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Corporate Images and Emblems

IT IS NATURAL that we should look for new words and expressions to stand for things which are coming newly upon us in these fast-moving years. Large masses of people are on the move, not only to higher standards of living but also to new standards of values and conduct and new social consciousness. Old descriptive terms and symbols fall short of what we find necessary in business and community.

The need for revision is illustrated in the political field by Portugal's invocation in 1961 of the 1373 treaty with Britain. It agrees that in case of aggression against one of the parties the other shall provide "troops, archers, slingers, ships and galleys sufficiently armed for war". To be sure, the meaning of these old terms is clear to those affected — the treaty was reaffirmed by Churchill in the House of Commons in 1943 in connection with the Azores — but business and society would handicap themselves if they were to cling to such ancient ways of saying things.

During the past twenty years, and at an increasing pace during the past ten years, business and industry have been looking sharply at their public relations. "What sort of front are we presenting?" is the question they ask. Out of their findings they are building what has come to be called their "Corporate Image".

This image is not a sort of brooding Buddha, but something very full of life, pulsating with the vigour of achievement and dynamic with growth.

How people think about us is highly important to all Canadians, whatever our individual roles may be. We are becoming increasingly sophisticated in economic, social, scientific and political affairs. We are compelled to get to know ourselves as others see us.

We must go farther than the mere acquiring of this knowledge. Having found out wherein we fall short of projecting the ideals we would like people to hold of us, we need to take constructive measures to develop a manner of communicating those ideals. Hence the current effort to build desirable corporate imagery.

Every company, big or small, has a corporate image. It is the sum total of all the bits of information about the company reaching the public. The company's basic philosophy, such facets of its personality as its dealings with the public in terms of product and service, its attitude toward its own personnel, its interest and participation in community matters — what is done in these areas in the firm's day-to-day activity builds itself, stroke by stroke, into a picture of the company in people's minds.

The need for an image

When we consider the state of the market place today we are convinced of the vital importance of an earnest effort to build better images. There was a time when a few specialized firms produced limited quantities of this or that sort of goods and sold them without great effort. Today's automated factories are pouring into our warehouses and stores great quantities of products of similar function, quality and price, marketed by competing manufacturers with much the same theory and practice of advertising.

Consequently, the customer's initial buying decision is not made on quality and price alone, but also, and to an increasing degree, on his impression of the maker and the seller. The questions he asks himself, often subconsciously, are: What reputation has the maker of these goods? How does his personality come through the verbal sales pitch? What image is impressed upon the emotional side of the customer's mind?

That this is true is seen readily when we examine the thoughts of a housewife who is shopping for an electric kitchen appliance. She is not the least bit interested in the complex operations of business; she knows that appliances of similar quality will be, by and large, in the same price range. What, then, does she seek to learn? Is the maker dependable? How will the manufacturer and this store treat me if my appliance needs servicing? What is the attitude of the store toward exchanges, in case my husband doesn't like the appliance? Are the manufacturer and the store trying to serve me, or merely to sell me something?

Such questions as these inspire business men and industrialists to recognize the importance of seeking a means of communication which will indelibly impress upon the public the most favourable attributes of their corporate personality, inducing continued loyalty to the company and its products.

To establish its image, a company must first decide what it wants to look like and then set about doing the things which will, when displayed to the public, leave the impression it wishes to make.

People tend to humanize companies by attributing personality characteristics to them. They sum up a firm in the same way as they sum up an acquaintance. It is, in a word, "friendly," or "liberal," or "self-respecting," or "solid." They like to deal with firms they can "feel good" about.

This brings out in strong terms the universality of responsibility within the company for building and maintaining the desired corporate image: every officer and employee is involved. The president's public comment, the general manager's attitude toward his staff, the shareholders' pride in possession of stock, the foreman's relations with men and women at the assembly benches, the telephone operator's reception of calls: all these contribute their strokes to the image. If they are of the right tone they combine to create a picture that will be recognized as that of a company with which it is good to do business.

Image is real

There is nothing remotely resembling the Emperor's New Clothes in a legitimate corporate image. It is real. In fact, we might reverse the story told by Hans Christian Andersen and say that only a child would deny that a corporate image is a real and attractive and necessary thing.

But this image is not something put together by magicians in a secret room. It is the outcome of careful consideration and planning in which the chief executives of the company are deeply involved.

A desirable image cannot be imposed upon the public by shouting about its merit. It is something to be built from the inside out, taking note of these things which are necessary to any constructive work: truthfulness, meaningfulness and believability.

It cannot be too often said that little things count. We, individuals as well as corporations, are judged by our behaviour, not in great crises but in the minor adjustments of daily life. A corporation, like a person, starts every new day as a new time of testing. In the course of the day the corporation will be judged a thousand times, or ten thousand times, every judgment being based upon some feature it presents: its correspondence, its reception of callers and customers, its sales approaches, the courtesy of its clerks, truck drivers and elevator operators, the spirit of its executives. It is the personal experience of people with the company's workers and products that is of paramount importance in image-building.

About changing images

One difficulty met with by long-established corporations is called by some psychologists "ideational inertia" — the diffidence about moving from an old idea to a new one. But if a company is to be successful it must go with the spirit of its time or be strong enough to lead it.

In other areas of life we change without hesitation. There is no more reason why corporate images should be less given to modernization than is the household bathroom, and look at the changes there. From the tin tub and angular rust-stained washbowl of not so long ago has emerged, little by little, a gleaming, streamlined room.

The changing image is not seen anywhere more clearly than in banking. The fusty-looking clerk of Dickens' time, with his wing collar and green eyeshade, writing interminably at a high desk or peering at customers through bars, has gone from the scene. Instead, the banks are staffed by keen young men and women who find a great deal of their work satisfaction through their friendly relations with customers.

This *Letter*, which tries to put before readers some thoughts and facts which they might not otherwise meet, is in keeping with the changing times and image.

Changes in the corporate image need to be communicated to the public, and herein lies some of our difficulty. We have to decide what traits to emphasize, and then to devise the means of communicating the abstract ideas in meaningful and appropriate words and emblems.

Probably overriding these difficulties is another: all the bits and pieces that go to make up the corporate image must be gathered together and made into a consistent whole. Then the image has significance in the minds of people. It is a unique image, not that of "just another company".

Consider your public

Our corporate image cannot be effective so long as it is made up entirely of what we think about ourselves. There may be a critical gap between what we hope we are and what people think we are.

It may be necessary to make periodic surveys of our public. Building of the corporate image cannot be done by masterminds in a back room, segregated from the people the image is to influence. The image must be constructed, not to make you feel good but to be interpreted by your public so as to give a true picture of your aims, your sincerity and your achievements.

Who make up this "public" we have been talking about? Most important are customers and potential customers. They hold your success in their hands. Their basic criterion in buying is to get value for their

money, but their judgment of what is good value has changed. In an era when consumer credit is freer than it ever was before, people buy less for cheapness than they used to. They look sharply at the manufacturer's and the retailer's reputation.

Secondly come your employees. When men and women work for a company which has a good public reputation they are proud of their affiliation and are loyal. The corporate image affects both productivity and labour turnover.

Next in order are the investors. Some people buy stock for a quick turnover and high gain, but the serious investor seeks a long-term relationship. The image presented to the financial community by the company may be the deciding factor in the purchase of shares; at the very least it is a telling influence.

Then we turn to the general public, made up of people who have no particular ties with the corporation. The view they have of the company, including its participation in community and national life, will be communicated to customers, employees and investors through comment and criticism. Also included in this general public are the people who are at present too young to use the company's goods or services, but will qualify for active relationship at some future time. The image you present to them now will influence them then.

Competition

This is a noisy world in which we live. Our ears are assailed every day by hundreds of talkers on radio and television, and every time we blink our eyes they open upon a new advertisement. All these are competing for attention. We must get our message through the barrage to our target, and we can't do that merely by shouting louder or using more display space.

Our strategy in meeting competition must include a conscious effort to create a distinctive and positive image with its face turned toward meeting the needs and desires of the public.

Many firms are failing because they have no other idea than to have their advertising jewellery a size larger than that of anybody else. When compared with corporations which devote time and skill to their appearance, these people look tawdry and flashy, and their ordinariness shows through.

The combination of boldness and discretion needed in this operation must stem from the corporation's highest authority. It is no longer practical for the executive to retire into itself and leave its public contacts to its sales and advertising people. The real image-building force must come from the heart of the company, not from one of its arms or legs.

Spreading from that centre we need an internal educational effort which clearly spells out the intentions of the corporation for its image and brings all employees into the image-building effort. Every trans-

action across the counter, every sales call, every piece of correspondence, every telephone conversation, contributes toward engraving the company character on the minds of people.

There are two things to be considered here. The men and women in your company must help to build the desired image, but they must also be moved by it. The image displayed must be the image inside. The deeper the sense of participation, and the more solid the inspiration, the more effective will be the end result.

Getting started

When decision has to be made about formation of a corporate image, the responsible executive is obliged to think clearly and accurately. He must become acquainted with the nature of the need, after realizing that there is a need.

Does this proposed image meet completely the specific purpose he is thinking of? Does it cover all the eventualities in his office and his departments and his branches? Do those who plan it and those who will be depended upon to carry it out qualify for his utmost confidence?

Having blocked out the ideal image, take a look at the present state of affairs. Evaluate critically what is being done in all the important areas of your company in the way of presenting a desirable image.

Scratch up all imaginable ideas before you draw a blueprint. You may make a score of preliminary profiles of an image before being satisfied. Challenge everything doubtful, even if you have to play devil's advocate in opposition to some of your most-trusted advisors.

Follow closely all the steps taken by those to whom you entrust implementation of the idea. Whatever the technical and constructional procedure, top management in the company is responsible for the policy that will see it carried out and put into use. No one should be allowed to do anything that would weaken or damage the corporate image.

Choosing an emblem

The emblem is a selective, coherent statement about the corporation designed to put into shorthand form the corporate image the executive wishes to convey. It serves, if properly used, to rivet together all the parts of a corporation, such as head office and branches, factories and outlets. It ties together all your related goods and services.

Every emblem design is individual and different. To make it so involves far more than doodling on a drawing board. The artist, taking the inspiration that is given him, evokes feeling, and gives the familiar and commonplace a touch of creative newness. He levels out the irrelevancies and sharpens the features to be accented.

And yet much can be conveyed by the well-done emblem. A Rembrandt portrait of an aged Dutch woman represents a particular person, but the representation is made a vehicle for a descant on old age and human fortitude and dignity. So the emblem, while picturing an animal or a scene or a complex of lines, can be symbolic of abstract qualities like dependability, eminence and purpose.

The trend today is toward simplicity of design. If your emblem was adopted about the time George Stephenson ran his first steam locomotive it is probably not suitable to an age when astronauts are training for flights to other planets. It is natural to wish to maintain continuity, and you may do this by up-dating the old emblem in modern dress. Pick out the strongest points, make them stronger, and eliminate frills that serve as distractions.

We owe most of the faults in design of emblems to the desire to catch the eye by any line and colour means, a false purpose in the long haul of corporate life. Inventions in type and design wrought out without reference to the corporate identity may surprise or startle us by novelty, but their cuteness becomes tiresome, and their sacrifice of purpose and taste causes them to become outdated quickly.

True excellence will be found to be closely allied with simplicity. Even cold propriety may be effective if it expresses the purpose of the sponsors of the emblem. Our minds do not deal easily with complexities. We have accustomed ourselves to boil down a statement or a picture to its essentials — we even wrap up whole nations in simple cartoon figures like John Bull, Jack Canuck and Uncle Sam.

On the other hand, too simple a figure does not provide us with enough about which to occupy our minds. A geometrician thinks in his axioms and definitions of lines and circles, but his lines and circles and triangles mean nothing except to the initiated unless they are accompanied by explanations and footnotes: and then what becomes of the idea of visual communication?

Our new emblem

 These thoughts about emblems are prompted by the fact that this *Monthly Letter* introduces the new emblem of the Royal Bank. The thought and work of the many people who prepared it are fresh in mind.

A professional design team was engaged, and created scores of designs, including a variety of abstractions, crowns, ovals, triangles, and modifications of the old emblem that has been in use all this century. A small committee of bank executives and officers sat in while these were discussed, and after several meetings the number of designs was reduced to two before the final choice was made.

It became clear early in the operation that it would be futile to attempt to express all the committee's thoughts about the bank in one emblem: dignity, substantiality, progressiveness, service, friendliness, accessibility, and a dozen other points of virtue. It was decided, then, to concentrate upon a few things: to carry forward something of the emblem that embodies this bank's long history of significant service to Canada, to dress it in modern garb befitting the bank's liveliness to progress, and to indicate the scope of our service not only in Canada but throughout the world.

It would have been hopeless to attempt to show within the bounds of an emblem the day-to-day reality of the Royal Bank as a place where pleasant people accept deposits, make out money orders, cash cheques, advance loans, rent safe deposit boxes, issue travellers cheques, deal in foreign exchange, and provide all the other services for which the bank exists. We decided to limit our emblem to emphasizing that behind all these is our tradition of stability which makes these services possible and dependable.

The emblem had to be practical, something that could be used on cheques, booklets, advertisements, letter paper, office and branch memos, and everything else we print; on trucks and billboards; and eventually on every one of our branches in Canada and abroad. It had to be intelligible to our customers and our other friends who speak many languages — English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Japanese, Dutch and Italian.

Now the Royal Bank, like everyone else with a new emblem, faces the task of getting it into use, because an emblem is wasted unless it is used wherever its owner meets the public. Rules will be set up for applying the emblem in every day use so as to emphasize the corporate identity of this Bank and all its branches. The effect sought is that of a symphony orchestra in which dozens of instruments, each with its own range capabilities and tonal qualities, combine to produce a single musical "image".

Be positive: constructive

Molding and shaping the corporate image and choosing an emblem are highly positive, constructive jobs, which you will need to approach with vigour, imagination and enthusiasm. A good image is not just a dandy thing to have, like a new car or a new head office building. It is an essential of successful business.

Getting a good image is not something to be solved by a wall-to-wall electronic machine with a thousand push buttons. It needs all the human understanding of which you are capable, applied to every facet of it.

Your starting point is to make a decision as to what kind of image you want. This seems like a platitude, but it is surprising how few firms have more than hazy ideas. What you are building is not just for this year, but something that will last and will serve you powerfully as long as you live up to it.