Re-Branding

Case study: Statistics Poland[1]

Background

At the end of 2017 – after years of using a well-known and recognizable, yet very outdated and old-fashioned logo - Statistics Poland introduced a new logo and visualization system. Additionally, apart from the old logo, there was no coherent visual language used in the organization, nor did it have any formal visual identity system.

The inspiration to propose a change in visual identity was two-fold:

- to adapt and align the logo with other initiatives and activities aimed at rebuilding the image of public statistics as a modern institution responding to the needs of users;
- the centennial of the creation of Statistics Poland.

The objectives were:

- to be perceived as modern, innovative, open and approachable for users of data and as an essential element of the state's information infrastructure and information market;
- to build a uniform visual identification for all statistical products, including publications.

We adopted a multi-faceted approach to the rebranding process, including many internal stakeholders.

The first step was an open competition for the new logo and visual identity.

- The whole process was preceded by a call for tenders that lasted approximately six months.
- The competition was open for everyone, and the criteria were published.
- The jury consisted of lecturers of fine arts from a well-known academic institution and statisticians responsible for our office publishing policy.
- The winner was a graduate of fine arts with an impressive portfolio who had won prizes in other competitions.
- Before we announced the winning design, we confirmed with the Polish Patent Office that the project was original and did not violate any copyright.
- The new logo was presented at a press conference with Statistics’ Poland’s President announcing the winning design and thereby introducing the rebranding initiative.
- Along with the new logo we introduced a complex system of visual identification with specific fonts, colors, templates, a refreshed layout of printed and digital publications, press releases (one of the first changes), web pages, official letters, emails, etc.

The second step was the implementation of the new visual identity within the organization.

- Templates (of official letters, e-mails) were developed and made available to employees.
- Renewed layout of statistical publications (both printed and digital) were introduced. This was a complex process and cooperation between departments was essential, as publications are produced in many different organizational units.
- To ensure consistency across the organization, we formed a Publications’ Rebranding Team with experts from various departments who analyzed issues related to the rebranding of our publications.
- In 2018 we published the first output featuring the new visual identity.

The final step was the total qualitative change in the area of statistical publications. It should be noted that this change was not only about the transformation of the publication's appearance but the transformation of the publishing series. The priorities of the publication process were changed, with a one-step resignation from purely tabular publications without analytical commentary, to only analytical publications, moving the dissemination of data to database tools and APIs. The new graphical language enabled a more attractive presentation of advanced statistical analyses. Another critical change was the introduction mandatory bilingual publishing - Polish and English. These changes were made easier for organizational units to adapt with the purchase and implementation of modern desktop publishing tools, preceding and accompanying the application of the new visual identity.

Public reaction

As expected, the reaction of the mainstream media was limited and mixed. It was neither strongly negative or overly enthusiastic, as the long-used logo was recognizable and deeply anchored in Statistics Poland social perception.

Internet users (mostly anonymous and commenting on press web pages) questioned the financial aspects of the project and asked questions about its budget. Others commented on the new logo and compared it to other signs already present on the market, suggesting excessive integrity and simplicity, and lack of distinctness and clarity.

The reaction from general social media users was generally cold, and naturally correlated with the negative attitude towards public administration in Poland. The comments reflected a perception of ineffectiveness of the logo, excessive spending and questioned the need to spend public funds on visual identification.

Simultaneously, experts and authorities in the area of branding appreciated the concept of a modern logo and welcomed the visualization. Also, the transparent selection process was acknowledged by the professionals. They underlined the relatively low cost of the logo and visualization system.
The new visual approach also resulted in many positive outcomes, such gaining many new followers who were not previously aware of Statistics Poland’s presence in social media channels.

Statistics Poland’s response

The response strategy emphasized the transparency of the competition (the criteria, the jury members, the selection process and the winner’s prize) and the cost of the project (which was relatively low cost compared to similar competitions or public tenders taking place around the same time). We stressed that those costs included the entire visualization system including the introduction of many new elements of our communication toolkit.

We also transparently communicated the rebranding process - informing people why it was necessary and the improvement of the institution’s communication and dissemination activities.

Before the project started, we were aware that spending public funds for this type of initiative was particularly sensitive. We assumed the majority of the expenditures would be limited to the organization of the competition and the creation of a visual identification system. We did not anticipate the costs and timing associated with the need to change existing graphic elements (e.g., signs on buildings). As a result, we had to reduce further the project’s budget to accommodate these changes. This resulted in a positive outcome as the actual cost of the project, when compared with similar projects in other public administration units, was lower.

Rebranding issues

The visual identification system changed layouts, graphs, tables in print and digital publications and press releases. The goal of these changes was to provide consistency across all organizational units (including regional offices).

However, the new system resulted in a change to employees’ daily work and this resulted in several challenges.

- The change exposed some deficiencies of skills associated with the use of text editing and graphics tools and the rigorous application of rules and templates to ensure compliance with the new language of visual communication. Unfortunately, the implementation strategy did not identify the essential training needs of the employees. Due to the lack of financial resources, the decision was taken to begin implementation and accept the initial difficulties that ensued. Gradually employees acquired the skills they required to work with the new system.
- The rebranding was initially perceived by employees as an obligation - a new rule to follow. The improvements and positive values were overlooked and some staff, who generally found it hard to adapt to change, were slightly frustrated.

Externally, users were also impacted.

- The introduction of the new visual identity in publications also changed the classification of the publishing series.
- A small number of external users were unhappy about the discontinuation of old forms and the transition to electronic data dissemination.
- Some advanced users, often using data in publications, were confused. They couldn’t find the desired data in its usual place in publications and press releases.

Lessons learned

The most important thing in rebranding is clear, transparent communication about why it is necessary and the benefits of the change.

A strong communication strategy should help employees understand the reason for and the purpose of the rebranding exercise. Employees need to know to what extent the change will impact their work and what kind of support they will receive from the organization (i.e. training.).

We recommend implementing a new visual identity system as an inclusive process with the participation of all organizational units that will use the new identification on a daily basis.

In the case of rebranding, it should be communicated how the new system will be chosen and the institution’s rationale for choosing that approach.

Externally, it is also a good practice to consult (if possible) and communicate, in advance, the planned changes in publications/press releases with users.

[1] Case study was provided by Statistics Poland. For questions or further enquiries, please contact Statistics Poland.