

Branding an academic superbrand

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Abstract

In spring, 2013, Tel Aviv University – an Israeli higher education superbrand that had never been branded – embarked on a branding process in pursuit of its defining narrative. This decision was taken despite the leadership's awareness of the many challenges in academic branding, with some processes resulting in success and others in ringing failure. What prompted a de facto superbrand to seek formal branding? How did a thorough strategic process manage to make dry academic research relevant and accessible to children, students, parents and donors alike? What did it take to implement the branding in a complex organization, as well as deal with internal objections and serious crises along the way?

The story of Tel Aviv University's branding is applicable to any institution that is considering branding or

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rebranding, especially academic ones and NGOs. This paper takes you step by step on a journey that begins with identifying problems and needs, dives deep into a fascinating strategic process; and continues through the systematic implementation of the brand.

Keywords

branding, higher education, marketing, change management, student recruitment, strategic planning, NGO, narrative

About TAU

- Public institution
- 29,000 students, including 1,500 international students
- 9 faculties, 35 schools, 120 departments, 400 labs
- 17 affiliated hospitals
- Ranked among top 100 globally
- 3,500 academic papers/year
- A top ten school for producing VC-backed entrepreneurs

BACKGROUND

At the end of spring 2013, TAU's market position seemed sound. A series of active marketing initiatives launched in 2008 had expanded the student body at TAU from an unprecedented low of about 26,000 to numbers close to the target (about 29,000). Although the university had never undergone a systematic branding process, all indexes indicated that it was, in fact, a superbrand in the Israeli marketplace. According to various market surveys and, as shown in Figure 1, TAU exhibited the highest figures for unassisted awareness, candidate applications and desirability in the eyes of both employers and the general public. The university also ranked high in features that were defined as its central values: excellence, prestige and internationality.

Moreover, in 2010 TAU was included for the first time in *Superbrands Israel*, a list published annually by the international organisation Superbrands, where it still starred in May 2013.

International rankings were gratifying: TAU was placed among the top 200 schools according to different rankings (Shanghai,

Times, Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), Taiwan, US News), 20th in citations of academic papers per faculty member (QS Rankings) and 22nd in the number of patent applications (World Intellectual Property Organization).

TAU also starred in measurements of entrepreneurship and start-ups, ranking among Reuters' Top 100: The World's Most Innovative Universities, and placed ninth in the world and first outside of the USA in the number of graduates who raised venture capital to found start-ups (PitchBook).

So, given TAU's enviable market standing, what drove TAU President Prof. Joseph Klafter to launch a sweeping branding process in June 2013? This question gains even more force against the background of well-publicised failures of similar processes in the academic world. This is due to the discomfort non-profit organisations often feel in the worlds of marketing.

The 'market versus mission' argument in nonprofits provides a pervasive context for internal conflict or competition over objectives and the means for achieving them. In the nonprofit sector marketing

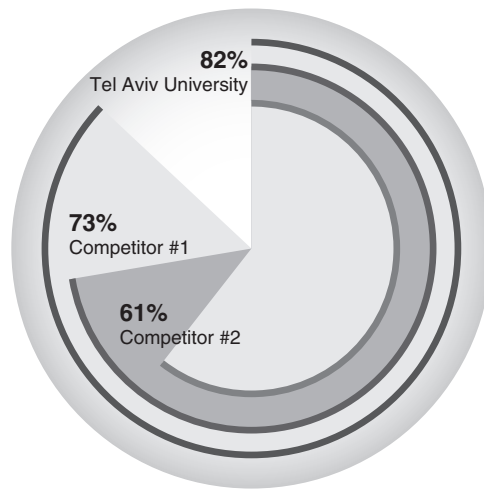


Figure 1 #1 in unassisted awareness (Illustration showing largest market segment)

Source: From a market survey conducted by SMG agency through the Agenda Research Institute.

is often seen as a ‘necessary but evil’ tool essential for survival.¹

Academia, in particular, regards itself as ‘clean’. It is involved in serious, ethical and pure undertakings that are above considerations of marketing and sales — seen as vulgar activities, overly commercial or dealing with trifles. In a paper entitled ‘Branded to Death’, Robert Jones criticises the ‘business-oriented’ concept of branding in academia²:

Universities and brands. Can the two words go together? They seem like opposites: universities are institutions disinterestedly pursuing truth, and brands are gadgets designed to sell things to people. Yet almost all universities now talk the language of branding. So what’s going on?

Branding, in particular, is conceived of as inorganic to universities, underlining the tension between ‘classical academia’ as a community of scholars and processes of competition, globalisation and commercialisation.

Critical voices tend to problematize the value of the commercialization of higher

education, including the practice of branding, by drawing attention to the ways in which market forces permeate higher education.³

Past attempts made by institutions worldwide (the best known of which are those of UC System and Loughborough) underscore this point, as well as the risk of failure in any branding endeavour.⁴

To understand the conscious decision made by the top management of TAU to knowingly embark upon such a complex and risky process at a time when the university’s branding position appeared sound, one must first understand the changes taking place in Israel’s education market.

The Israeli education market in one word: Competition

Like all other research universities, TAU competes for outstanding students and excellent researchers, large research grants, scientific reputation through publications and citations, high placement in international rankings, donations and public support.

Since the 1990s, the Israeli system of higher education has undergone accelerated growth in the number of institutions — from 21 to 63 in just a quarter of a century. Most of the new colleges focus on fields considered to be practical (engineering, computer science, business, law, economics, communication, design etc.). During the first decade the number of students grew at a rate of 8 per cent per year, decreasing to 4 per cent in the following decade. The percentage of students in colleges reached 65 per cent, while the relative percentage of students in theoretical fields (both humanities and sciences) decreased.

In the past five years, growth in the number of potential candidates has come to a standstill, mostly due to demographic

changes in the population. The negative growth in the number of candidates for higher education has resulted in intense competition between universities and colleges and among the universities themselves.

Under the surface: Signs of erosion

The transformations in the higher education market led TAU to establish a Strategic Planning and Marketing Division in 2008. The need for branding was recognised even then, but TAU was not yet ready. Instead, it was deeply immersed in fundamental strategic processes, and entering another process, especially in view of academia's unfavourable attitude towards the very idea of 'branding', discouraged the decision-makers. Thus, TAU initiated tactical marketing activities, such as the annual open house, a new website and digital advertising, which helped it cope to some extent with the challenges of increasing competition.

The turning point finally came in April 2013. A tracking study initiated by the university (alongside other warning signals) prompted it to embark upon the process.

The good news for TAU leaders was that the university had generally maintained its status as a superbrand. Nearly a fifth of the sampled population named it, unassisted, as the academic institution they would like to attend or would recommend to a friend.

But the rest was less encouraging. As shown in Figure 2, among its youngest respondents, aged 18–26, the survey clearly showed a decline in TAU's desirability. Moreover, drilling down into specific fields, such as biomed, engineering, the hard sciences, humanities and the arts, the survey indicated erosion in TAU's standing relative to its overall position; in some disciplines, in fact, other universities had taken the lead, sometimes with a significant advantage over TAU.

A brief analysis generated the inescapable conclusion: TAU enjoyed its position as a large, high-quality and comprehensive institution, located in Israel's central region, but these very same attributes were detrimental when it came to specific fields of study. As an all-embracing, interdisciplinary institution, TAU had never placed emphasis on any specific area or declared a specialisation in any particular field. In this, it was clearly at a positioning disadvantage relative to niche institutions specialising in a small number of areas or targeting a limited sector of the population. Lack of clear branding made it difficult to define the university's essential nature or articulate the connection between its various schools and departments. What single, coherent, institution-wide agenda did they share? What was the link between, for instance, the School of Electrical Engineering and the Department of Jewish Philosophy? Such questions had no definitive answers, apart from very general, almost hollow words, such as innovation, excellence and prestige.

The analogy used by the university's marketing staff to explain the market survey results was that of a supermarket offering a large selection of products versus specialised shops, such as a deli. Where is someone likely to shop in the coming month? Probably at the supermarket. But for gourmet cheese, they might prefer the deli. Since TAU had no intention of cutting any departments, or declaring that it specialised in just one area, a formal branding process seemed to be the best solution.

Moreover, other Israeli universities *did* have a clear, differentiated identity: biomed, technology, Jewish tradition or life on campus. And TAU? In many cases, we got answers like 'everything else', 'Tel Aviv' or 'a big university'.

Knowing that 'a strong university brand is considered a major asset in the global competitive market for higher education',⁵

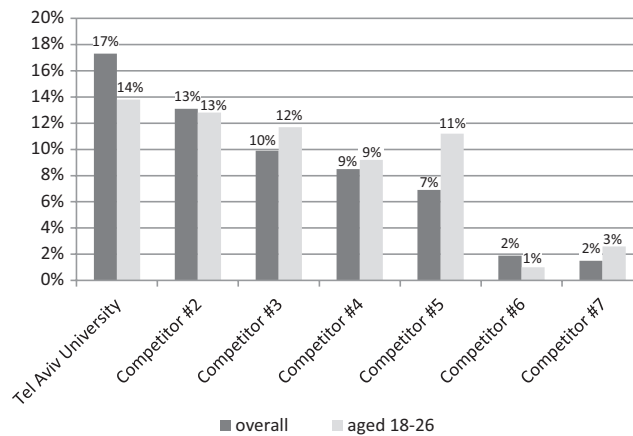


Figure 2 A tracking study, April 2013 (sample of 800 people from the adult population)
Source: Rotem AR Institute.

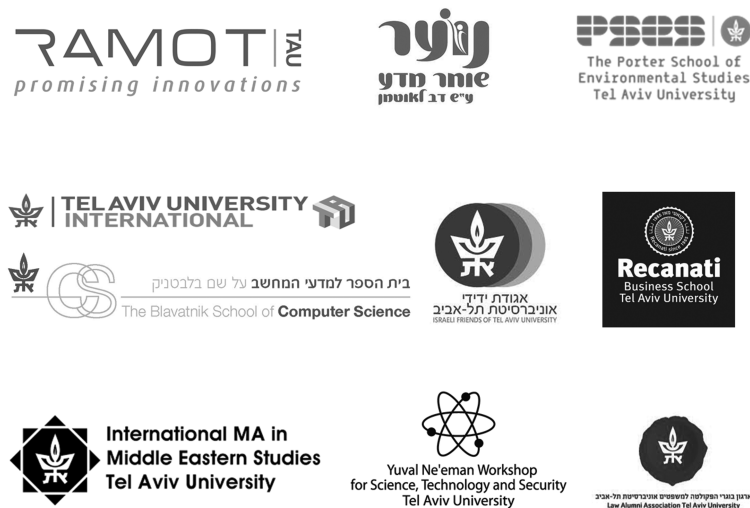


Figure 3 TAU 'logo soup'

the mission was to tease out TAU's true identity.

Embarking upon the branding process: What about the logo?

TAU had conducted marketing and fund-raising activities, and led advertising campaigns, before the branding process began. And yet its various units spoke in different graphic languages and delivered different messages, lacking a leading narrative that would explain, in simple words, what TAU is, and what differentiates it from other institutions of higher education.

The result? A 'logo soup'⁶, as demonstrated in Figure 3, familiar to many large organisations, especially in the public sector, and even more so at universities. This model, reflecting a structure known as a 'house of brands', '... is difficult to support. Each brand must have its own marketing budget, and there is no way to leverage spending in one product category with sales of a product in another category'.⁷

Branding is sometimes confused with launching an advertising campaign, and rebranding may be viewed as synonymous with changing the logo. At TAU, it

was clear that the university was embarking upon a strategic effort, accompanied by market surveys that would pinpoint its strengths and weaknesses, core values and vision. This would ultimately lead to a narrative that differentiated it and defined its place as vital to the world it inhabits. The creative side would come later.

With regard to changing the logo, the original intention was to keep the old one. This was despite the fact that a survey on the logo's equity, as shown in Figure 4, found that although TAU rated high in important parameters, such as prestige, excellence and a multidisciplinary approach, its logo did not reflect these values and was perceived unfavourably. The logo's signature flame symbol carried problematic associations, such as 'mourning' and 'memorial day', stemming from associations deeply embedded in Jewish-Israeli culture.

As the visual representation of a brand, corporate logos have the potential to communicate and reinforce a brand's core values and principles.⁸

In the case of TAU, the survey indicated that its logo fulfilled absolutely none of its goals.

How did TAU proceed from here to wards a strategic process? First, by formulating the operational and decision-making processes. It was clear that a large number of officials would need to be involved and that this should reflect TAU's organisational structure. At the same time, the university management wished to avoid involving everyone — for instance, through internet questionnaires or a faculty-wide vote. A referendum held previously at a leading Israeli academic institution had resulted in sweeping support for the old logo.

A branding steering committee was established for the project, headed by the president, and including the university's academic and administrative leadership along with the elected chair of the students' union. The committee was responsible for making decisions at critical junctures. It held discussions on selecting the TAU narrative, and, at a more advanced stage, choosing the creative concept and the logo. Decisions were made by voting.

Under the committee and derived from it was the branding supervisory team, consisting of a small number of professionals specialising in marketing and related areas, who presented the issues and decisions before the steering committee. The project's day-to-day

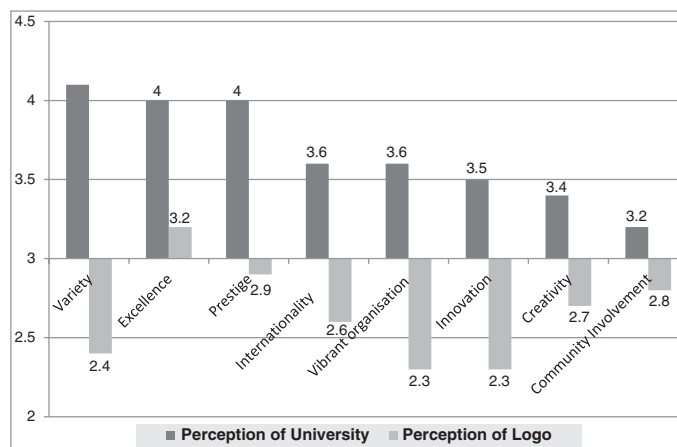


Figure 4 Perception of University versus Perception of Logo (sample of 600 people from the adult population, January 2012)
Source: Rotem AR Institute.

supervision was in the hands of three people: Ehud Or, VP Strategic Planning and Marketing; Alon Weinpress, director of the Marketing Unit; and Rava Eleasari, head of Marcom in the Development and Public Affairs Division. All three were also members of the steering committee.

There are various approaches to the execution of a branding process in organisations. In many cases, a large branding company is invited to guide the entire process. TAU chose differently: it hired the branding strategist Atara Bieler as an external consultant. The collaborative work of the small supervisory group with Ms. Bieler created the needed balance between, on the one hand, TAU's needs and the input of its professionals, who knew it well, and, on the other, the objective professional guidance of an experienced branding strategist. In this way, the timetable was closely supervised, and the university's representatives were involved every step of the way. It should be noted that both the TAU president and the head of his office were highly active in the branding process as well.

In a separate tender, art director Uri Naveh and copywriter Tal Berkovitch were chosen for the creative implementation. Both took part in the final stages of the strategic process, and strategic consultant Atara Bieler continued to monitor

their work afterwards. A close connection was thus preserved between the strategic insights, especially TAU's chosen narrative, and the creative concepts and products.

Figure 5 describes the marketing research techniques and meetings that were involved in the strategic process.

STRATEGIC PROCESS

Research findings: Starting with consensus

The research findings were dramatic in their unanimity: Everyone saw TAU as a 'leading researching institution'. Whether due to published articles or graduates' high-tech start-ups, the university was perceived as having a major scientific impact on the world.

But first, a brief note about methodology. It was decided that a long, in-depth research process was needed, among both internal and external populations.

The research process comprised 50 personal interviews with important figures inside TAU, group interviews with officials of various ranks, in-depth interviews and a group discussion with major employers, focus groups of both Israeli and international students, and quantitative market surveys in the adult Israeli population, emphasising age groups relevant for higher education. These were supplemented by case studies of the branding of



Figure 5 Pursuing our narrative
Source: Graphic design by Leave a Mark.

institutions of higher education in Israel and worldwide, re-examination of market surveys conducted by TAU in the past, a branding workshop with TAU leaders — both academic and administrative — and, of course, several intensive discussions of the branding steering committee.

Since extensive quantitative and qualitative data was already available, the research process focused especially on the subjective experience of TAU stakeholders. Questions were designed to extract strengths and weaknesses from the point of view of the academic marketplace, as well as to understand the broader role of the university in society.

A curiosity-kindling institution

Respondents agreed that TAU was a paradise for scientists to conduct research, connect to the wider academic world and enjoy great publishing opportunities. Students tended to view this research focus as coming at the expense of teaching performance, however. Most also expressed a clear aversion towards science as a profession; science, in the subjects' opinion, was irrelevant to their lives and careers. A scientist was perceived to be a person confined to a lab and detached from real life. Universities and colleges were seen as organisations that should equip students with something practical — a career — and even help them with the challenge of getting settled in their chosen industry after graduating.

Yet, and this is critical, TAU students recognised that they were at the place where discovery was happening — the wellspring of knowledge production. This idea was similarly expressed by potential applicants who had not yet decided where to pursue higher education, and even by those who favoured professional colleges over research universities. Some of the subjects even referred to TAU as 'the place

where you study with those who actually created the knowledge and wrote the textbooks'. This idea arose in connection with the arts and humanities as well, which typically have lower scientific appeal.

Regardless of the discipline, a strong idea emerged of TAU as a 'curiosity-kindling institution'. Students said that their TAU experience had caused them to become more curious and to develop a healthier appetite for knowledge than earlier in their lives. An interesting way of putting it became one of the major inspirations for establishing the brand story later on: 'Since I started studying at TAU', one student said,

everything interests me more than it did before. Even if a plumber arrives at my house to fix a leaking faucet, I find myself watching what he does out of pure interest.

One of the central ideas that surfaced, therefore, was about the value of becoming an inquisitive individual, no matter how many academic degrees you earn or your choice of career. One professor memorably put it: 'Studies at a research institution shape the student into a person who dares to question — irrespective of what the student wants to do in the future.' Curiosity, when handled rightly, is never satiated.

Positive traits were attributed to TAU's pluralistic culture. First, the campus community reflected a city known for its embrace of diversity and its tolerance towards different ethnicities, religions and cultures. Like the city, the university had a reputation for being cosmopolitan and free-spirited.

This pluralism translated, academically, into Israel's most diversified institution of higher education, with a wide variety of offerings for everyone. Moreover, students and faculty were at liberty to integrate any field with any other field — creating a true interdisciplinary study and research environment.

Students' attitudes to the concept of interdisciplinary studies could be negative: 'What does it mean, anyway?'; 'Too many choices cause confusion'; 'I am swallowed up by an enormous system.' Faculty members, on the other hand, enthused about how the interdisciplinary approach promoted freedom of thought, broadened thinking, and nurtured creativity and originality. For them, the university was the nexus between personal freedom and academic freedom.

One of the solid and prominent findings dealt with the uniqueness of 'Tel Avivian science'. The Tel Avivian scientist embodies the well-known Tel Aviv spirit of entrepreneurial thinking combined with high energy. The scientists of Tel Aviv and the citizens of Tel Aviv are identical in many ways: brash, brave, ingenious, resourceful and stubborn. In short, the Tel Avivian scientist transforms Israeli chutzpah into academic chutzpah.

The Tel Avivian scientist, several subjects said, is 'someone who won't take no for an answer — on principle'. Another description provided by a young researcher pointed to sheer grit:

If I want to start a new project, and my equipment request hasn't come through, I won't wait. I'll pull an old radio apart to jerry-rig the device I need for my project just to launch it and get closer to some results.

The dilemma: Not a list of values but a gripping story

After nine months of intensive research and analysis, TAU's DNA was successfully decoded: this was a curiosity-inspiring research institution with a pluralistic, interdisciplinary campus that engaged in bold, Tel Aviv-style science.

But remaining with a list of brand values, a 'this and also that' identity concept, was not good enough. The underlying narrative of TAU — an authentic and appealing

story that could be told in an invigorating way — was yet to be gleaned. Moreover, this story had to translate abstract notions into simple everyday experiences that target audiences could relate to and feel positive about. People had to like TAU and choose to become attached to its brand.

A great narrative operates in the mind of the consumer, although it refers to the brand. This is what branding is about. It describes not how the system is but why the consumer prefers it. A good story creates strong identification, and this is how brand equity is born and thrives.

'Facts and figures and all the rational things that we think are important in the business world actually don't stick in our minds at all. But stories create "sticky" memories by attaching emotions to things that happen', says Nick Morgan, author of *Power Cues* and president and founder of Public Words, a communications consulting firm.⁹

The functional benefits of the university were clear, but the emotional elements lay dormant. TAU's narrative would have to awaken them.

Overcoming the 'Great Research Disconnect'

The branding team and steering committee considered several possible narratives, but only one distilled the essence of TAU — as a researching institution rather than an institution for researchers.

The goal in spinning this story was to take research, which was perceived as dusty, dry and tedious, and show it as it actually is: an inexhaustible source of enthusiasm and passion. The branding story had to overcome the 'Great Research Disconnect' — whereby research is so much a part of our lives, yet strangely, we are not connected to it. Research involves questioning, freedom of thought, multiple viewpoints and audaciousness (all characteristics associated

with TAU itself). It happens every day, in every place, at every age — from the baby tasting everything she can grab to the teenager using Google to do his homework, to the entrepreneur chasing after the next, life-altering idea.

By illuminating the brave and adventurous side of the scientist's quest, the story of TAU could connect people with their 'inner researcher'. Why? Because research is a hungry investigation, full of action, that everyone can relate to. Dormant in each of us is a researcher who wants to break free . . . if we just let him or her out. Moreover, there is no need to actually become a scientist to reap the benefits of an academic research institution; becoming a curious, seeking person ensures personal growth, professional development and a competitive edge in the job market.

Finding the right hero

Yet there was still a missing element in the story. It was the hero, of course.

Remember, business stories, just like novels and movies, consist of three parts: the challenge, the struggle, and the resolution. And the hero's the character who faces the challenge and fights through to the resolution.¹⁰

The inspiration for a compelling hero came from detective fiction. A detective is presented with an unsolved riddle, usually a crime or another problem that is difficult to figure out. The struggle of the hero with the problem pulls the reader in, both intellectually and emotionally. A good detective solves the crime riddle by discovering a fact that was hidden away. Similarly, a good researcher chases after hidden facts restlessly, endlessly. In both cases, it is what the hero does not know that propels him forward.

Thus was born the narrative of TAU: 'It's what we don't know that drives us.'

When this strategic sentence was presented to the steering committee of the branding process, a few TAU professors stood up and said, 'Didn't you just state the obvious? Of course we're looking for what we don't know — every single day of our life.' This was a great compliment, as the basic principle in creating a persuasive brand narrative is to illuminate a stark truth, without additives or decorations.

No less vitally, the declaration of not knowing tied together the three main elements of TAU's identity into a compelling story with an appealing hero. That hero is everyone — that hero is us. Not knowing feeds our curiosity; it is comprehensive, multifaceted and liberating, as there are no boundaries to the unknown; and it enables us to say with confidence, even chutzpah: 'We don't know. Yet.'

CREATIVE SOLUTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Pursuing the unknown

Now the creative team tackled the challenge: to express a concept as abstract and fluid as *not knowing* and use it to create a complete visual and verbal language for TAU, applicable to all its activities and units.

The creative solution was derived from several conceptual and visual arenas. Figure 6 shows a number of ideas rendered in the 'mood boards' presentation, submitted to TAU in January 2015 (approximately 18 months after the beginning of the branding process), which inspired the subsequent development of the creative language.

This was the foundation for building the brand story, tagline, logo and a rich brand language. In their book *Blue Ocean Strategy*, W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne mention focus, divergence and a compelling tagline as the three characteristics of a good strategy.

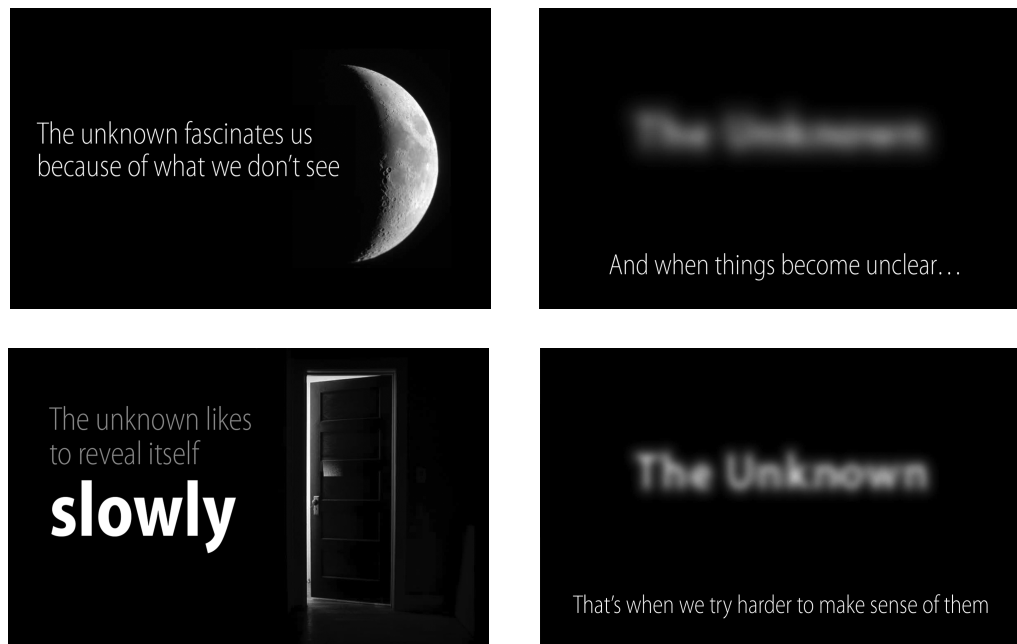


Figure 6 From the 'mood boards' presentation
Art Director: Uri Naveh. Copywriter: Tal Berkovitch.

A good way to test the effectiveness and strength of a strategy is to look at whether it contains a strong and authentic tagline.¹¹

Therefore, translating the strategic sentence into a winning, differentiating tagline was of the essence, as demonstrated in the creative concept presentation of Naveh and Berkovitch:

Pursuing the Unknown

The unknown takes us on a journey with no beginning and no end.

An ongoing exploration to discover new knowledge, research new worlds and venture to places as yet unrevealed. The pursuit of the unknown excites us.

We are eager to go beyond roads well-traveled and take risks that may lead us to new places.

“Pursuing the unknown” represents our chase, our passion, our *raison d’être*.

Creating knowledge and passing it on are the heart and soul of every research university in the world. Thus, it is not surprising that 150 universities worldwide use the word ‘knowledge’ in their motto.¹² All, in reality, pursue the unknown, but TAU is the first to adopt and own this idea.

As mentioned earlier, TAU had originally intended to keep its logo. True, the logo was not perceived favourably, and it did not support TAU’s positive features, but it was well established and widely recognised (40 per cent of the respondents linked it, unassisted, to TAU). Moreover, failures in the introduction of new logos by institutions like the University of California or Loughborough should have dissuaded TAU from even attempting it, yet, the branding steering committee ultimately found itself choosing a new logo, for three main reasons:



Figure 7 The old logo in Hebrew and English



Figure 8 The new logo

1. In order to convey to the world — both inside and outside the university — the new spirit of TAU, a significant change in external attributes, first of all the logo, was required.
2. The existing logo, shown in Figure 7, was unable to fully support the new brand narrative. The conservative blue colour, together with the straight, sharp lines and the flame symbol, suggested a sensible, old-fashioned, unimaginative institution. This logo could not express the brand traits identified in the branding process, which included a love of adventure, curiosity, creativity and risk-taking. Also, the Hebrew lettering that served as the basis for the old logo did not contribute to the international and universal spirit that the new branding wished to convey.
3. A marginal consideration: the font of the old logo, which was not a standard font, needed to be revitalised and updated.

At the same time, it was important to include the old emblem in the new

logo. This was the right thing to do, both intrinsically and symbolically.

Figure 8 shows that the blue of the old logo was transformed into the colour black, which signifies mystery and infinity.

Black can give us the space sometimes needed for reflection and inner searching. It can indicate inner strength and the possibility for change.¹³

The three circles symbolised the research process. It begins with an idea that is not clear or 100 per cent defined, and gradually it becomes whole or complete. But it is a never-ending journey — a circular process. When a finding is reached, the process starts all over again with new questions and new unknowns.

The three-circle design also provided a solution for sub-brands at TAU. We knew it was important for each faculty to feel unique and independent, yet also a part of the TAU superbrand. The new branding gave TAU that kind of flexibility.



Figure 9 A logo for every faculty

Reporting findings from a study of universities in the UK, Chris Chapleo reveals through qualitative interviews a common set of challenges. One of them is achieving a healthy balance between the need for a coherent overarching university brand, on the one hand, and the need for schools and faculties to create their own sub-brands ('brand architecture'), on the other.¹⁴

We considered the model of Harvard University and suddenly the creative solution fitted the TAU brand hierarchy like a glove.

Each faculty at TAU had input in the design of its logo using icons relevant to the field, such as molecules for Medicine or people meeting for Social Science.

In this manner, as shown in Figure 9, we devised a unique visual signature for each faculty, which was consistent with the umbrella brand while also reflecting the rich multidisciplinary offerings at TAU, as well as the multifaceted nature of pursuing the unknown. This move addressed the 'supermarket effect' described earlier. Each faculty was now given the tool to differentiate itself from both other faculties at TAU and competitors at other institutions and to interpret the brand narrative in accordance with its own subject matter. These unique logos also supplied a rich visual language, as shown, for example, in Figure 10.

With the support of the TAU president, it was decided that additional university sub-brands should be brought into alignment with the new hierarchical logo structure. Despite early concerns, units that had long used their own independent logos, such as the International School, Youth University and tech transfer company Ramot, were happy, as illustrated in Figure 11, to come under the superbrand. The recently established Alumni Organisation also adopted the logo, as did the Friends Associations in Israel and worldwide.

As shown in Figure 12, we were inspired by the three circles to integrate a dot-dot-dot into the copywriting. Instead of reporting a research finding in the usual way, the new branding poses it as a question, something to be continued. The example in Figure 13 shows how a research about bats can be reported in an interesting way.

Prelaunch road show

The chosen brand language was surprising, to put it mildly. The logo was certainly not standard for an institution of higher education, the black colour was considered daring, and the message of 'Pursuing the Unknown' was bold and sophisticated. Although all had been extensively discussed and endorsed by a large majority in the steering committee, it was clear

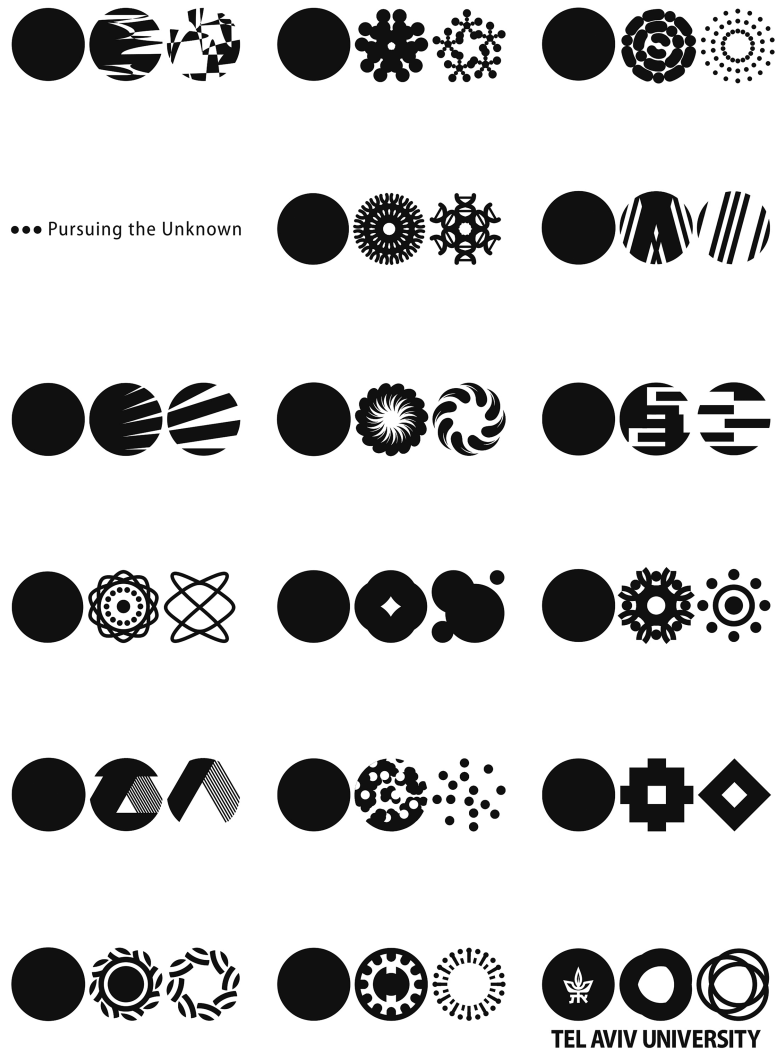


Figure 10 A rich visual language
Art Director: Uri Naveh.

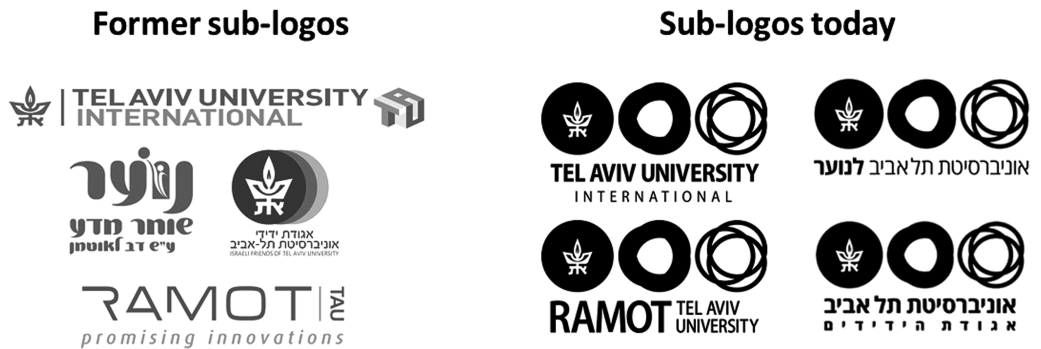


Figure 11 Former sub-logos versus sub-logos today

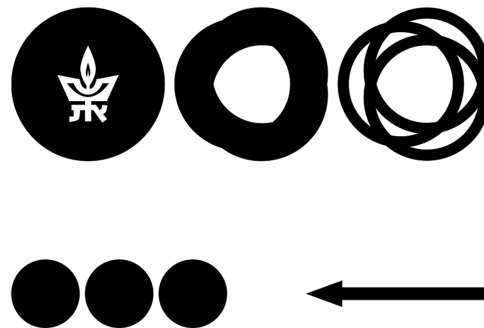


Figure 12 The rebranding process also addressed the textual language



Figure 13 Posing research finding as a question
Source: From a creative concept presentation, April 2015.
Art Director: Uri Naveh. Copywriter: Tal Berkovitch.

that the brand language must also be shared with other parties on campus, in order to gain support. Again, the team that managed the process at TAU always had the setbacks of similar moves in the higher education market in the back of their minds.

The TAU president wanted broad support for the university's branding. Therefore, at this stage, and for the next few months, the strategic process and creative ideas were presented to dozens of academic and administrative leaders at TAU. The marketing team held 25 personal meetings with senior officials and ten group meetings, in which the materials were presented and the issues discussed. There were practically no reservations with regard to the necessity of the process. The strategic conclusions and the narrative, condensed

into the tagline 'Pursuing the Unknown', received wide support. Questions were raised, however, with regard to the new logo, and especially its black colour, which, alongside positive attributes like solid, innovative and renewal in preparation for a new cycle of life,¹⁵ evoked negative associations (depression and loss, for example), as well as concerns about giving up the use of colour.

These concerns and impressions could not be ignored, but attempts to add a touch of colour to the logo, for instance in the faculties' logos, yielded poor results. Since a picture is worth a thousand words, it was decided to produce samples of materials under the new branding.

A section of that year's Annual Report was redesigned using the new brand

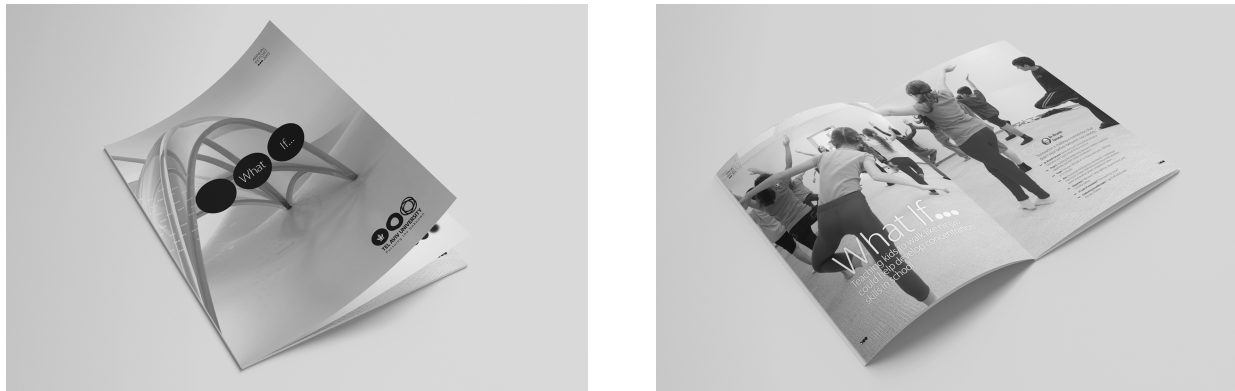


Figure 14 Examples of the Annual Report's design under the new branding
Art Director: Uri Naveh. Copywriter: Tal Berkovitch. Photos: Yoram Reshef.

language. Figure 14 shows the redesigned report. The colourful cover with the enhanced black logo, as well as the pictures inside, did much to dispel previous worries. The Brand Book did not ignore the issue either, and a shade of blue was added as a secondary official colour. The world regained its colour, despite the black logo, and the brand language received its final stamp of approval.

Universities celebrate academic achievements but do not tend to celebrate organisational processes, certainly not those that have to do with marketing. This is true of TAU as well, which launched the new branding officially in a letter issued by the president, rector and director-general at the end of October 2015, addressed to all campus personnel. Responses were few, and most were favourable, although as many as 2,000 people had opened the attached presentation describing the strategic and creative process.

Nothing suggested the imminent storm . . .

Talk less, do more

Although the TAU management had entered the branding process with open eyes, it did not foresee the tsunami

triggered by the launch of the new brand language in a marketing campaign targeting prospective students.

It happened at the end of January 2016, just before the open house for young people who wished to become acquainted with the campus before applying. Just as it did every year, TAU advertised the open house on billboards – as shown in Figure 15 – and in the digital media.

This time, however, the campaign premiered the new branding message and logo, aiming not only to brand the university but also to brand TAU students as curious people, as searchers.

It was probably the appearance of the logo on billboards throughout the city that provoked the heated call by some Israeli academics to protest against the change. They posted a digital petition, and 100 signatures were collected in less than a day.

The protest was one more manifestation of the sincere belief of academic personnel that branding processes are at odds with the very essence of the 'scholarly community'. Their objections were also informed by natural conservatism in the face of any change, especially in something as symbolic as a logo. The media, which had shown little interest in the press release issued by TAU's spokesperson and



Figure 15 Campaign for Open House 2016 (loosely translated from the original Hebrew)
Art Director: Uri Naveh. Copywriter: Tal Berkovitch.

had seemed indifferent to the university's new branding, now became interested and covered the controversy extensively.

TAU President Klafter received personal e-mails asking him to retract the new branding. Protests included criticism of technical details in the logo and of the process itself. Some critics outright refused to use the new logo. The TAU management and branding team, despite their awareness of the risks involved in branding and specifically in changing the logo, had prepared no plan for handling such a crisis.

On the days that preceded the open house (TAU's main annual marketing event), the branding team did nothing but deal with the crisis, providing the media with answers in real time. Faculty members who asked questions or protested by e-mail received quick responses, which sometimes included lengthy face-to-face meetings. The serious, candid and direct response to those who sought answers usually produced good results.

At the same time, the leadership of TAU, headed by the president, stood firm. They listened, they showed interest, but they were also resolute and unwavering.

The president's promise to bring the issue to the Senate put an end to the

immediate crisis. When the Senate meeting took place, about two months later, the management was ready, the lessons had been learned and the discussion went smoothly.

TAU's marketing team was pleased to discover that the protests of the academic staff and the media coverage had no negative impact on the open house, which a record number of 14,000 people attended. Figure 16 features a photo that was taken at the main entrance of the campus.

The significant turnaround had been brought about by doing, not talking.

Sixty things we don't know . . . yet

It so happened that the launch of the new brand coincided with TAU's 60th anniversary, which provided an excellent platform for launching the new branding and introducing it to both the university and the general public. The birthday became a celebration of '60 years in pursuit of the unknown'.

The annual international Board of Governors (BOG) meeting, receiving a higher budget than usual, was coloured with the new brand language. Similarly, the alumni's 60th anniversary event vigorously conveyed the new branding, not



Figure 16 Happy day on campus: Open House 2016. The left banner invites “Geniuses” while the right banner invites “Seekers”. Photo: Yael Zur.

only with the logo flying on flags and decorating the sets, but also through rich content that told the brand story on stage. Companies hired to produce these events loved the brand narrative, which unleashed their own creativity. You can be impressed by some of these creative outcomes in Figures 17–20.

The Annual Report for the BOG was produced under the title *60 Things We Don't Know . . . Yet!* It included 60 projects by groundbreaking researchers, all of which spoke the brand visual and textual language, as shown, for example, in Figure 21.

A short video produced for TAU's 60th anniversary broke the traditional, well-known format of presenting the institution's numerous achievements over the years, focusing instead on ‘the things we know and the things we don't know . . . yet’.¹⁶

TAU's marketing operations ‘speak digital’ fluently. Thus, it was clear that TAU's digital assets, and first of all its website, should be adapted to the new branding. The website's home page was transformed into a live magazine, reflecting the pursuit of the unknown conducted by all researchers and units at TAU.¹⁷ The home page was also ‘recruited’ for special occasions. For example, for one year's annual

open house it was filled with the day's leading motif: many question marks.

The big elaborate events, the logo's inclusion in different formats, and delivering the brand narrative through diverse media turned the complex concepts and ideas into something concrete, which people could understand and relate to emotionally. Some cynical remarks and objections were still voiced here and there, but the overall atmosphere had changed, and the new branding received wide support.

The celebrations ended, but the work of assimilation had not yet been completed. In fact, it still continues, and will go on, into the unknown. The new branding is not just an advertising campaign or a pretty casing for special events. It is TAU's narrative, expressed day after day: in graduation ceremonies, in communication with candidates and students, in conversations with donors, in research news on the website, in social media (as demonstrated in Figure 22), in speeches made by the president and other senior officials in different forums, and in countless other ways.

Figures 23–25 show some examples of the branding implementation on different occasions and illustrate the never-ending ideas inspired by TAU's new branding.



Figure 17 Entrance to TAU's Smolarz Auditorium, Honorary Doctorates Ceremony, BOG 2016
Photo: Michal Roche-Ben Ami.



Figure 18 Honorary Doctorates Ceremony, BOG 2016
Photo: Michal Roche-Ben Ami.



Figure 19 60th anniversary alumni event
Photo: Michal Roche-Ben Ami.



Figure 20 On-stage content — Pursuing the Unknown. 60th anniversary alumni event
Photo: Michal Roche-Ben Ami.

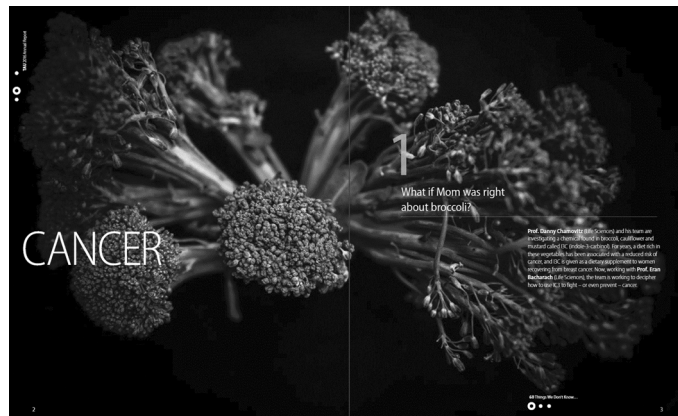


Figure 21 Annual Report for the BOG, 2016
Photo: Yoram Reshef. Design: Issi Dvir. Copy: Mimi Tanaman — hi-Text.

We are all researchers in an endless pursuit

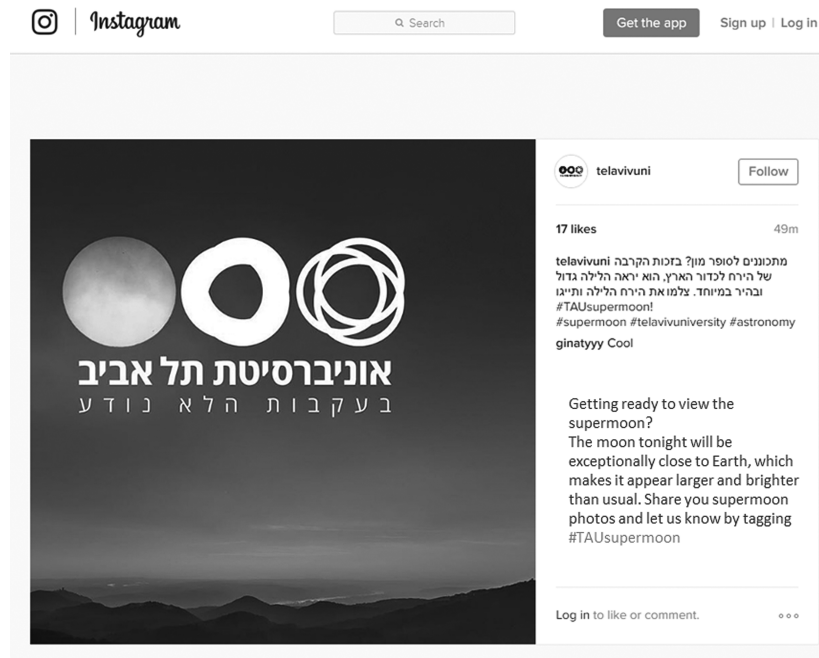
When we first embarked upon the journey to new branding, we knew a great deal about marketing, branding, narratives, higher education, managing change and more, just like TAU researchers who begin a new scholarly investigation.

We did not know, however, where the road would lead us, or what the results would be. But we had the professional confidence, the belief, that this move was needed and the ‘chutzpah’ to lead the process that we felt certain was right for the university.

The result we attained was the creation of original branding. And again, similarly to TAU researchers, our moments of satisfaction were very brief. The pursuit of the unknown never ends. In the world of branding, it requires consistency coupled with flexibility, enabling adaptations and solutions for what we have not done . . . yet.

Summary and recommendations: Talk less, do more

This paper reviewed the process of branding at TAU: from identifying the need for new branding and launching the process; through the decision on how the



Credit: Twisted.

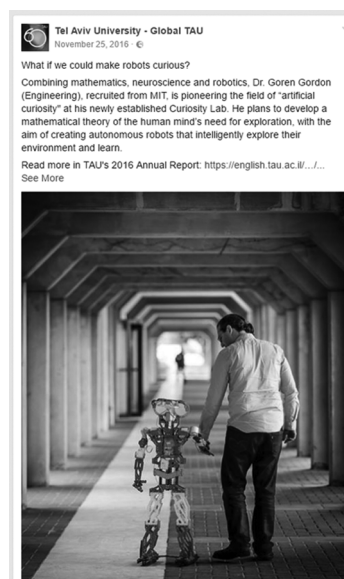


Figure 22 Examples from social media

process should be managed, the establishment of the steering committee and the branding supervisory team, and selection of suitable consultants; to finally describing the

strategic insights and presenting the creative products. We told you about organisational crises that arose when the new branding was inaugurated and how we handled them



When you walk in, the doors open and you're actually cracking the code.

Figure 23 Brand-in — Example for sliding doors in the buildings



Credit: No, No, No, No, No, Yes.

Figure 24 Idea for branding on buildings



Credit: Twisted.

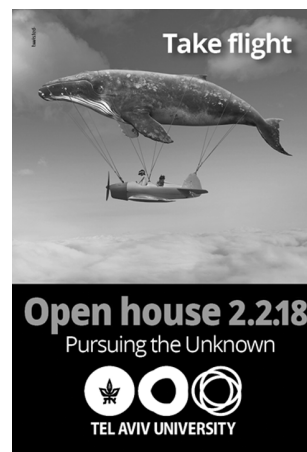


Figure 25 Inspiring curiosity and imagination — Open House 2018

and continued to successfully implement the new brand language.

Every organisation is different and must undertake the process in its own way and face its own challenges. At the same time, organisations also have a lot in common. We learned a great deal from both the successes and the failures of other institutions of higher education and felt it was important to contribute the experience and knowledge we gained for the benefit of others.

The following ten recommendations serve as a brief roadmap for branding:

1. Even strong brands are sometimes in need of revitalisation, rethinking and a renewed definition of their organisational identity. Always be alert to whether anything has changed in the market, in the competition or in the perception of the brand. Frequent market surveys help maintain sensitivity to such changes.
2. Branding \neq logo; rather, identity and strategy.
3. Involve a sufficient number of top management personnel in the process, while also appointing a small team of people who can supervise the process and take it forward on a daily basis.
4. Strong backing from the head of the organisation (the president in the case of an institution of higher education) is critical for the success of the process, and for overcoming challenges in the ultimate implementation.
5. Even something obvious and universal like 'research' can be transformed into a unique and exciting branding story.
6. Recruit brand ambassadors. In institutions of higher education, these can be members of the academic faculty, students and alumni.
7. It is important to present and explain the process. It will only really be understood once the branding is used in concrete applications, however. Therefore, talk less, do more. Make the branding real through actual examples.
8. Understand that logo alterations unleash strong emotions. Therefore, do not change a logo just for the sake of change.
9. Do not be caught unprepared: before launching the new branding, imagine the worst case scenario, and prepare a plan for this contingency.
10. Successful branding requires 360° implementation. Prepare a plan for assimilating the branding, and earmark the necessary resources.

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