

# A new identity, culture and brand at iPSL

## Building the internal brand from scratch

BY HELEN LOVE

Internal branding can be a challenge to get right, but if you're successful it can provide great rewards. These can be seen not just in the communication arena, but in the fields of employee engagement, reinforcement of the external brand, and, as Helen Love explains here, in facilitating major change in a merger and acquisition scenario, even during economic downturn.

Intelligent Processing Solutions Limited (iPSL) was launched in 2000 as a joint venture between the financial institutions Unisys, Barclays and Lloyds TSB with HSBC joining as a subsequent shareholder in 2001. The company was set up to manage outsourced cheque clearing and processing for the majority of the UK's banks, processing over 76 percent of the UK's cheques. It currently provides services for around 300 banks and building societies, directly and indirectly, including sub-contracting and agency arrangements by banks. Clients include Alliance & Leicester, Barclays, The Co-Operative Bank, HBOs, HSBC, Lloyds TSB and National Australia Bank Group Europe, as well as many other financial institutions.

### The challenges

From its inception, there were a number of key objectives for the joint venture and some significant challenges. A major consideration was to achieve economies of scale by migrating all the different banks' cheque clearing systems onto a

minimum number of common platforms (major transformation project for technical platforms). Simultaneously, they had to TUPE across the existing cheque-processing staff employed by each of the member banks into the new organization.

They also needed to consolidate operations across the 13 sites, with a view to closing offices and reducing the original headcount from 4,500 to around 2,500 in only three years.

In parallel with the TUPE exercise, there had to be an ongoing transition of terms and conditions from legacy employers to new ones based on the contractual model of Unisys.

In an effort to drive up service levels and improve performance, there were simultaneous rollouts of both performance-based remuneration for all staff and across-the-board Six Sigma Lean techniques to achieve continuous process improvements.

In addition to all this, the communication function was faced with a workforce where 85 percent had no internet or email access, 85 percent were shift or part-time workers and there was a critical need to ensure commitment and support from the various unions of which the majority of the processing staff were members.

This was in effect a merger and acquisition scenario, with 4,500 staff "TUPE'd" into the new organization from culturally and politically diverse legacy environments. Not only did they have to be merged into one identity and culture, but they also had to adopt a different mindset as they were now to be judged on client deliverables and personal and team performance.



Intelligent Processing Solutions Limited (iPSL) was established in 2000 to manage outsourced cheque clearing and processing for the majority of the UK's banks. It provides services for approximately 300 banks and building societies.

## What needed to be achieved

Working with a cross-functional team and with the support of the senior management team, the primary aim was, as soon as possible after the takeover, to launch one culture and identity for the new company iPSL – a new internal brand – which would not only tie in with the various legacy cultures of the banking partners, but would also be aligned with the commercial strategy of the majority shareholder, Unisys. This new brand, culture and values program was to be designed and rolled out through a period of ongoing major technological migration and consolidation, planned job losses and site closures. Against this somewhat negative backdrop, there was an overriding need to build engagement in the workforce, pride in their work and improvements in performance against service level agreements contracted to the existing clients.

In effect, we were implementing a cultural transition to a performance-based culture, which was unfamiliar to the majority of the staff.

## What we did

iPSL needed a foundation set of employee values to act as the basis for the new internal brand.

The first step was to establish what common ground existed from the legacy employers. A series of employee focus groups was launched, where employees, union stewards and HR representatives from each of the partner organizations shared historical values, behaviors and cultural attitudes in an open discussion forum. The various inputs were discussed and fed back to staff via team meetings, until eventually a list of seven values, common and relevant to the legacy organizations, was agreed. In order to make these values meaningful to the employees, each one was communicated simply and clearly, with specific examples of behaviors, which would reflect that particular value. These were all set out in a values booklet that was delivered to all personnel.

Once these values were established and articulated, they had to be embedded in the workplace, to build internal attitude and behaviors (forming the company culture), which reflected the key values. Because the values had been discussed and agreed with staff and they felt they'd actually had some input into the definition process, they were readily and quickly accepted by the majority of the workforce and other stakeholders.

We now had to take those values and build them into a robust internal brand that would give iPSL a clear internal and external identity, yet remain aligned to the commercial strategy.

To do this, we decided not to reinvent the wheel, but to base the program on a proven

process that had been used to drive culture change and internal branding in the parent company, Unisys. The Unisys “Vision ON” initiative had been running very successfully for several years at this point, so we decided to replicate the different elements of the Vision ON program in an iPSL Values Into Action (VIA) program.

There were four key components in the original Vision ON program:

- Reward and recognition
- Location teams
- Suggestions scheme
- Special projects

All were underpinned by a strong brand identity, a relentless communication campaign and an ongoing and participative commitment from the Unisys leadership team to provide resource and support for the initiatives.

Firstly, we secured the commitment and support of the iPSL management team and the Unisys Vision ON team to assist in the implementation of the new internal branding and engagement program. As the program was to be rolled out by the head of communications at iPSL, the support of the local and corporate communication teams was also guaranteed. The senior management team in iPSL were introduced to the concept, shown the proof points from the successful Unisys rollout and shown how the program could be customized to suit the iPSL culture, workforce and business strategy, which were quite different from those in Unisys. iPSL already had an existing suggestions scheme, which was working well and we didn't want to undermine it, so we elected not to replicate that particular element. Instead, we decided to roll out the rewards and recognition, the location teams and the communication framework as the VIA program.

## Rewards and recognition

With immediate effect, we began a recognition scheme that called for nominations across the entire



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## KEY POINTS

- In 2000, Intelligent Processing Solutions Limited was established to deal with the cheque-clearing process for a large number of banks in the UK.
- This presented a number of challenges, including bringing together employees from various cheque-clearing companies to work for a new organization with new technology.
- Building employee engagement levels played a large part in uniting the workforce behind the brand.

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- ◀ organization of any individuals who had demonstrated behaviors, which reflected any of the seven key values of iPSL. The winning candidates were then featured on giant posters each quarter, which appeared in strategic display areas across all locations. Photos and a brief description of the reason for their nomination were not only displayed on the posters, but were also featured in the quarterly employee communication magazine (which also mentioned all other candidates who had been put forward but had not won). It was important to display winners in all locations, as some of the offices had retained a high proportion of TUPE'd staff from the legacy partner who'd owned and operated in that site, so poster displays reinforced the new “One iPSL” identity and all included the VIA logo and branding.

The winners were named at regular leadership team employee road shows and presented with congratulations and certificates in person from the company CEO at these shows, their success celebrated openly with their colleagues and managers. Instead of offering a financial reward to the winners, which would have been problematic as we had frequent team nominations, we asked each winning individual or team to name a charity of their choice. We then made a donation to that charity on their behalf, securing additional local and national press coverage for the donation wherever we could.

There were multiple reasons for making the reward a charitable donation. It did, of course, reduce personal tax liability, but it also promoted an altruistic attitude and a heightened awareness of social and community responsibility and the contribution that employees could make to local charitable causes. Furthermore, it got staff in each office location thinking about their involvement in the local community and how they could benefit not only charities, but other local schemes which benefited employees and the wider community. This would be a critical success factor for the implementation of the next element of the VIA program – the location teams.

#### **Location teams**

The next objective was to establish location teams in all of the iPSL offices remaining open throughout the launch year, with funding for this

project already pre-approved from the senior management team.

iPSL was operating in a challenging economic climate. The iPSL business strategy at launch was built primarily on the need for banks to outsource a key component of their back office processing – cheque clearing. However, since the joint venture had been in existence, the revenues from cheque processing had been dropping significantly and at a quicker rate than anticipated. This was as a result of rapid reductions in the use of cheques by both companies and individuals. In such a challenging business climate, there was an even greater need to improve morale and motivation among our staff, working together to deliver improved results and nurture a team spirit across all sites.

The aim of the location teams was to encourage and support employee participation and involvement, to increase support for local initiatives – both within iPSL and in the local community – and to harness the enthusiasm and drive of our employees to maximum benefit. This was just one small element of the big picture, improving employee engagement to support the new company brand internally and externally.

Each location team comprised a cross section of volunteers who came forward to get involved and help make a difference at their local sites. They could come from any shift, any department and any level within the company, united by the shared desire to help iPSL employees and the local community by being proactive in any business specific to their own site. This could include support for local charities, organization of employee sports and social activities, looking at ways to improve the working environment or addressing issues of work/life balance within the workplace.

In order to demonstrate trust and empowerment by the iPSL management, each of these teams was awarded significant funding to cover both charitable donations and discretionary spend. They organized many employee events, such as Christmas celebrations and children's parties, provided support and funding for local charities, improved the work environment for the benefit of all employees and generally contributed toward an overall improvement in morale and an increased sense of belonging for all staff, with encouragement and help from the company.

Each location team established its own charter, based on the iPSL values and behaviors, but was in effect self governing, with little intervention from senior managers. This sent out a very powerful message to employees – we trust you to do the right thing.

Interestingly, the fact that the location teams also had discretionary spending powers generated some additional and unanticipated benefits. When

the location teams used their discretionary funding to address issues in the work environment, such as office décor, provision of facilities and improving social amenities, it seemed to galvanize the departments whose responsibility those issues should have been. This fostered a better collaboration between the different silos in the organization, creating better holistic awareness and better understanding of the key issues. In addition, by implementing small changes and fixing some of those little “niggling” problems in the work environment, the location teams removed some of the barriers to staff engagement. Whereas previously, the workforce had often been unable to see past the need to rectify small problems, they were now able to focus on the bigger picture.

### Communications

The whole VIA rollout was underpinned with regular and consistent communication, using the same vocabulary, advising on progress, inviting and sharing feedback. The communication team met regularly with the location teams to provide support and guidance and we established quarterly communication meetings across all sites and with senior management team involvement.

Face-to-face delivery was a critical element of the communication mix, given the lack of email and internet access, and the fact that iPSL was running a 24-hour operation. Regular drop in clinics were held on all shifts, where managers made themselves available for interactive and open discussions and fed back on company performance, transformation progress and business strategy.

### Outcomes and benefits

Having a consistent communication and values framework across all sites and legacy groups allowed us to create a central definition for the internal branding but ensure that delivery had genuine local context and delivery.

This in turn supported the effort to build a unique iPSL identity and brand internally, but to ensure it was aligned closely to the majority shareholder values system and culture. Over the 18 months following the launch of the VIA initiative, all employees moved seamlessly and painlessly from their legacy cultures to a new, all inclusive iPSL internal brand, culture and identity. This was further assisted by the migration of staff between sites, mixing up of legacy groups, common objectives and a desire to deliver customer service excellence.

Leveraging proven Unisys initiatives and processes to begin with drove confidence and ensured success for the new branding. The location teams in particular were an integral part of improving morale and motivation, demonstrating concern and empathy, taking tangible action on

employee issues and creating the small but so important quick wins that drove further inclusion and engagement.

### Conclusion

At a recent Melcrum Change Communication conference in London, my presentation made the point that it doesn't matter how articulate, precise or impressive your communication messages are; it doesn't matter how well aligned they are with the business strategy, the company brand and values; it doesn't matter how well you segment and target your intended audiences and the channels you choose to reach them. None of this matters at all, if the people with whom you are communicating aren't engaged with your organization. If they're not engaged, then they won't want to listen and indeed won't listen. The VIA program at iPSL built a foundation of engagement and positivity.

The communication during the course of the merger and building of the internal brand were based on clear and consistent messages, two-way discussions, honest and open communications from the leadership team and were above all employee focused. As a result, the VIA initiative provided a firm basis for a robust internal values system and brand, and thereby enabled the cultural change to allow iPSL to grow business in the UK profitably. VIA was the medium to build and strengthen the company identity from the inside out.

Sustained profitable growth needs focus on being both an employer and a supplier of choice, building the external brand and reputation from the internal values and behaviors. However, it's only by creating the right conditions to engage employees and motivate them to do their best that the company can achieve sustained success in the market with its customers.

Best of all, such initiatives don't have to be based on a big budget change management program. Instead, this type of approach favors little “cultural nudges” – modest initiatives that have the potential when added together to cause disproportionate positive change in the company and its brand perception. scm

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