Public-Private Partnerships: The New World of Partnership Branding

Terry Tyrrell   Chairman, Brand Union
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From public health to education, alliances between the public and private sectors are set to grow as brand partnerships are increasingly used to deliver and communicate policy goals. This challenges both sides to demonstrate true brand alignment beyond the superficial level of putting their logos side-by-side. The exponential benefits of getting it right are huge. However, to succeed will require large multinational corporations to radically change their cultures; and public sector organisations to become more proactive, assertive managers of their own brands.

Private sector brands can play five key roles in partnership with the public sector:

1. Replacing the voice of government
2. Providing a public service at no cost to the taxpayer
3. Harnessing the power of the private sector to effect behaviour and social change on a global scale
4. Philanthropic partnerships to deliver public policy objectives
5. Data sharing partnerships

In this article, we explore how public sector organisations should select partners and offer guidelines for successful brand partnerships.

Public sector organisations should think carefully about who to partner with and how to execute the brand partnership. Questions include:

- What is the purpose of the partnership?
- What value does the partnership create for citizens or beneficiaries?
- Does the potential partner share a common purpose and set of values?
- Are our brands compatible?
- What is the role of brand in achieving our mission?
- How should our brand partnership be represented visually and verbally? What is the appropriate hierarchy and architecture for our brand partnership?
- How will our brand partnership be managed and governed?
What do we mean by a ‘brand’?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What makes a brand?</th>
<th>What are the characteristics of a Strong brand?</th>
<th>What are the benefits of a strong brand?</th>
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</table>
| A brand is what an organisation means in people’s minds. Brands are built through the positive experiences people have of an organisation’s products, services and increasingly, the reputation of the company itself and the contribution it makes to society and the wellbeing of peoples’ lives. The cumulative effect of positive experiences build differentiation, trust, and long-term customer loyalty. | Strong brands have distinctive and unique stories that define:  
• What they do  
• What they stand for  
• Why they exist  
And how they tell the story through:  
• Narrative and tone of voice  
• Design, symbolism and visual identification  
• The behaviours that make up the experiences people have with the brand | Strong brands:  
• Create tangible value  
• Make choices easier  
• Capture price premiums  
• Generate high levels of loyalty  
• Attract and retain top talent  
• Tend to outperform the stock market  
• Survive, even on ‘testing’ times  
Over the past seven years, the S&P 500 increased 23% in market value. In contrast, the BrandZ™ Portfolio of the strongest brands appreciated 58% |

‘Great’ companies will be ‘good’ companies

Corporate reputations are no longer solely based on shareholder returns. Companies are under scrutiny like never before and consumers will vote with their wallets if they see that they are not acting ethically or contributing to social good. As ‘great’ companies strive to become ‘good’ companies, they will work increasingly in collaboration with governments, NGOs and international agencies. For corporate brands, future survival will be about building and preserving reputation and honouring the company’s brand promise. Doing good will become a licence to operate, no longer a CSR initiative but part of the ‘purpose’ of business, the reason they exist.

The public sector is ahead of the game in partnering

Governments across the world have for some time recognised the benefits of partnering with the private sector. Initially these alliances were driven by commercial imperatives. Government would benefit from additional investment for public development initiatives with the private sector organisations benefiting from an eventual profit from the investment and as a reward for taking on a share of the risk. So on paper a win-win all round.

<table>
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<th>Private Sector</th>
<th>Public Sector</th>
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</table>
| • Access to commercial opportunities  
• Mitigating regulation  
• Supporting relevant societal issues  
• Category leadership  
• Increased brand equity throughout goodwill | • Increased acceptance & credibility  
• Financial support  
• Government voice counter-productive  
• Greater impact  
• Acceleration of policy delivery |
Partners or partnering?
The challenge for both sides is now is to go beyond ‘partnering’ to becoming real partners. Partnering and partners are very different. Partnering is an exercise that takes advantage of a situation for mutual benefit – albeit with the best intentions.

Becoming partners requires a deeper, more meaningful relationship where it is clear what role each partner plays and the ‘fit’ or brand compatibility of each partner.

Here we look at the five roles that the private sector can play as a partner to the public sector. We then look at the factors public sector organisations should consider when choosing a company to partner with, and some guidelines for making brand partnerships successful.

The five roles of private sector brands
There are fundamentally five roles that private sector organisations can play as a brand partner to the public sector.

1. Replacing the voice of government
Brands can play an important role communicating messages to the public persuasively on behalf of government. Brands can often be more credible and trusted messengers than governments on a particular issue. Brands may also be able to use their channels to reach large audiences that government may find difficult or very expensive to engage.

AT&T’s “It Can Wait” campaign against texting and driving (USA)
AT&T launched a major campaign to educate people – especially teens – about the dangers of texting and driving. Over 3 million people pledged never to text and drive. A great example of a private organisation supporting a public service education campaign. Clearly great too for the AT&T brand to be seen to be acting responsibly and in the public interest.
Change4Life campaign (UK)

Change4Life is a campaign to encourage positive behaviour change towards healthy lifestyles in England. The campaign is government instigated but has never been a government-owned brand. Instead, it allows everyone with an interest in healthier lifestyles to partner with government in a wider social movement for health. A large set of Change4Life resources and branding collateral is available for partners and supporters to use free of charge to support their health and well-being work. In this example, a national newspaper and supermarket chain use the Change4Life brand to promote healthy summer recipes.

2. Providing a public service at no cost to the taxpayer

Some brands choose to provide a public service. We distinguish here specifically between brands acting as paid contractors for government and those who provide a service to the public free of charge.

OUTurance Pointsmen (South Africa)

Johannesburg has a chronic traffic congestion problem and not enough police to direct traffic at junction grid-locks. Over the past six years, thousands of motorists around Johannesburg have come to rely on the assistance of the ‘OUTurance Pointsmen’. OUTurance is a leading South African insurance company that in addition to providing millions of motorists with car insurance every year, do their bit by providing a public service by helping to alleviate traffic congestion, contribute towards road safety, and create job opportunities in underprivileged communities. As the photograph shows, OUTurance Pointsmen are highly visible and provide a vital public service. Their partnership with The Metropolitan Police Department is common knowledge and does not need to be made visible through co-branding.

Image courtesy of OUTurance
3. **By harnessing the power of the private sector to effect behaviour and social change on a global scale**

Some brands have the power to shift social norms through their core commercial activity. This trend has been led by the FMCG sector, which has partnered with global development organisations to tackle sustainability and public health issues on a massive scale.

The **Global Public-Private Partnership for Handwashing with Soap** (PPPHW) aims to give families, schools, and communities in developing countries the power to prevent diarrhea and respiratory infections by supporting the universal promotion and practice of proper handwashing with soap. The aim is to change the handwashing behaviour of one billion people by 2015. Major commercial partners include Unilever and Proctor & Gamble. It is these two massive consumer brands that give this amazing initiative its credibility. Unilever’s Lifebuoy brand has such global awareness that its name alone is a major catalyst to drive change. With 7,140 mothers every minute choosing Lifebuoy across Latin America, Asia and Africa, the voice of the Lifebuoy brand talks to them about how to protect their children from diarrhoea and pneumonia through hand washing with soap, suddenly, reaching a billion people seems achievable. A great example of how the power of a brand can achieve so much more than a public sector organisation ever could.

4. **Philanthropic partnerships to deliver public policy objectives**

Private sector brands increasingly partner with public sector organisations via their philanthropic or charitable arms. The company and the public sector partner work together to tackle social issues that resonate with the brand.

**IKEA Foundation and UNICEF**

The largest corporate cash donor to UNICEF, IKEA Foundation has committed more than $200 million in both cash and in-kind donations to UNICEF’s programs to save and improve the lives of children and their families. For more than 10 years, IKEA has been a key supporter, contributing to UNICEF’s work through philanthropic donations, sales of UNICEF Greeting Cards, cause-related marketing promotions, in-kind assistance and national-level fundraising and promotional activities by IKEA customers and employees around the world. But IKEA have taken this further to make it a true partnership by engaging directly with issues affecting children, such as child labour.
5. Data-sharing partnerships

Governments around the world are under pressure to open up their data sets to encourage transparency, better service provision and innovation. Now the private sector is starting to join the open data movement too, creating a new form of public-private partnership.

Making Brand Partnerships Work

Brand Compatibility

True partnership requires brand compatibility. Brand compatibility is rarely considered when brands decide to co-habit and can often result in an early break up. When Mercedes-Benz merged with Chrysler in the late 1990s, it was called a “merger of equals.” A few years later it was being called a “fiasco.” Discordant company cultures had the two divisions at war and in 2007 they admitted failure to integrate and agreed to split. Simply put it was a bad brand fit.

On the surface, there are some inherent contradictions between approaches to brand in the public and private sectors (see below). So this poses the question:

Should government think more carefully about the compatibility and motives of the private sector businesses they partner with?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Private Sector</th>
<th>Public Sector</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Delivery of a profitable return to investors</td>
<td>• Delivery of government policies and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Commercial focus</td>
<td>• Behaviour change focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Highly competitive</td>
<td>• Little or no competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accountable to shareholders</td>
<td>• Accountable to the electorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scale restricted to business areas</td>
<td>• Scale tends to be huge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Brands tend to be holistic built around customer experiences</td>
<td>• Brands tend to be badges or campaign initiatives built around behaviour change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Brands tend to be seen as part of business strategy</td>
<td>• Brands tend to be seen as a communications tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organisations relatively stable</td>
<td>• Government tenure 4 years (or less)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Loss of trust and integrity</td>
<td>• Trusted to ‘do the right thing’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Choice</td>
<td>• Little or no choice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UP Singapore Hackathon, sponsored by Singapore Power

Hackathons using government data have become a popular way to kick-start innovative solutions. Uniquely, the Singapore government and Singapore Power co-sponsored a hackathon combining public and private sector datasets on energy consumption. 18 prototypes were created in just 48 hours. An amazing example of how providing access to public data to trusted intermediaries can generate such a wealth of ideas and creative thinking that could never be achieved by government alone.
Brand Fit

Partnership Branding is much more than the logo of a public sector body alongside the logo of a private sector organisation. A superficial ‘paint job’ will not fool consumers or citizens for long. From a brand fit point of view there are a number of vital considerations in the process of judging compatibility and defining the principles of partnership:

- **Values** – Ensuring the alignment of the partners’ brand values, having a common vision and clarity of ownership are the essential ingredients for success
- **Value proposition** – Having an overarching value proposition that underpins the campaign or initiative that is relevantly linked to the brand values of both the public and private partners
- **Brand architecture** – Achieving the most appropriate ‘brand architecture’ that balances the degree of visibility of the public and private sector brands. As discussed later it may not be necessary for equal visibility and in some cases it may be beneficial for one or other of the partners to remain invisible.
- **Visual and verbal expression** – Although not always possible, ensuring that the visual and verbal expression of partner brands are in harmony. Public sector brands tend to be restrained and understated, by contrast private sector brands will adopt a more distinctive and commercially oriented visual and verbal identity. Finding a balance through adoption of common elements such as colour and visual devices, can provide the required harmonisation.
- **Brand management and governance** – Brand management and governance is vital where the roles of partners are defined and understood – particularly to protect the public interest and avoid the possible commercial exploitation by the private sector partner.

Lessons from the world of brand partnerships

When a public sector organisation considers developing a partnership with a private sector organisation, valuable lessons can be learned from the world of commercial brand partnerships.

- **Ensure that brand compatibility is leveraged**

  Nike and Apple brought music and exercise together when they developed the Sports Kit, a wireless system that allows shoes to talk to an iPod. The coming together of two iconic brands with common values working together for mutual benefit.

- **Define the role of each partner brand with absolute clarity**

  The Art of Shaving is a US retail chain selling high-end shaving and grooming products. Their top of the range $150 Power Fusion razor teamed up with Gillette bringing together a beautifully designed razor
which is only compatible with Gillette razor cartridges. The Power Fusion razor is perfectly balanced in the hand, but it is the six cutting blades of Gillette that play the functional role of achieving a smooth shave. A perfect marriage of style and function in one instrument.

• **Work from the outside in**

Understand the need states of the audiences you are talking to and address these head on. Vodafone recently announced a global partnership with MoneyGram to launch a service for consumers in around 200 countries to transfer funds directly via the M-Pesa mobile money platform. They recognised the enormous demand for people to send money back home via mobile.

• **Be flexible and adapt to create greater added value**

RED is an extraordinary organisation that really knows about the power of branding in complex brand sharing situations. RED was created by U2 front man and activist Bono with the aim of engaging the private sector to raise awareness and funds to help eliminate HIV/AIDS in Africa. What is unique about RED is that whilst partner brands are among the most iconic in the world – Nike, American Express, Apple, Starbucks, Gap, Armani, SAP, Bank of America, Coca Cola – they subsume their identities under the RED master brand. This is a powerful demonstration that the RED brand and what it stands for is more important than theirs. It is also a show of unity that we are all together – fighting for a common cause, the eradication of AIDS in Africa.

**Conclusion**

Delivering a profitable return to investors and delivering public policy goals are becoming increasingly dependent on successful partnerships between public and private sectors. This requires both sides to understand the rules of partnership branding. Public sector organisations need to think carefully about their choice of brand partner to ensure brand fit. Partnership branding must reflect a true partnership in which both sides share a mission and values, with clear functions. When partnership branding works, the collective power of private and public sectors can be transformational.
Terry Tyrrell
Chairman
Brand Union

Originally trained as a graphic designer, in 1976 Terry co-founded Sampson Tyrrell, the agency he helped grow to become Brand Union. With over 35 years experience in creating and managing global brands, Terry remains an active contributor to the continued growth of the agency, leading teams on major assignments and acting as a key client advisor to senior management.

Brand Union
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