

Putting Purpose at the Heart of a Brand



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“ We help cultural organisations to unlock their audience potential and support them to accelerate change so they can thrive.”

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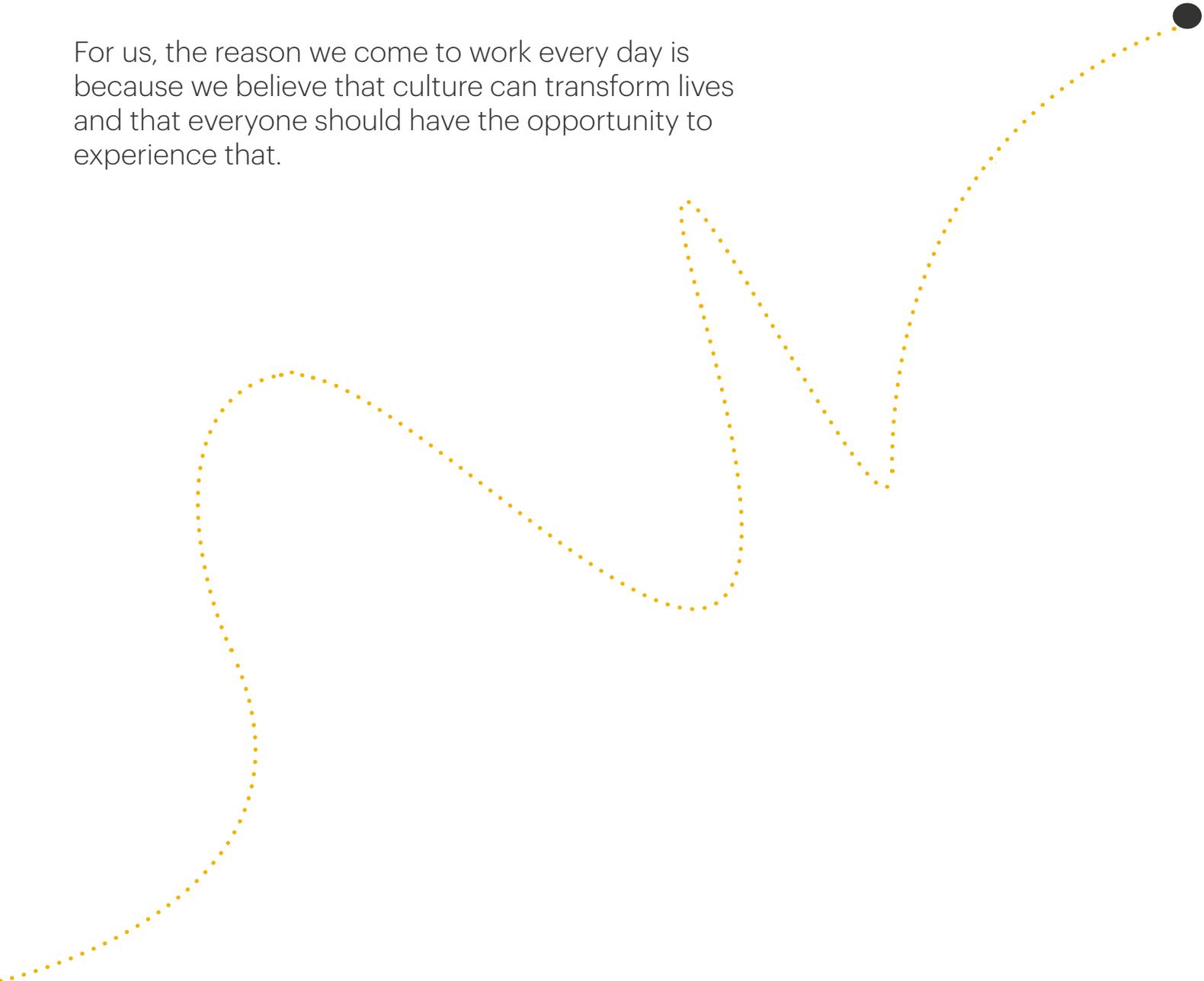
Introduction

The choice to change

When you've spent 14 years as 'Audiences NI' – the audience development agency for Northern Ireland – people may wonder why we decided in September 2017 to launch a new name – thrive audience development, a new brand – thrive: making culture count, and a new website www.wewillthrive.co.uk?

While these processes can often be difficult as you sweat over the shade of magenta or the right font – in many ways for us here at thrive HQ, it was quite a simple decision to go down this route. It all started with looking at our purpose. Why do we exist, what difference are we aiming to make, and what is our offer to the sector which will deliver value for our public funding?

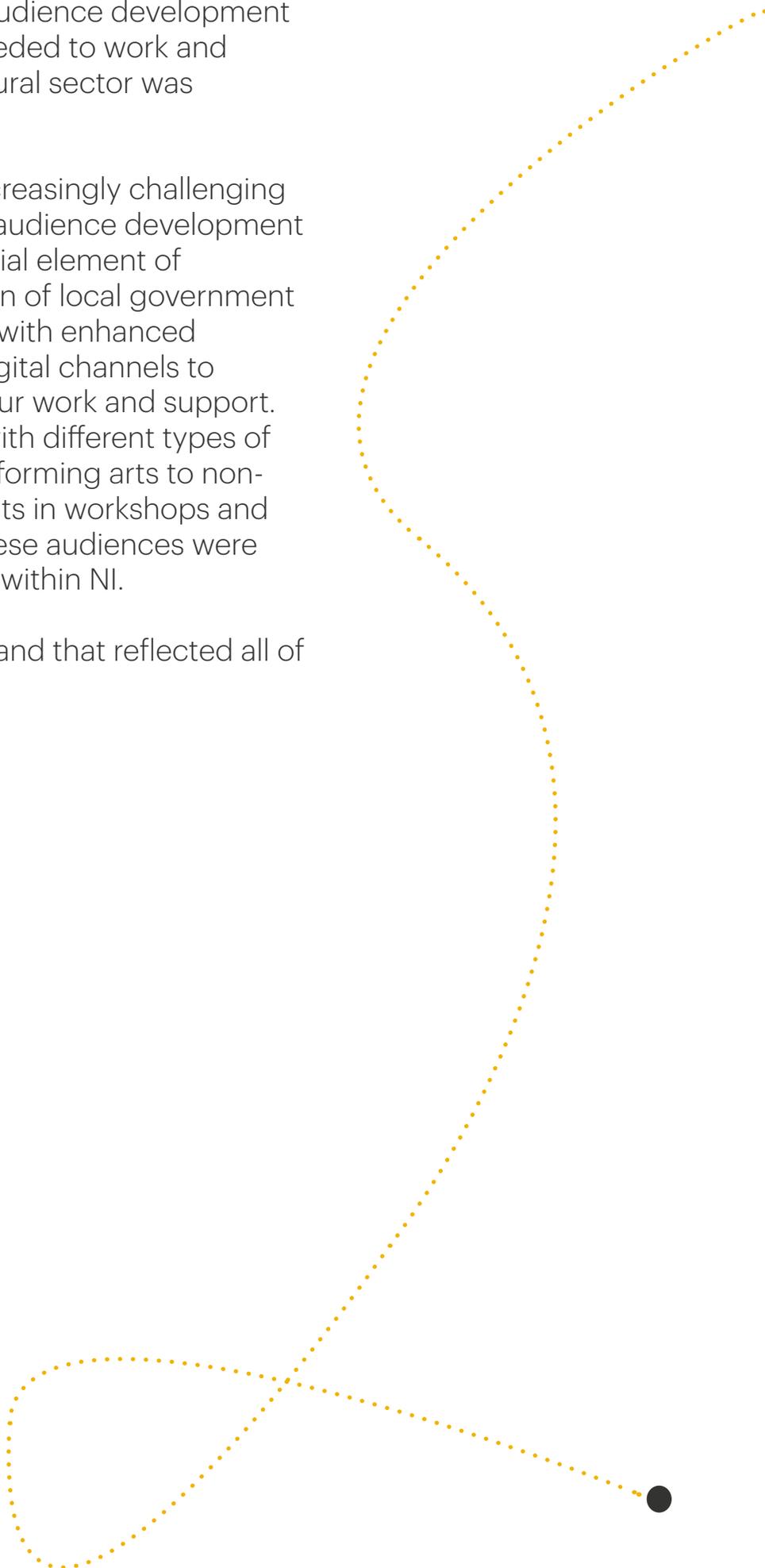
For us, the reason we come to work every day is because we believe that culture can transform lives and that everyone should have the opportunity to experience that.



But after over a decade in the audience development game, how our organisation needed to work and the value we offered to the cultural sector was fundamentally changing.

That need was driven by the increasingly challenging financial environment and that audience development needed to be seen as an essential element of sustainability; the re-organisation of local government in NI from 26 – 11 local councils with enhanced powers; and the potential for digital channels to reach more of the sector with our work and support. Increasingly we were working with different types of organisations from ticketed performing arts to non-ticketed visual arts to participants in workshops and classes; And more and more these audiences were coming from without as well as within NI.

We needed a new name and brand that reflected all of that.



Beginning the rebrand journey

But where to start? The words of brand guru Robert Jones, who had delivered a Building A Brand from Why workshop here in 2016, were ringing in our ears.

“Your purpose excites your people, guides your decisions and attracts your funders because people want to know why should I buy from you, work for you, partner with you and invest in you? ”

To help us articulate a new purpose we appointed designer Darragh Neely and digital agency Eyekiller. This external support was made possible through ACNI Lottery Sustainability Funding. A grant programme aimed at helping organisations re-shape their purpose and delivery to increase sustainability.

After a number of workshop sessions we developed a simple statement of purpose:

We help cultural organisations to unlock their audience potential and support them to accelerate change so they can thrive.

Once we arrived at the idea of supporting organisations to thrive we became really energised – always a good sign.



The next stage was led by Darragh working with the team to help pinpoint a new name.

“A rebrand can be a very cleansing process, but also very challenging particularly when there’s a new name required. Getting input from the entire team was a crucial step in this and we had several workshops to tease out what the ‘brand’ of the organisation really was.” – Darragh Neely, designer

It can be really difficult to see the wood for the trees when you’re deciding between thousands of possibilities for a new name, so having this outside help was invaluable.

Finally, we hit on thrive audience development. It captured what we do and our ambition for the cultural sector.

Designing the logo also re-enforced our purpose. The ‘fulcrum’ you see in the logo represents the point where audience data and information become insights – and that’s what we bring to the sector but that alone is not enough so we also support organisations with actions and resources to move from the ‘aha’ moment to real change.

The logo for 'thrive' features the word 'thrive' in a bold, dark blue sans-serif font. The letter 'i' is stylized with a pink dot and a pink vertical bar. Below 'thrive' is the tagline 'making culture count' in a smaller, pink sans-serif font.

thrive
making culture count



Website re-design

Overhauling our website was a core part of the re-brand process. Again this was informed by our purpose – how do we use our digital channels– to provide the support, resources and insights organisations need to unlock their audience potential and thrive?

We wanted to offer free and subsidised support to arts organisations regardless of their size, level of experience, art-form or audiences they wanted to attract. To ensure that there were no barriers to accessing this essential information and support we removed our previous membership model. We knew that having a user-friendly website full of high quality and relevant resources would be key. Thankfully our core funder Arts Council NI were supportive of this change and could see how this would give many more arts organisations the chance to avail of what thrive audience development had to offer.

Once we established outcomes for the site, Eyekiller began design and usability testing to make sure that the site was user-friendly.

“We know that if users had a really positive experience they would be much more likely to engage with thrive” – Jamie Robinson, Eyekiller

Having an easy-to-use website was a little bit of ‘practice what you preach’ for us. If we are encouraging cultural organisations to put audiences at the heart of their products, venues, and online communications, we needed to put the sector at the heart of ours.



Imagery and tone-of-voice

The rebrand also gave us a chance to really think about how we present ourselves through words and images. We commissioned photography that captures the wide range of organisations we work with, and puts the audience front and centre, showcasing Northern Irish people and places.

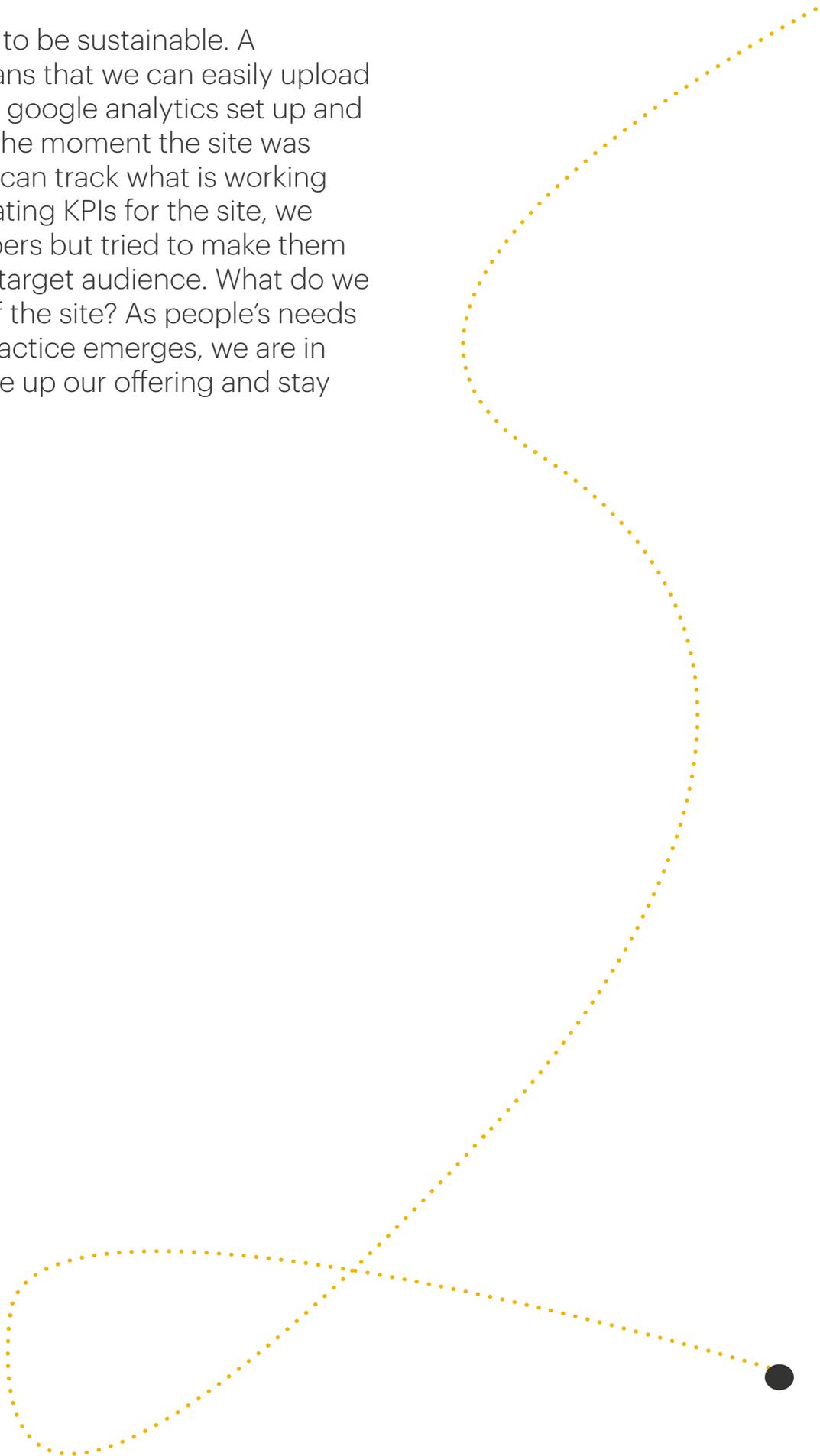
We also had a look at how we spoke online and offline – was the way we wrote reflecting our purpose and values? We drew up guidelines for our tone of voice, made sure the website reflected this and encouraged the whole team to get involved by posting on social media.

Future-Proofing the Brand

None of us have a crystal ball to see where we'll be in ten or twenty years. But it was important for us to make sure that the brand would be implemented and developed past the launch day.

We spent a lot of time collaborating with our designer to create brand guidelines. These can be used by outside design agencies and are a useful guide for new staff. We also put together a handy cheat-sheet for staff on how to talk about the new brand and use the new logos and design. Templates for emails and documents, and a bank of images were set up so that everyone was confident in using the brand from the get-go. Because everyone had been involved in the brand design process it was very easy to get people using the new brand.

The website also needed to be sustainable. A straightforward CMS means that we can easily upload and edit content. Getting google analytics set up and aligned to our KPIs from the moment the site was launched means that we can track what is working and what isn't. When creating KPIs for the site, we didn't just focus on numbers but tried to make them more meaningful for our target audience. What do we want people to get out of the site? As people's needs change, and new best-practice emerges, we are in a good position to change up our offering and stay relevant.



Pitfalls and opportunities

Of course, there were some bumps in the road along the way. The domain names 'thrive.com' or 'thrive.co.uk' weren't available, and 'thrive' was taken as a social media handle on most platforms. We went with 'we will thrive' and it may be that this aspirational tone is more reflective of the fact that the arts sector in NI has never been more challenged especially around funding reductions and the fact that our job will never be done.

So, we're five months into the new brand, and we're really happy that we made the change. In the first three months after the re-brand, visitors to the website increased nearly 150%.

But more importantly, visitors have been engaging with content - downloading toolkits, research reports, and booking into events over 700 times. We were delighted to receive lots of positive feedback from our peers in the sector:

"The new branding and website is fantastic. Very clear about what you do and what your offer is... The access to the reports and templates is fabulous."

"Congratulations on this new rebrand and fresh start for you - I think it's a great idea, and makes sense to keep at heart your reason for being and get-up-and-go."

Above all, our new brand and website have made it easier for us to provide support to the people we work with now and will work with in the future. Our name helps us to communicate why we exist and what we do. Re-branding can be a difficult decision to make, but for us, it was definitely the right one.

Recommendations and key takeaways

Your brand should start with your purpose — to explain why you do what you do. It's the 'WHY' that they buy into.

Do user testing and gather feedback — your own audience have to be the 'why' behind your decisions.

Communications has to be part and parcel of your overall business strategy - it's the blueprint for how you share your stories and your purpose.

Seek buy-in from all staff. — A re-brand is a great opportunity chance for everyone to understand and communicate the value your organisation provides.

Come and say hello at www.wewillthrive.co.uk.





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