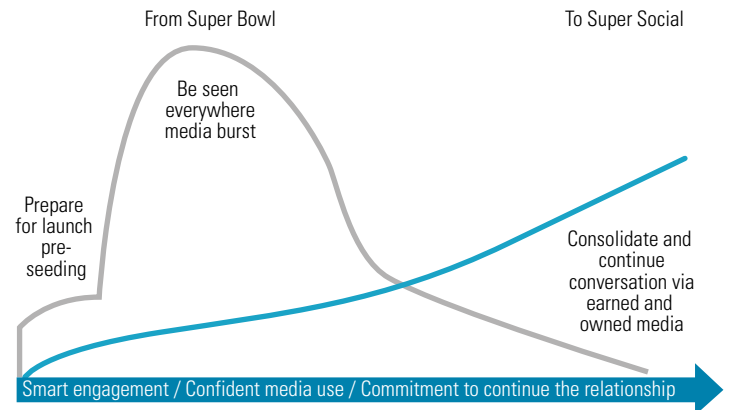


Figure 6. Super Bowl/Super Social media engagement strategy

Source: BBH

A number of steps followed:

- Step one: re-engage with an internal audience.**
 BA staff members were the first to be shown the film and be engaged in presentations held at the brand's hub, Heathrow's Terminal 5. At these sessions the company announced a five-year, £5 billion reinvestment plan. The company was announcing its plans to get back on top, to empower its staff and put the customer back at the heart of the business. After years of aggressive cost-cutting, the brand was now committing the business to regaining leadership.
- Step two: re-engage with the external audience.**
 The next step was to reconnect with passionate flyers. These brand loyalists, properly engaged, would help promote the brand during the Super Bowl launch and act as brand advocates during the Super Social phase. This was the first step for the brand to take to rebuild its connection to customers.

Footage from the 90" film was re-cut into seven separate films and combined with bespoke footage and interviews from behind-the-scenes. These short documentaries were seeded prior to campaign launch. Each film was aimed at a specific consumer group who still felt strongly about the airline and its history. A dedicated blogger team contacted each group and built a relationship, sharing the films and exclusive information about the forthcoming launch.

- Step three: campaign launch.**
 The campaign TV ad was unveiled on the 21st of September 2011. It was first premiered on the brand's Facebook page at 11am, followed by the TV premiere on Channel 4 that evening. The launch



Figure 7. Campaign press assets

Source: BBH

film was supported by outdoor and press assets to help create greater impact around 'To fly. To serve.'. Figure 7 shows examples of the press activity designed to demonstrate the airline's total commitment to its manifesto.

- Step four: sustaining the campaign.**
 Ads focusing on what the ethos meant followed on from those geared to creating maximum impact. These ads were designed to avoid airline category clichés by showing BA service benefits through staff-led brand truths.

On the digital platform online films told more in-depth stories of the people who lived the brand values. For example, 'Kite Surfer' was the story of a BA pilot and world champion kite surfer, emphasising her passion and commitment to flying. 'Africa Relief' followed the story of the BA volunteer team as they transported a plane load of Unicef aid from Europe to east Africa and back in under 24 hours.

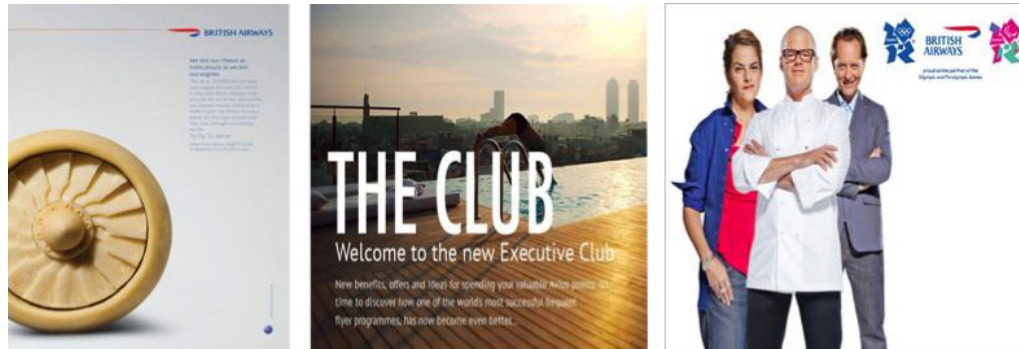


Figure 8. Customer service brand improvements

Source: BBH & Ogilvy

Going for Olympic gold

From the outset, BA was determined to restore the passion and pride among its staff and lay the groundwork for the airline to move into the Olympic year as official airline partner, with momentum and confidence as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The 'We're Ready' campaign was the company's demonstration of 'To fly. To serve.' through an Olympic lens. The £5 billion reinvestment into the business was beginning to bear fruit and, with talk of chaos and upheaval in the lead-up to the Games, the airline wanted to communicate the fact that it could perform beyond expectations.

In print, the airline talked about the capabilities of its staff serving the equivalent of three Olympic-sized pools worth of tea on board, and laying enough cable in new aircraft to cover an Olympic track eighty times. On TV BA wanted to demonstrate the readiness of the one part of the business customers were most disappointed with: the baggage crews.

During this period BA also unveiled multiple brand improvements to enhance customer service, including the food and an improved Executive Club (Figure 8).

Having engaged customers through its Olympic warm-up campaign, BA now asked what 'To fly. To serve.' demanded of the airline as the Olympic Games approached: 'What could BA do to demonstrate it is the most patriotic supporter of Team GB?' The airline was aware that to achieve this it needed an idea that reached out not only to customers but also to the culture itself.

The momentum from its new ethos gave the company enough confidence to develop an idea so bold that it would guarantee cultural relevance for it during the Games. The 'Don't fly' campaign gave BA a legitimate role to play in the Games by enabling it to command a new, confident tone in communications while it was directing all activity into supporting and spurring on the home athletics team. To the tune of the Clash's 'London Calling', BA physically taxied people from the airport to the Games, while online BA let people get involved by taking a BA plane down their street (Figure 9).

Meanwhile, in print, BA rallied the nation to show its support for the teams and rally the home advantage. A wide array of different activities were carried out during both the Olympics and Paralympics games, including sponsoring ParkLive at the Olympic Park and running daily reactive press ads supporting the athletes.

Enjoying brand renewal

1. Re-connecting with colleagues

The first step of the brand relaunch was to re-engage colleagues. BA needed to re-establish morale and a sense of purpose among its 36,000 staff. The 'To fly. To serve.' kick-started this objective, with eight out of 10 employees reporting that they were proud to work

for BA. With each wave of successive activity, the morale of the staff continued to grow to new heights in step with the brand's renewed marketing confidence.

After just over the two years of the initiative:

- 91% said they were proud to work for BA.
- 87% said working for BA made them want to do the best they could.
- 92% were confident that BA would be successful in the future.
- 87% would speak highly of BA's products.
- 67% would speak highly of BA's customer service.
- 71% would recommend BA as a great place to work.

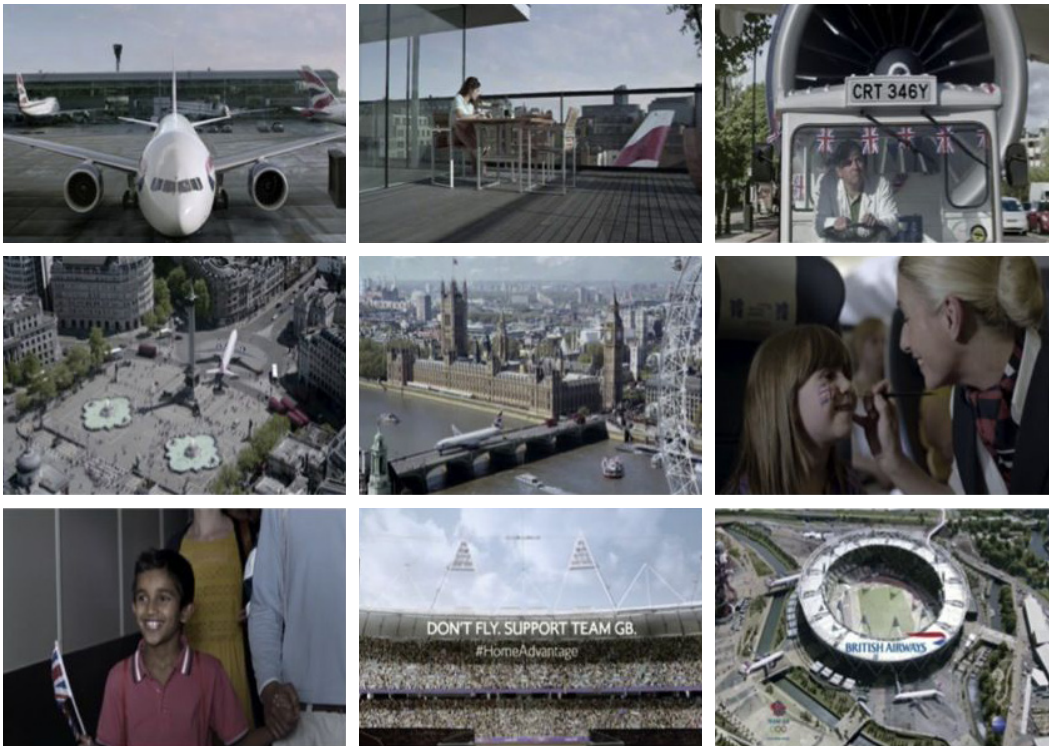


Figure 9. 'Don't fly' campaign

Source: BBH

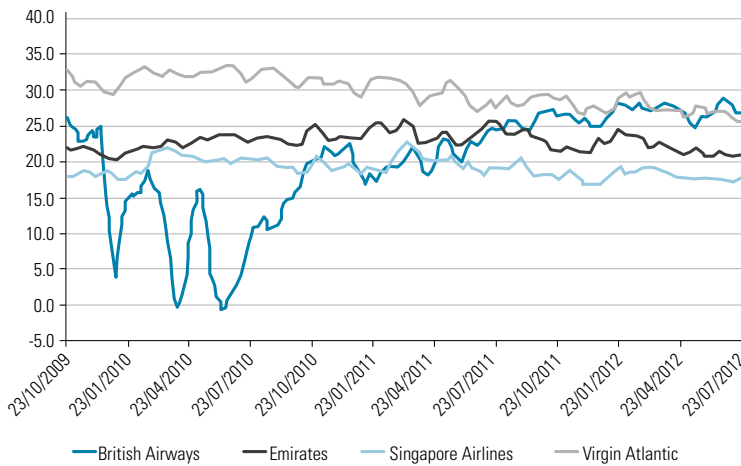


Figure 10. UK's favourite airlines

Source: YouGov

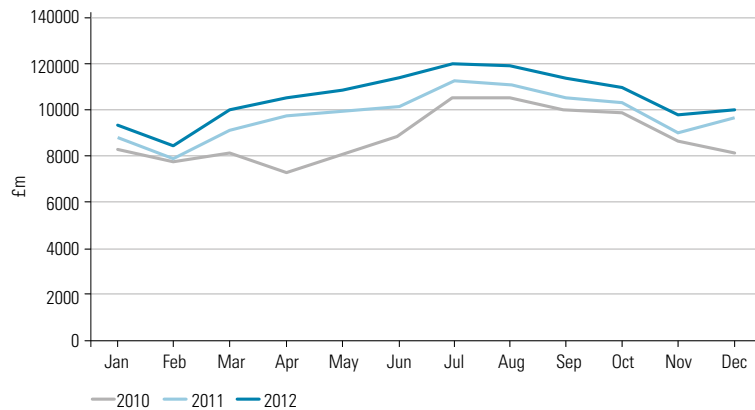


Figure 11. BA month by month revenue

Source: IAGshares.com

2. Focusing on customers

Brand measures that looked at customer perceptions of the airline rose significantly after 'To fly. To serve.' and have continued to rise with each successive campaign. 'Desire', a BA brand metric that tracks customer choice when price is removed, has seen strong growth with each brand campaign. In addition, the brand's key success measurement, 'bonding' has also risen year on year. So, while it had taken ten years for the brand to slip on this measure from 30% to 10%, in the space of twelve months there was a 5% rise.

3. Culture

Since the launch of 'To fly. To serve.' the airline's social media presence has increased in significance, contributing to its reconnected role in culture. Independent bodies confirmed this, with YouGov judging BA to be the UK's favourite airline (Figure 10).

Meanwhile, BA enjoyed successive periods of sustained growth from the campaign's inception, with month-on-month rises in revenue since 2010 (Figure 11).

About The Marketing Society



Inspiring bolder marketing leaders

The Marketing Society is an exclusive network of senior marketers. Over the past 54 years we have emerged as one of the most influential drivers of marketing in the business community. The Society challenges its members to think differently and be bolder marketing leaders by supporting the development of leading-edge thinking and promoting the evidence of effective marketing. We do this through The Marketing Society Awards for Excellence, our publication Market Leader and in the online Clubhouse. Our well-respected calendar of world class events provides extensive networking opportunities and inspiration with speakers including Lord Sebastian Coe, Sir Terry Leahy and Paul Polman.

We are the place for discerning marketers to learn, develop and share best practice.

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MARKETING EXCELLENCE

“A treasure trove of case study examples covering the whole waterfront, from launching new brands to revitalising, sustaining and extending established ones, and from insights to advertising and sustainability. Whatever your business, they should make you proud to be a marketer, shake up your thinking and inspire you to go the extra mile.”

Professor Patrick Barwise, London Business School, Chairman of Which?

“These cases are a great source to stimulate your thinking. Some will stimulate new thoughts; some will unlock ideas from the back of your memory. All of them however are great fuel for growth.”

Keith Weed, Chief Marketing and Communication Officer, Unilever

Published in 2013, this series of award-winning case studies features some of the world's leading brands:

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