



THE BURNING ISSUE

Are there advantages for charities with famous names changing them?

Last week, the Earl Haig Fund relaunched as Poppyscotland. Leonard Cheshire have also announced a rebrand, though it is unclear whether they are to change their name. TFN asked a selection of charities whether it's worth ditching a famous name.

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YES

However, caution must be taken. Established charities will have very long-standing and committed supporters and perhaps family links to founders. Discreet and appropriate internal consultation should always be the first step after executive agreement that there are advantages to be realised. Bridging the gap between existing supporters, even if those are dwindling, and new supporters is an important balancing act.

The charity sector is becoming more professional across the board, and to keep up that means communication with varied audiences must be up to date and relevant. A charity's name now must reflect what it does and must be easy to remember. The ideal name achieves that, though, while also recognising the organisation's important heritage.

In 1944, Sir Winston Churchill said, "...tradition has never weakened a nation, indeed it has strengthened nations in their hour of peril; but the new view must come, the world must roll forward."

YES

The Earl Haig Fund's primary communication vehicle, the poppy, was better known than the charity itself. Capitalising on this familiarity by rebranding Poppyscotland was a wise decision as the charity will no longer be competing against itself but can harness the combined strength of both brands.

Leonard Cheshire, on the other hand, should not lose its name as its only emotive image is that of its enigmatic founder. Instead, it should focus communications on bridging the all-too-common gap between awareness and understanding by bringing the visions of its founder to life. It could, however, adapt its name to Leonard Cheshire Disability Care (LCDC), for example, as this would increase brand understanding without alienating its heritage and existing supporters.

Non-descriptive names, like those of individuals, aren't obstacles to understanding a brand's values; poor communication is. What does Laura Ashley represent? Or Mr. Kipling? Or Johnnie Walker? Yes, there are advantages to changing a name. But no, it's never the solution by itself.

YES

If a charity's name is completely unknown, unintelligible or confusing then I believe it is worthwhile changing.

In the short-term it may seem expensive, time consuming and there may well be resistance but effective re-branding will most certainly pay dividends in the long run.

Following extensive research we discovered that the general public were unfamiliar with the scope of work carried out by the modern Erskine. People who didn't know about Erskine thought we were part of the NHS or involved in medical care. By dropping "Hospital" from our name and adding the strapline "Caring for ex-Service men and women" we have repositioned ourselves as a modern charity with an ongoing need to raise vital funds.

With over 180,000 charities in the UK fighting for share of wallet, charities have little chance of being supported if potential donors don't know who they represent, the valuable contribution they make to society and the funds required.

YES

So, what is in a name? There are clear advantages to charities re-branding if they have taken the name of their founder – and more so if they have 'lived with it' for many years.

Charities, like their commercial counterparts, evolve over time and its 'core business' may have been redirected from the founder's original cause. This can lead to an awareness gap, with people simply assuming they know what the charity does.

A re-brand, such as the one Sue Ryder Care carried out five-years-ago, can help engage with supporters, new and existing, and signal energetic new purpose and direction.

The question of how far to change a charity's name, is determined by the specific circumstances of the particular organisation. In the case of Sue Ryder Care, it was decided to retain the name of its founder but change 'Foundation' to the more directional 'Care'. This helped retain the loyalty of donors who had long supported the charity, whilst heralding a modern outlook and newly cemented vision to provide specialist palliative and neurological care which liberates lives.