

## A brand new future for the Ramblers

After 20 years of solid service, the Ramblers' logo of rolling green hills is being put out to pasture. In a modern world constantly competing for people's attention, it's rare a logo remains unchanged for so long, or the organisations behind them. So after seeing in some of the walking charity's biggest ambitions – chief among them the right to roam in England, Scotland and Wales – members and staff alike have agreed it's time to change the logo as part of an overall rebrand of the organisation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

“This is not just about a logo or marketing, but a wholesale shift in where we how we want people to see us,” says Ramblers' chief executive Tom Franklin. “There is a public perception that the Ramblers is only for the walking elite. But we want to be about walking for everyone, whatever their ability. We're changing the way we work to become more relevant to today's world, with new campaigns and new services for all people interested in walking. The new look will help us to get that message over to them.”

### Why rebrand?

There's no denying the Ramblers has suffered from an image problem for some time. When researchers were hired to find out the general public's opinions of the Ramblers, many of the focus groups predictably recited the old stereotype of men with beards and bobble hats, marching through the countryside.

But what was more surprising were the number of people who either hadn't heard of the Ramblers or didn't know it was a charity.

“Most people have either no opinion of the Ramblers or such biased opinions that they need to be challenged first,” says Max du Bois of Spencer du Bois, a branding agency specialising in the not-for-profit sector that helped put together the new Ramblers' brand. “Many see the Ramblers as a leisure organisation and don't know about its charitable, campaigning or environmental work.”

For Spencer du Bois, a good brand is about relevance and awareness. Right away, it was obvious the Ramblers is still relevant to the issues facing people today – whether it be pure and simple enjoyment of the outdoors, or combating obesity and reducing carbon emissions. But the problem is the public is either totally unaware of the Ramblers or don't know what it actually does, assuming that – like the rolling hills logo – it is tired and old-fashioned.

“If things are looking dated and just not resonating with people, you need to rebrand,” says Max. And not only will the Ramblers' public image benefit, argues Tom Franklin, but its members will too.

“The image of the Ramblers is something that we laugh about ourselves and are a bit embarrassed by,” says Tom. “There's an affectionate view of that image among our members, bordering on parody. But I think that means we sometimes lack confidence, which can make us sound aggressive. The new look will help us to regain that confidence in what we have achieved and think differently about how we work.”

## **A year of consulting**

Long before drawing up a new logo, Spencer du Bois began talking with people at the Ramblers about what aims and values the organisation wanted to get across. As well as deciding to position the Ramblers 'at the heart of walking' and to foster a fresh reputation as 'inspiring experts', the organisation confirmed its desire to be more welcoming in its outlook and work in a more collaborative style.

Then a whole year of consultations on these findings followed: there were seminars organised at the Ramblers' key annual general meetings in England, Scotland and Wales; focus groups held with members and non-members; online surveys canvassed through the Ramblers' website; and even breakfast conferences catering for partner organisations and political decision-makers. The response was overwhelmingly positive. The Ramblers' members embraced the changes as long overdue, and non-members felt enthusiastic and engaged by the new messages.

Finally, eight very different versions of the new logo were created by Spencer du Bois and presented to the Ramblers' Board of Trustees – from a conservative update, to more radically designed concepts. The board opted for the more radical approach.

"It was lovely to have a team who wanted to take a big, bold step," says Max du Bois. "The one that was most radical was absolutely right: it made people look up and think: 'That really speaks to us'."

## **How the new logo works**

With an 'r' formed by a tree-like upright and a smoothly curved stone, the new logo combines both urban and rural environments, using the playful idea of things you might find on a walk. The tree and stone can be replaced with a selection of specially-selected images – including leaves, a feather, an acorn and a doorknob – to make eye-catching alternatives of the logo for use on websites, campaigning adverts or postcards.

"One of the things that inspired people about the logo is its incredible flexibility," says Max. "With this 'found objects' approach, the logo will always be evolving, so hopefully it will still look fresh in five years' time."

Central to the new logo is the strapline, 'at the heart of walking'. Not only does it directly quote one of the Ramblers' key new messages, but it helps engage with people on a personal, emotional level. Other visual elements – such as specially-created 'horizon lines' and a varied but restricted palette of colours – will all help to create an atmosphere about the organisation and what it does, bringing a recognisable uniformity to all the Ramblers' publications.

By hopefully attracting new people to the organisation, it should help local Ramblers Areas and Groups to recruit more members and volunteers. "The new brand is designed to make us appealing to a greater variety of people," says Tom Franklin. "This isn't about being 'PC' – this is about ensuring our growth as a membership charity. We want people who previously thought the Ramblers wasn't for them to think again."

## **Rolling out the brand**

The new brand – its values, the logo and guidelines for usage – will first be introduced to key volunteers within the Ramblers' Areas and Groups through a series of workshops being held up and down Britain in February. Then an official unveiling to the public is planned for 2 March 2009. The logistics of replacing all current marketing materials with the new look are daunting, but the aim is gradually to phase out all instances of the old logo by the end of the year.

That isn't the biggest challenge, though. The cultural change the new brand will help to bring about within the organisation will be a much deeper, ongoing process. As the Ramblers' director of marketing and communications, Tony Hall, explains: "No matter whether you're a walks leader, campaigning to pull down an illegal fence, being interviewed, or designing a leaflet – what the Ramblers does, says, and how it does it, will all contribute to the brand's standing. By harnessing the commitment and passion that exists across the organisation, the potential for the Ramblers is huge, and this new look is just the start!"

It's a potential that excites the Ramblers' chief executive and ultimately brings the organisation back to its roots. "The rebrand is about renewal and making the organisation younger again – not just in terms of attracting a younger audience, but giving us a renewed vigour," says Tom Franklin. "We were set up for the walking masses, for ordinary people, and we want to be for ordinary people again."

## **NEW BRAND, NEW AIMS**

**What is our business?** Improving people's lives through walking.

**Where do we want to be?** At the heart of walking.

**What are our values?** To be welcoming, visionary and passionate.

**What do we want to do?** Make the joy of walking part of everyone's daily lives.

**How will we work?** Positively, collaboratively, knowledgably and relevantly.

**What reputation do we want?** As inspiring experts.