

## LOGO LANDS

The world's smallest nations have found a new weapon to take on to the global battlefield of commerce and fame - branding. *Wallpaper\** plots the rise of the brand state and heralds a new epoch of Gucci government

Call it the *Field of Dreams* theory of international relations: if you brand it, they will come. That seems to be the logic behind a growing list of countries that are trying to woo the world using the tried-and-true techniques of commercial brand building. What began as a consumer marketing product-as-lifestyle trend - pioneered by the likes of Nike, Disney, Calvin Klein et al - is becoming de rigueur among presidents, prime ministers, diplomats and foreign policy wonks. With swishy logos, catchy tag lines, mammoth marketing budgets, celebrity endorsements and even new lavish ambassadorial flagships (think branded superstore not stuffy embassy), this is government gone Gucci.

'Our brand is as important to us as the swoosh is to Nike and the golden arches are to McDonald's,' says Donald Tsang, Hong Kong's chief secretary for administration, about Brand Hong Kong, launched in May 2001. With its stylised dragon logo incorporating the letters H and K, 'BrandHK' has all the requisites you'd expect of a chic product launch: a flashy premiere with 500 execs and Bill Clinton at a *Fortune* Global Forum, logos emblazoned on an airliner, a new fleet of Eurocopters and ferries, a tag-line (Asia's World City), gimmicky media events and a world tour - all slickly packaged by the marketing acumen of Burson-Marsteller. 'The practice of branding countries is as old as the hills, which is why we have a stereotype image in our minds for almost every country in the world,' says Tony Allen, managing director of the London office of global consultancy Interbrand.

Throughout the ages kingdoms and countries have used unpleasant tactics to promote themselves under the labels of war and colonialism. But with the end of the Cold War, democratisation in Eastern Europe, globalisation and the information revolution, nation-states have had to abandon their old wicked ways, at least among Western countries. We've gone from jingoism to advertising jingles, from waging territorial wars to virtual battles between country-brands jockeying for position in global trade clubs (EU, Nafta, Mercosur, ASEAN, WTO), swooning for attention on CNN and seducing that dollar dominatrix called global capital. 'It is more important than ever not to leave the perception of your country unguarded or unmanaged,' says Allen, who's worked on branding the EU, Britain and now Estonia. 'Others will be more than ready to ascribe values to your country that you may not wholly appreciate.'



ILLUSTRATOR: SCOTT WOTHERSPOON



## BRAND NEW WORLD—A GLOBAL LIST OF THE LOGO NATIONS

**BrandHK**

Since the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997, one of the goals of BrandHK is to remind global management that the city is open for business under a 'one country, two systems' slogan. [www.brandhk.gov.hk](http://www.brandhk.gov.hk)

**Just .Be It**

Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt hired a team of image-makers to revamp the country's sagging image with a new logo incorporating the internet suffix .be which looks like a Zen Buddhist take on Nike—Just Be. [www.belgium.fgov.be](http://www.belgium.fgov.be)

**Captain Euro**

Arguably the silliest, most desperate attempt at fostering a European identity, Captain Euro is no branding superhero. Thankfully, Eurocrats have called in Rem Koolhaas to brainstorm a new Euro flag and Brussels as Europe's 'new capital'. [www.captaineuro.com](http://www.captaineuro.com)

**Brand Estonia**

Not post-Soviet, not even Baltic, but Nordic. That's the image this tiny country wants to convey to the world with the help of global powerhouse Interbrand. [www.eas.ee](http://www.eas.ee)

**Scotland—The Brand**

An initiative of Scottish Enterprise, 'Scotland—The Brand' involves 300 companies labelling their products with a Scotland Device tag, like Glenmorangie and the Roslin Institute who cloned Dolly the Sheep. [www.scotbrand.org.uk](http://www.scotbrand.org.uk)

**Cool Britannia**

Think tank Demos fired up the brand debate with the book *Britain™* in 1997. Despite a government-appointed 'Committee of Cool', the initiative went nowhere under New Labour. [www.demos.co.uk](http://www.demos.co.uk)

**Thailand's Brand**

Sex tourism heaven, sweatshops and cheap furniture? Think again: 'Land of Diversity and Refinement.' At least, that's what their slogan says. [www.thaitrade.com](http://www.thaitrade.com)

**Institute of Polish Brand**

Set up five years ago by the Chamber of Commerce and Ministry of Economy, the Institute has just launched its brand with an ad campaign in *Time* magazine. See *Wallpaper\** Issue 42 for our take on the Polska Brand. [www.imp.org.pl/index\\_eng.html](http://www.imp.org.pl/index_eng.html)

**India Brand Equity Fund**

New Delhi and the Confederation of Indian Industry just announced this initiative. Stay tuned for a hi-tech Bollywood brand. [www.cionline.org](http://www.cionline.org)

**Brand NZ**

Coming soon courtesy of three government ministries in partnership with local business and industry. In the meantime, check out New Zealand Edge, a country brand co-founded by Kevin Roberts, the New Zealand-born CEO of ad agency Saatchi & Saatchi. [www.nzedge.com](http://www.nzedge.com)

So active brand management is becoming an increasingly important practice of government.'

Yet country branding is not just about money, attracting tourists, trade and investment. Less than a month after the twin tower attacks, Charlotte Beers, formerly the 'queen of Madison Avenue' who worked her way to the top of ad agencies J Walter Thompson and Ogilvy & Mather, was sworn in as under-secretary of state for public diplomacy. From her first job on Uncle Ben's Rice to her current one for Uncle Sam, Beers has proved to be a woman who can sell, sell, sell. And she's using everything from focus groups to celebrity endorsement to win Brand America's global PR war. The trend is what Peter van Ham, a senior research fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations in The Hague, dubbed 'the rise of the brand state' last autumn in the journal *Foreign Affairs*. 'The unbranded state has a difficult time attracting economic and political attention,' he wrote. 'Image and reputation are thus becoming essential parts of the state's strategic equity.'

At the US Institute of Peace in Washington DC, that's exactly what Sheryl J Brown is researching as co-director of its Virtual Diplomacy Initiative. 'The new contenders for international power are information mobilisers,' she says. New stateless actors such as anti-landmine campaigners, environmentalists, celebrities (think U2's Bono at the World Economic Forum) and especially multinational corporate empires have laid siege to diplomats' traditional monopoly over international relations. 'Commercial brands started to compete with states for the allegiance, loyalty, as well as the money of the customer-cum-citizen,' says van Ham. In the 1990s, government simply fell out of fashion. Hence, they started mimicking corporations, referring to citizens as 'clients', privatising services, selling out public space to brands and now launching savvy marketing campaigns of their own.

Of course, not everyone buys van Ham's 'brandology'. *Realpolitik* thinkers mock it as 'flaccid power', arguing that it's the military hardware that matters most. But since most small and medium-sized countries just don't have the military clout, they've bought branding's supreme slogan instead: Just Do It! Ireland was the first in 1995. 'We did it in a classic brand management way,' says Noel Toolan,

the Irish Tourist Board's director of international marketing at the time. The Irish viewed their country, whose image was of an economic basket case, not as a product, but as a complex service brand. 'It's actually the people and their behaviour that is the brand,' says Toolan, who now heads his own consultancy BrandAid. They set up a brand entity in partnership with the private sector and invested \$30million in a global marketing campaign. It has paid off big time. (In fact, in one survey of multinational corporations, 72 per cent of respondents said that national image is important when they make their purchasing decisions.) The lethargic leprechaun is today the Celtic Tiger, an economic idol of Europe.

The 'brand wagon' has quickly picked up speed with more than a dozen nations initiating overhauls, including Estonia, New Zealand and India (see box). To complete a branding transformation some countries have even opted to establish swank, architecturally striking flagship buildings in Manhattan, in much the same way a leading retailer or designer might. Scandinavia House was completed a year ago and the Austrian Cultural Forum has just opened to rave reviews in New York. But branding does have its drawbacks. People aren't products. Countries aren't corporations. The strategy is vulnerable to all sorts of brand bashing and cultural jamming from within, from disgruntled citizens who resent being packaged, labelled and sold globally like a pair of Nike trainers.

'What the brand is telling you is totally inauthentic. It's fabrication,' says Kalle Lasn, founding editor of Vancouver-based *Adbusters* magazine. In February, Lasn dedicated an entire issue of *Adbusters* to deconstructing Brand USA, juxtaposing Charlotte Beers' idyll with shady images of Christian fundamentalism, voter apathy, mass obesity and America's support of crackpot dictators and their murderous, right-wing death squads.

'One of the rules of branding is that the product has to live up to its promises, as no image which is at odds with reality can be convincing,' admits van Ham at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations. 'Brand bashers play a useful role here. They're the active world citizenry keeping the brand state sharp.' ERIC ENNO TAMM \*