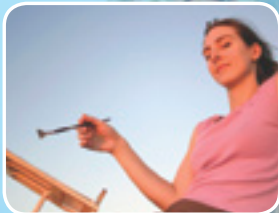# creative birmingham
business

foreword

The Creative Birmingham Partnership Board was formed in mid 2004 and brings together all the key public agencies investing in the creative and cultural sector in Birmingham. It is a strategic level body with a clear mission (see below).

The co-ordination of effort, resource and expertise has undoubtedly improved with the advent of the Board. It has strengthened relationships and given clearer direction in terms of funding streams and priority action areas.

This document reviews, in brief terms, some of our work from the *Marketing Creative Birmingham* Report to the recent assessment of Creative Birmingham's brand DNA.

Birmingham City Council has responded positively to our calls on those issues which it is able to directly affect. *Connectivity* – how best to link up and present cluster areas such as the Jewellery Quarter and Eastside under the Creative Birmingham banner – is an issue at the heart of the re-organised Planning and Regeneration department. The Council is also reviewing the way it structures Arts and Culture and Creative Development to ensure it has a joined up approach to developing policy, funding and running projects to support the development of Birmingham's creative economy. With support from Screen West Midlands it has already set up the FilmBirmingham office to promote the City as a film location.

Marketing and promoting Birmingham as a creative capital has been our major focus. The Board strongly believes practitioners in the sector are best paced to lead this drive with a more strategic operation under Creative Birmingham. Meanwhile, we consider the time is right to set out the latest thinking and analysis on why the creative sector should be placed at the heart of local and regional social and economic regeneration policies. This booklet briefly highlights these two new projects and welcomes your feedback.

Anita Bhalla
Chair, Creative Birmingham Partnership Board

message from the leader

For the past eighteen months, the Creative Birmingham Partnership Board (CBPB) has been focusing on raising the profile of the creative and cultural industries in the City of Birmingham. I am pleased with the work of the Board to date and the City Council is committed to exploring opportunities to ensure that it is able to develop its broad agenda. As a result of the work of the Board, I am also pleased to announce that we have now set up a FilmBirmingham office.

We are most concerned to ensure that the sector is industry-led and your views and involvement are critical to its future success. A successful partnership between the industry and key agencies, which manage the public funds, will be necessary. The City Council has an important role to play, so I look forward to hearing from practitioners to inform us as to how we can best mobilise, organise and shape our resources in the development of the creative and cultural industries.

Councillor Mike Whitby
Leader, Birmingham City Council

mission

The Creative Birmingham Partnership Board will nurture creative and cultural enterprise to demonstrably position and promote Birmingham as the leading creative economy in the UK regions by the end of 2008.

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creative birmingham: discovering the dna

"Youth"

Birmingham is Europe's youth capital, with more under fifteens than any other European city and more students than any UK city outside London.

The youth market is a premium category, a scarce age profile in relation to an ageing population. Meanwhile, Birmingham and the region is often targeted as a bellwether area – a testing ground for new brands among young people. The youth market is also a key target for creative and cultural products and services provided by Birmingham's creative sector. Increasingly, the sector is attracting new young talent, particularly in areas such as digital media and software/games.

Creative Birmingham is youthful in tone and approach, not just actual years. It has a youthful-like optimism and energy in its attitude. Ask people what words they use to describe Creative Birmingham and you will hear:

"Fresh"	"Edgy"
"Risky"	"Refreshing"
"Cool"	"Sexy"
"Funky"	"Surprising"
"Dreaming"	"Restless"
"Vibrant"	"Exciting"
"Innovative"	"Happening"

Young people in Birmingham are colour blind. They don't just embrace and enjoy different cultures and creeds, they see straight through skin colour and see the benefits of diversity.

Birmingham is adapting to and taking advantage of emerging technologies, trends and tools. Exploiting digital media is at the heart of many of the leading creative businesses in the city. The future of Birmingham's creative sector will largely rely on ensuring the newest, *youngest* technologies and techniques are harnessed.

"Internationalism"

The city has a tradition of entrepreneurship and wealth creation. Its status as the city of 1,000 trades remains intact – today, many of those trades are rooted in the creative industries.

Come to Birmingham - visit our cultural attractions - and it's a cosmopolitan place. You receive a big welcome in Birmingham - and usually visitors are incredibly surprised.

Birmingham is a city which embraces diversity; a city which is tolerant. Our creative output benefits from fusion – new genres; fresh output created by a range of influences. People in the creative sector in Birmingham are comfortable looking to horizons far and wide - for ideas and business.

With our cultural attractions, entertainment offerings, nightlife and lifestyle and event venues, Birmingham is a natural meeting place for people across Europe and the world.

creative birmingham: the marketing infrastructure challenges and opportunities

A range of barriers prevents Creative Birmingham from realising its mission in respect of marketing and communications. However, the sector in the city possesses a range of assets and faces a series of opportunities which could be better exploited with a more modern marketing infrastructure. Issues include:

- Information and data not gathered or co-ordinated in a systematic method
- There is no recognised single network or system for communicating internally and externally
- Informal networks and conversations do not reach all audiences, internal or external, with consistent messages
- PR operates on a drip, drip basis – not strategically
- Sector leadership and championing currently in hands of public sector agencies and few creative professionals
- Key Agencies Group/Short Term Task Forces/Consultancy approach not sustainable (alone) to deliver CBPB mission in medium to long term
- No long term, high level investment in marketing talent across the sector
- Communication platforms and marketing collateral are less well advanced than other cities
- The rate of progress towards full Broadband and WiFi access in Birmingham, however, present real opportunities for business and entertainment
- Birmingham is a proud city, but often finds it difficult to express its achievements
- The Brummie sense of humour is well known, but it is a brand that often relies on self-deprecation rather than celebration
- Public marketing activity is currently too corporate and institutional in tone
- Management of public sector investment in creative sector is not arms-length like some other leading creative cities
- The approach to risk and dynamism from the public agencies evident in the 1980's and early 1990's towards creative activity does not exist to the same extent
- A renewed sense of vision is required by creative practitioners from those responsible for developing the sector
- Champions of the creative sector need to be identified, co-ordinated and briefed to promote Creative Birmingham

creative birmingham: business

Its key objectives and tasks will be to:

- Steer and manage the marketing and communications strategy;
- Direct Championing and Lobbying;
- Build a Knowledge Bank on the infrastructure, resources, venues, agencies, companies and practitioners in Birmingham's creative and cultural sector;
- Create the networks and systems for assimilating and diffusing data, general information, events and stories with marketing and publicity potential;
- Design and distribute appropriate marketing collateral on Creative Birmingham;
- Undertake feasibility studies on marketing and communication projects (eg. magazines and web portals);
- Support the management and marketing of creative-based festivals and major events;
- Assist in the development of creative quarters and hot spots;
- Advise the Creative Birmingham Partnership Board on policy development.

creative birmingham: defining success

To be seen as successful in 2008, Creative Birmingham will have achieved some or all of the following:

- Established a coherent brand structure for the promotion of Creative Birmingham
- Executed major advertising/publicity campaigns on Creative Birmingham which have led to greater awareness and media profile (gaining 'talked about' status)
- Have re-established the arts and creative industries as major economic and social priorities at City Council Cabinet and Advantage West Midlands Board level
- Created a Network of Creative Champions who gain regular appearances in the media and on relevant international and national industry platforms articulating the attributes, successes and opportunities of Creative Birmingham
- Supported the creation of an attractive and popular consumer magazine covering creative activities in Birmingham
- Delivered a major increase in traffic to web portals and sites relevant to Creative Birmingham
- Initiated major creative-based festivals and events for the City

making the business case

The benefits – economically and socially – of the creative industries are well established. However, it is some time since a focused piece of work has covered latest academic thinking and best practice, analyzed market opportunities, studied trends and helped to lay down a route map with specific reference to Birmingham.

A study is now being commissioned by the Creative Birmingham Partnership Board to report in the first half of this year. It will be high level, utilising the best in new thinking on creative economies and the sharpest analysis.

The resulting report will be used to help express the case for further investment in the creative industries, including with Birmingham City Council and Advantage West Midlands. It is hoped this will reaffirm the appetite for placing the creative sector at the heart of economic and social regeneration policies.

The study will:

1. Map and value existing assets across the creative and cultural sector.
2. Identify key past successes and identify projects and activities suitable for investment over the next five years.
3. Analyze recent public sector spend and private sector leverage to identify return on investment with a view to future programmes.
4. Identify the role and impact of development in Birmingham on the wider region.
5. Analyze skills development issues in the sector, including graduate retention.
6. Set out the role of the sector in driving image and reputation for the City.
7. Analyze the benefits the sector brings to improving social inclusion.
8. Examine brief case studies in other international and UK core cities which might help to inform innovative approaches to public sector investment in the creative sector.

creating the profile for birmingham's creative
and cultural industries

Marketing Creative Birmingham
3 December 2004, Urban Communications Limited

Extract: Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Introduction

In this final section, we set out the key findings from the study and make a series of recommendations. Among these recommendations, we suggest the establishment of a small number of 'task and finish' groups. These time-limited, job-specific taskforces under the auspices of the Creative Birmingham Partnership Board will provide answers to the questions this research initially set out to explore. Creative Birmingham needs to invest time and funding in the issues this report describes and the taskforces we strongly recommend. Only with such an approach will the long term solutions be found to the brief this project was commissioned to consider.

Findings

1. Short Term or Long Term?

The Creative Birmingham Partnership Board must decide if it wants to treat raising the profile of Birmingham's creative and cultural industries with a long term approach and investment strategy, or simply to gain more acknowledgements and headlines in the short term. The real answer to the brief posed in this study is not with a few more press releases or the introduction of a Creative Birmingham pin badge. The solution lies in a professional marketing approach, starting at the beginning with defining the city we want to develop and communicate to our various audiences.

2. The Holy Grail

The most difficult challenge in undertaking this study has been in identifying Creative Birmingham's unique selling proposition (USP). It became the holy grail of this project, a marketing problem which seemed to expand every time the answer came into reach. In many ways, the easiest route for the report author would have been to hit upon an idea which attracted the most available consensus and thus defined Creative Birmingham's USP. Whilst it is certainly attractive to a marketer, enabling the rest of the marketing strategy then to be developed, we do not believe the consent and support is there for any one concept without further work. The fundamental vision and messages of Creative Birmingham are too important to be decided on such a whim.

Later in this section, we detail the scope for a dedicated taskforce to continue work on this issue and suggest the basis of an answer to this important question.

3. Diversity and Fusion

Notwithstanding our comments made above, diversity remains - in the author's opinion - at the heart of Birmingham's offer. However, the term has become overused and devalued. It means different things to different people. Too often, it is used as a catchall, politically correct word without real resonance or impact. However, Birmingham can claim to be a city where not only is there tolerance and real integration of cultures and communities, creative alliances transpire and result in new and original creative content. The city can lay reasonable claim to being a birthplace of fusion, particularly in music and food. However, we need a new vocabulary to express what we mean by diversity and we have to articulate the economic – as well as social – benefits of living and working in a city which is truly diverse...in all its meanings.

4. Not Brand Ready

It was the intention of this study to consider in some detail and lay out a branding model for Creative Birmingham. However, it soon became apparent that the city, its institutions, creative companies and practitioners are not on the verge of such a step. More work is need; perhaps more importantly, a great deal more 'buy in' is required before Creative Birmingham can invoke such a move.

As referred to already in this section, we need to take the next steps in identifying Creative Birmingham's USP. What is distinctive about our city in creative and cultural terms? Where do we see ourselves in the UK and international marketplaces. What are our messages – what do we want to say about ourselves and what do we want others to think about Birmingham. Without these fundamental questions having a settled answer, outlining a branding model would be futile.

We discussed the issue of branding with the new Chief Executive at Marketing Birmingham. There is scope for working with the agency and its 'b' brand. However, the author is in agreement with Marketing Birmingham that Creative Birmingham should first define its offer and prepare the framework for the marketing strategy.

5. Market Segmentation

As we have said many times in this report, the depth and breadth of creative activity in Birmingham is hugely impressive. However, there is an argument that we position Birmingham as having outstanding practice in every creative and cultural sub-sector and take a blanket approach to promotion. To succeed in raising profile, we need to take a more focussed approach. The Board needs to take a hard look at those areas where we excel most, where we can really say we possess unique or distinctive qualities and where most opportunity for growth and attention exists. From that platform, we then need to target those channels, media and audiences which have an interest in or can affect the growth and development of that discipline and the wider aspirations of Creative Birmingham.

6. Language and Engagement

A number of participants in the research pointed to the language gap between practitioners and agency officials and their communication materials. One factor in this equation is the separation and lack of engagement in the leadership and direction of Creative Birmingham and its partner institutions. As a result, the language – the grammar and vocabulary – used in promoting Creative Birmingham and its initiatives is at odds with practice on the ground and how creatives express themselves.

The answer lies in more inclusion and engagement, not for its own sake, but to develop a communications style more synonymous with the reality and ambitions of Creative Birmingham.

7. People, Heroes and Creative Champions

In areas beyond the creative sector in Birmingham, the city has a unique ability to undermine its own successes. Indeed, there are many who believe the external perceptions of Creative Birmingham are actually better than the perceptions we ourselves believe are held outside the city. As we highlight in this report, some contributors suggest this may be due to our style of humour, our grounded attitude (which today might be termed 'keeping it real') and the area's industrial heritage.

There are three strands to improving this position. The first is to engage and increase awareness of creative and cultural activity in Birmingham, to both increase demand for it and generate pride among the city's citizens. In so doing, we will develop use of the most effective marketing instrument – positive word of mouth. Whilst not wishing to cover old ground, for many the single biggest failing of the capital of culture bid was that we did not win the hearts and minds of Birmingham's people. It is time to learn that lesson. Secondly, we need to identify and celebrate our cultural heroes. Too often, they remain unsung in their own city, sometimes receiving greater tributes and acclaim outside the city's boundaries. We should support them, celebrate them and – to use a marketing term – exploit them. Lastly, we need to encourage leading creative practitioners to become the sector's recognised champions, helping to lead the development of Creative Birmingham and acting as spokespeople for it.

8. Graduate Retention and Youth

As one participant in a discussion session put it, our marketing and inward investment activity is aimed at the middle – middle class, middle managers, middle aged. However, it is young people who are attracted by and then build cities in the new creative economy. Young people who are leading creative content delivery and consumption; who look for rewards outside the framework of a 9-5 salary existence; whose lifestyle and cultural interests have taken on a greater significance than previous generations; who marry and have children later in life; who enjoy greater mobility and communication than ever before; who are marketing savvy and can distinguish true from dishonest messages.

A number of respondents also pointed to the problem of graduate retention. One discussion group member also suggested that the city and region enjoy the greatest number of students in the UK. True or not, the fact remains that it is an area rich in learners. These two issues are inextricably linked. If Birmingham can harness and retain its young people and attract others, it has a real opportunity to reap the economic and social benefits. However, it will not succeed on such an aim with what some described as 'institutional' or 'corporate' styles of marketing and promotion.

9. Music & Magazine

Whilst the author is not able to highlight music necessarily as Birmingham's USP with absolute conviction, the potential of this sub-sector and its importance in marketing is beyond doubt.

Birmingham has, without argument, a rich musical heritage. It has given birth – and continues to give birth – to artists and styles which set new levels and create whole new musical sub-genres. However, many of Birmingham's most recent and current artists have not attracted acclaim or attention for the city. Other locations – Glasgow and Manchester were most often cited – have grown artists of national and even international

repute, with the city's brand benefiting in return. Such success, particularly in respect of the two examples given, has acted as fuel to further hits with the record industry targeting such locations to discover and develop additional talent.

There are a number of contributory factors which have possibly led to this situation. Our collective mindset in respect of celebrating success and the institutional approach might well be among them. However, a large number of participants in this study pointed to the lack of mid-sized music venue in the city where developing musical artists can develop their craft and their audience. Between the small gig scene and the arena and stadium settings, there is a vacuum where musicians can not only perform but develop a creative base.

Music, perhaps along with screen media, is the genre which can most develop the image of a city. This is particularly true among younger audiences which, as we have established, need to be targeted more actively by Creative Birmingham. It is music which is, perhaps, most responsible for making a location 'cool,' 'hip' and possess a 'buzz.' As one participant expressed it, there is no 'mind picture' of Birmingham through its music. In part, this may be due to the very diversity of sounds generated by the city. So, whilst a city cannot invent musical talent or ensure its success, it can develop the infrastructure to encourage artists to emerge and improve the marketing framework to help promote them and, in turn, the birthplace of their music.

The lack of a single magazine which represents and reflects Creative Birmingham was singled out on a number of occasions for concern. Publications do exist in the marketplace, but in the opinions of many none have cut through to the same degree as similar titles in other cities. Whilst intervention in the proper business of the market is not suggested here, it is an area which Creative Birmingham might explore to assess if it can remove any barriers which are preventing such a publication to achieve greater impact.

10. Connectivity

Policies based on clusters and quarters were backed by almost all participants in this study. However, for many the issue is connectivity. Not just between the quarters - Jewellery, Eastside and the city centre - but also important locations such as mac and the new pUBLIC. Overnight and inexpensive solutions are not at hand for such significant challenges. However, Creative Birmingham needs to consider this issue in some detail – what impact does internal geography have on the success of elements of the sector and what can be done, physically and in marketing terms, to address connectivity in the short, medium and long terms.

11. Iconic Developments

As our work in competitive cities identified, the importance of landmark buildings and structures cannot be underplayed. Even with venues such as Symphony Hall, successful creative cities like Birmingham need to continue to develop their facilities and urban landscapes. Such developments are particularly important to Eastside and projects such as the move of the Central Library and the Needle are currently under consideration, whilst we have already pointed to the importance of developing a mid-sized music venue.

Iconic developments attract attention, symbolise the offer and ambition of a city and can fill gaps in the cultural infrastructure. To maintain its progress, Creative Birmingham must identify the right projects, be ambitious and invest. The short term benefits may be intangible; the long term advantages can be significant.

12. Quality

At the Marketing Brainstorming session, we touched on an interesting debate around quality. Who decides on what, in creative and cultural terms, is of high quality; what are the thresholds and standards; and what deserves investment and promotion? We did not have time to complete that particular strand of discussion, but the matter deserves attention. If we are to identify the distinctiveness of Creative Birmingham's offer and segment the market in order to target sub-sectors and audiences, what measures do we use to make such judgements? Does Creative Birmingham need a Creative Director?

This is a difficult issue. The public sector institutions cannot, alone, be the arbiters on the taste and quality of provision by the private and not-for-profit sectors. Creative artists and entrepreneurs – our Creative Champions - should be involved in the frameworks for such judgements.

13. Capacity to Demand Focus

As we discussed in relation to the Creative City initiatives, there is a case that we need to focus on generating demand, raising expectations and excitement levels, thus ensuring the capacity built in the sector is sustainable in the long term. As in all industries, organisations will succeed and fail. Fashions and trends will move on. Technology and macro-economics will alter markets. However, enabling growth and encouraging demand are the best methods at this stage of the cycle to absorb the available supply and continue investment in cultural capacity.

14. Marketing Birmingham: Standing Ready

Early in this report, we noted that two key bodies often find themselves in the firing line for not having done more to support and promote Creative Birmingham.

Marketing Birmingham, in the author's view, is not the problem. Neither is it the whole solution to marketing Birmingham's creative and cultural offer. However, it is better placed than ever before to appreciate the value of the sector in achieving its core purpose and to play a role in devising and implementing such a strategy. First, though, Creative Birmingham must define its vision and objectives for the sector. Secondly, and perhaps most fundamentally, it has to identify the resources to fund such plans.

15. Advantage West Midlands: Articulate the Case

The regional development agency has somewhat fragmented approach to the creative and cultural sector. Its focus has been elsewhere, notably on major capital projects and the manufacturing sector. However, there is little evidence of the sector having made a concerted effort, backed by an articulate case assessment, to encourage the agency to adopt a particular strategy and back it with an investment programme. The benefits of investing in culture are harder to assess in terms of job assists and business supported than some other sectors, but at the same time the social and image advantages are arguably wider. Creative

Birmingham needs to prepare such a proposal and seek to engage AWM to a much greater degree in mapping its vision and strategies. It must use its Creative Champions and Heroes wisely in this process, highlighting successes to date and the potential of the creative and cultural industries to market the region.

16. Invest in Marketing

Marketing should always be an integral discipline, never an after thought or ancillary operation. It also requires real investment, not leftovers from the budget.

The sector's lead agencies and creative organisations can be accused (with few notable exceptions) of not investing in marketing – in strategy, talent and financially – anywhere near seriously enough. To successfully market Creative Birmingham, a bright strategy or a shiny new badge is not first on the list. A new mindset is needed, where marketing Creative Birmingham receives as much attention (and funding) as skills training and business advice. As one participant put it, we need to join up content and communications. In pursuing the next round of funding opportunities, we must position marketing as a priority.

17. Creative Led

To take the next steps towards achieving the stated mission of becoming the leading regional capital for the creative industries by 2008, Creative Birmingham must engage the very talents it aims to develop. There is little creative marketing and promotion for Creative Birmingham in evidence. As we heard, much of it is deemed 'institutional' and 'corporate' in nature and style.

Rhonda Wilson, Creative Director at Seeing the Light and winner of the main Creative City award, is a prominent ambassador for the importance of creative and visual imagery in branding a city. She was unable to participate in our discussion sessions, but nevertheless made a useful contribution to the debate elsewhere: "we haven't got a brand that has a language we can own. So, if it's the creative sector that requires marketing, it needs to be done creatively, not by people who don't understand the nature of creativity." This author could not put it better.

18. City Council Structure

We noted earlier that the approach to the creative and cultural sector did not benefit from AWM's structure. We also found that there is widespread agreement that the culturally and economically driven disciplines do form one coherent sector. So a question arises over the current structure and approach of the city council. On the Creative Birmingham Partnership Board, there are representatives from the Arts and Creative Development teams, as well as Eastside. This study has not considered this issue in enough detail to make a recommendation for re-organisation. There are many factors to consider before countenancing such a move. However, there are clear advantages to be had from a coherent approach to culture and creativity and a single, powerful voice for Creative Birmingham in cabinet.

19. Vision, Ambition, Focus and Priorities

Above all, the call we heard most often – particularly in the discussion groups – to the leaders of Creative Birmingham could be summed up in these four words. To become the UK's leading regional capital for the creative industries by 2008, it must articulate a clear vision; it must demonstrate ambition; it must focus on its strengths and opportunities and should prioritise its resources to achieve this vision.

In summary of our findings, Urban believes significant potential exists to achieve the mission set out in the brief. However, the final answer cannot be found here. Instead, more marketing groundwork is required to make the long term progress required.

The full report can be downloaded at
http://www.urbancomms.com/downloads/cbpb_final_report.pdf