

# THE NEED OF BRANDING GREECE

by Andreas Markessinis

Do we need to brand Greece? Yes, we do. In today's globalized world where national identity loses step, a country willing to compete must have a brand. This brand should communicate to the world audience Greece's characteristic values that make up her essence. The louder and clearer this message is broadcasted, the better Greece will emerge among the nations.

In this abstract, what I intend is to sketch the development of a brand for Greece. My intention is not to develop a brand for our country, but to ignite a debate on the issue.

I believe that a branding process for Greece is necessary; it should improve our damaged image abroad, it should market Greece to the world as a distinct unit, and it should boost our National self-esteem as well.

## The need for a brand

As the Athens 2004 Olympics come closer, more and more focus will be brought to Greece. Hopefully the Games will be a great success, and may at last put an end to the negative reviews Athens and Greece as a whole have undergone in the preparation years. Delays, increases of budgets, unfinished projects and several fatalities have been widely reported when referring to the 2004 Games' organisation.

However unfair they may be, these critics have hurt Greece's pride and have severely harmed the country's image abroad. They have also questioned Greece's reputation as a serious and modern European country. Even if the Games are successful, the reputation of Greece as a reliable, competitive nation will stay for some time under suspicion.

The image Greece had abroad before earning the Olympics in 1997 was not too good either, which still worsens things. In the European Union context, Greece is known for being a backward country. Its citizens are told to be nationalistic, xenophobic and hysteric, while the country is said to be entangled in an archaic clientelism, an inoperative State and a critical lack of basic infrastructures.

In case  
Greece  
comes

through the Olympic experience reinforced, people would then incorporate another, more positive, image of Greece to their perception of the country. But, rest assure, they would not, all of a sudden, forget the negative look they had before. In fact, most people will end up having a dual image of the country: that of an inert, backward and conservative country, at the same time that one of a thriving and modern nation.

This perception is incoherent, and therefore blurry and confusing. Certainly not the best image for marketing a country overseas.

That's why Greece  
must be branded. A  
new, powerful  
Greece is

powerful Greece is emerging and it needs to have a new, powerful outlook. With this new brand, the older perceptions should be obliterated, and stereotypes and prejudices against Greece should become gradually part of the past.

## **No, we don't have a brand**

Our country is already easily recognisable. In fact, Greece has a really strong image abroad. Iconic images such as the Aegean landscapes, the Parthenon or Bouzouki music are rapidly associated with our country.

The fact that Greece enjoys a powerful image overseas does not necessarily mean that she has a brand. No, Greece does not have a brand in the modern meaning of the word. Other countries have successfully built their own brands, but Greece has not, or at least not well enough.

Countries similar in size and volume to those of Greece have been successful in becoming distinctive trademarks in the global economy. For instance, Ireland has championed in New economy start-ups. Finland has become a hi-tech powerhouse for ITC companies, while Sweden has become one of the world leaders in the creative and designing industries.

All of these three countries share a similar background with Greece: they three are small countries, they have a similar population, and none of them have been Great Powers in recent history nor key players in

the international context;  
quite the contrary,  
they have in  
fact

been traditionally peripheral nations in European history. However, all of them have in the last decade streamlined their own identity in the global economy, and products and services coming from these countries now carry distinctive and valious qualities associated.

With these examples ahead, Greece shall find its own path. Just like Sweden had one powerful industry (automobiles) but it never prevented her to leap into the New Economy, Greece also has one powerful industry (shipyards and fleets), that should not prevent her to find new sectors in which excelling.

With a clearer, more up-to-date profile, Greece shall be able to introduce herself in the global market and present herself with her own credentials. A brand for Greece will give her an identity, a clear definition of "who I am and what I stand for". That should make communication for Greece more effective.

## **A Troubled Background**

Branding a country is no easy task, but it is even more difficult to create a brand for a country like Greece. For some countries, developing a brand is reinforcing the positive perception they already enjoy, but the Greek case is quite the opposite: brand should help defeating the negative perceptions the country has accumulated in the recent past.

Unfortunately, Greece is sometimes perceived in ways that are negative, even hostile, even when this perception is clearly unmatched when compared to reality.

Americans, for instance, look at Greece as one bastion of Anti-Americanism. Meanwhile, many tourists who visit Greece are dissatisfied with the country's service standards. Among Northern European

countries, Greece is considered the European Union's bully member, and Britons include Greece in the demeaning expression "P.I.G.S.", a word coined for the laid-back Southern European countries (P.I.G.S. stands for Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain).

The equation is that, although enjoying one of the highest awareness among Europeans (98%), Greece is one of the least popular nations of the continent. Among businessmen specifically, Greece obtains no better ranking, as is regarded as one of the least attractive countries in Europe to invest in.



## A New Vision

Greece should be conscious of these problems, and have the will to address them. More than that, Greece needs to assume a global role, which is not only more prominent, but also positive and persuasive. To achieve that it needs a brand.

Greece would benefit significantly from branding itself in a way that is to be consciously modern and



mould-breaking. Only when Greece grasps the crucial importance of distinctive identity, it will have the chance to build a brand that provides a clear and sustainable position for the country in the international context.

The brand should shape up Greece's defining traits, and develop character, value, and identity. It must be built on the areas in which Greece excels, on Greece's existing strengths. It should outline the best of Greek competencies with a clearer profile. Lest we forget, the brand must be honest, which means that brand must be based on values which are real.

Like any leading brand, Greece's new brand needs to be designed clear, strong and simple. It must also be inclusive; a symbol for the whole country, not divisive. Nor should it be political, otherwise it won't last. It should spring from Greekness, respecting the national heritage but avoiding falling into nostalgia.

For the brand to be effective, it must be genuinely Greek, so Hellenism must become the backbone of Greece's new global identity. It should be emotional too. It would say "Look at us, this is what we can do, this is who we really are".

## Purpose of The Brand

The objectives of the brand are manifold: it should defeat negative stereotypes and exorcise old prejudices, and instead enhance our reputation in the world.

The brand should build trust. Greece should deliver on promise; that is the shortest way to engender trust between a brand and its clients. Through creating and sustaining personal relationships with the customers, Greece's brand should grow stronger.

The new brand should also take care of aesthetics, and thus dress Greece with a suitable look for the XXI century.

A good national brand for Greece is a powerful tool:

it can greatly assist the objectives of the Greek nation as a whole: increase trade, raise foreign investment and be more tourist-attractive, and ultimately gain greater international standing amongst leaders, influencers and decision makers.

In the end, Greece's brand would improve Greece's image in the world, and even improve Greeks' esteem for their own country, which would further help. In that, branding could even affect Greece's internal culture.

## Conclusion

All in all, Greece's image abroad must be radically changed. Greece is lagging in many areas, but there is still place for hope. For the first time in many years, Greek economy is booming. Some attribute it to the Olympics, others see other factors.

The truth is, that with the expansion of Greek firms in the Balkans, the sky-rocketing Athens Stock Exchange and the rapid growth our economy has been experiencing for the last 3 or 4 years, traditional underdog Greece is becoming one of Europe's most dynamic economies.

There is chance that Greece notices the need for a brand in a global market in which competitors are hundreds of aggressive countries. It is useful for Greece to have a brand to express herself. It is to compete with very well-branded, yet after all similar competitors, such as Ireland, Finland or Sweden.

Greece should be brave and gain competitive advantage over other nations. Caring for the nation's image at home and abroad is paramount for such purpose. And a brand would definitely help.

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