

The public perception of ringing

We know what an amazing activity ringing is but many of the public don't. That matters, because with other activities competing for everyone's time, it affects recruitment. Unless people appreciate that ringing involves skill development, teamwork, social events and fun they are unlikely to join. If children's parents don't see it in a positive light they may encourage their children to do something else.

People have a clearer perception of many other activities and whatever their views about say rugby, swimming, horse riding, motorcross, singing, playing the organ, violin or bagpipes, they have a pretty good idea of the skills needed, the scope for progression, whether there is competition or teamwork, the performance opportunities and the status in society. How can we fill the void with a clear understanding of the interest, stimulation, challenge and enjoyment of ringing?

Many ringers already do good work with talks, demonstrations, tower tours and so on, but those activities could be more effective within the context of a public recognition of ringing as an activity. In marketing jargon, can we develop ringing as a recognisable 'brand', to which we can attach the positive perceptions?

We recently had an opportunity to see how this might work. Rob Parker (creator of the Discover Bellringing website bellringing.org) is a former student of Reading University and knew that students in the Department of Typography have a final year assignment to develop a brand for a surrogate client – typically a local charity. Rob arranged for 'ringing' to be included. Two teams of four worked on ringing. Their task was probably harder because they couldn't focus on a single organisation but had to develop ideas that could be used collectively by dozens of ringing bodies, each of which have their own distinct identities.

Rob prepared an initial brief and we met them to answer questions. I arranged visits for them see bells and how they work, and to a 12-bell practice where they talked to lots of ringers as well as observing. After four weeks both teams presented their final 'pitch'. Both had some really good ideas though their overall approach was quite different.

Each team broke ringing into a number of different themes through which it could be promoted, with ideas for how to get the message to different target audiences. You can see the documents on-line but here is a summary of some key ideas.

Each team created an identity for the campaign to publicise ringing. 'Campana' is a classical allusion to bells and 'RESOUND' was more metaphorical. Both developed 'brand pillars' to reflect different aspects of ringing, and they translated the pillars into a set of propositions, each of which could be developed with leaflets, posters, etc. They were:

- **Join the band** [musical and mathematical] -and- **Travel through time** [historic] -when you- **Ring around the world** [competition and travel] -to make- **Friends for life** [community and social].
- a **RESOUNDing** part of Britain [Traditional], a **RESOUNDing** group of friends [Social], a **RESOUNDing** feat of engineering [Technical], a **RESOUNDing** majesty of music [Musical]

Both teams identified several target audiences, including parents and teachers as well as students and young people, and they identified routes via which people might find out about ringing (university, scouts, D of E award, school, on the bus, in the pub, national trust).

Ideas for delivery of the message included posters, leaflets, beer mats, bracelets like sallies, tee shirts, school packs, websites and 'push cards'. (I'd never heard of push cards, despite having used them for ten years. They are like visiting cards with a brand image on one side and a web address on the other.)

We have obtained permission to re-use the ideas (with acknowledgement where appropriate) but how can we do this, noting that 'we' doesn't just mean the Central Council it means the ringing community as a whole? There are four potential levels.

- At the lowest level, ideas for colour schemes, type faces etc, are unlikely to be applied uniformly across the Exercise, though they might be useful if there were any national promotional campaigns.
- At a slightly higher level is a logo for ringing. This would need to supplement not supplant a society's (or a tower's) established logo, which usually has strong local and historical links. A good analogy is the way many companies have other logos on their letterheads as well as their own, for example a trade body or quality standard. Ringing organisations could use a logo representing ringing as well as their own.
- At the next level are messages about ringing in general, which should be compatible with most ringing organisations.
- At the highest level are ideas for delivering the messages, which should be widely usable to promote ringing.

The question of a visual identity for ringing (level 2) needs further consideration, and we could welcome the views of ringing societies and individual ringers. The ideas at level 3 and 4 should be directly usable or adaptable as they are.

The PR Committee stand at the Ringing Roadshow will include branding ideas, and visitors will be invited to give their views.

John Harrison (on behalf of the CC PR Committee)

The Reading University student documents can be seen at:

ringingteachers.co.uk/admin/branding/Campana.pdf & ringingteachers.co.uk/admin/branding/Resound.pdf