

# Communicating the World Heritage brand: Building appreciation and commitment to the World Heritage concept

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World Heritage listing is a global brand certifying properties possessing such valuable and irreplaceable heritage that they must be protected in perpetuity for the benefit of all humankind. However, a significant number of visitors arrive at a site with little or no prior knowledge about the World Heritage status of the location they are visiting (King, 2011). In Australia, the World Heritage brand has often been erratically or only nominally presented to the public on-site (King, 2010). In some cases, information about the concept is also only superficially presented (King, unpublished data). The situation significantly reduces opportunities to transmit to the public what World Heritage is, and why it is important to understand and appreciate World Heritage.

As branding plays an important role in the sustainability of protected areas (King et al., 2012), this paper aims to strengthen public appreciation and stewardship for the World Heritage concept by suggesting two strategies park managers can employ to ensure a consistent presentation of the brand and its values. It begins by introducing the terminology used when discussing *World Heritage* branding.

## Speaking A Common Language: World Heritage Branding Terminology

It is useful to briefly review the current terminology associated with branding as the vocabulary is still evolving. *Brands* are composed of both visual and mental elements (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). The visual elements of the World Heritage brand consist of both its brand name and brand marks. The term World Heritage is the internationally recognised brand name.

Two brand marks are typically used to denote World Heritage – the World Heritage emblem and the World Heritage symbol (Figure 1). The emblem (Figure 1a) specifically refers to the original brand mark adopted in 1978 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2008). The symbol (Figure 1b) explicitly refers to the emblem without the encircling phrases. The symbol was previously known as the striped World Heritage emblem (King, 2010; 2011).

Some World Heritage Areas have developed their own site specific logo (Figure 2). The phrase *World Heritage logo* is a vague, generic term that does not differentiate between World Heritage brand marks. For example, the term could apply to any of the brand marks shown in Figures 1 and 2. Another generic phrase, *World Heritage brand*, usually refers to the visual elements of the *World Heritage brand*, but may be used when discussing both the visual and mental elements of the brand.



How many of the tourists who visit the iconic Three Sisters come away with an appreciation of the World Heritage Value of the Greater Blue Mountains? Photo © R. Mackay

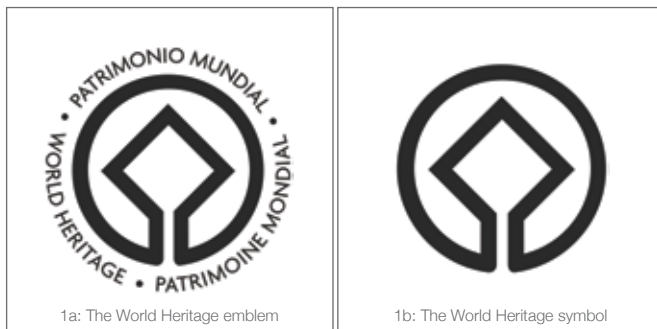


Figure 1: Examples of World Heritage logos



Figure 2: Examples of Australian World Heritage logos

Brand knowledge is the mental part of a brand and is comprised of all the thoughts, feelings, associations and experiences a person has had with a brand (Kotler and Keller, 2009). *Brand equity* is the overall positive or negative value the World Heritage brand bestows on a property based on a person's brand knowledge (Aaker, 1991; Kotler and Keller, 2009). While some agencies spend a great deal of time on the design and placement of their World Heritage logos, they may still overlook clearly transmitting the brand's values and therefore fail to build positive brand equity.

### Challenges and Constraints in Conveying the World Heritage brand

- The size of some World Heritage Areas allows for hundreds of access points. This situation makes it virtually impossible for management agencies to communicate to a visitor at every possible point of entry that they are entering a World Heritage Area.
- The fragmented nature of some World Heritage Areas makes it difficult and costly for management agencies to make effective visitor contact across all properties; and, for visitors to understand the relationship between distinctly separate sites encompassed within a single World Heritage Area.
- Some World Heritage properties are prone to damage in weather events such as cyclones, seasonal flooding, etc. making it difficult to maintain existing visitor infrastructure and justify the need for additional facilities.
- The number of land tenures and agreements within many World Heritage Areas adds additional layers of bureaucracy.
- Some World Heritage Areas cross state boundaries, adding further coordination considerations across management agencies.

Figure 3

### Challenges to Communicating the World Heritage Brand in Australia

Australian World Heritage management agencies are confronted by a unique combination of constraints and challenges when trying to transmit the World Heritage brand to its constituencies. These are outlined in Figure 3. Identifying the impediments in communicating the World Heritage brand is an initial step towards addressing some of these issues (King, 2011).

### Branding Strategies for Appreciation and Commitment to the World Heritage Concept

With the challenges listed above in mind, there are two useful strategies management agencies can employ to help build positive brand equity for the World Heritage concept and for specific World Heritage Areas.

#### 1. Develop a World Heritage visual identity guide

To build brand knowledge about the nature of the site, visitors must first be aware the site is a World Heritage Area. Thus, the World Heritage brand should be displayed prominently, consistently and repeatedly for the visitor to 'see' and become familiar with (King, 2010).

A strategy to ensure an integrated presentation of the World Heritage brand across all media and communications is to develop and adhere to a visual identity guide (King et al., 2012). A visual identity guide

- Low visitor numbers at some World Heritage Areas allow cash-strapped agencies to justify channeling funds elsewhere.
- Changes in Federal and state governments lead to changes in agency priorities that affect transmission of World Heritage to the public.
- Working with the agencies that control road sign installation and/or modification can be a long-term time consuming task; thus hampering World Heritage branding efforts.
- A lack of agency personnel trained in marketing and branding has led to ineffective branding exercises, missed opportunities and uneven presentation and communication of the World Heritage brand to the public.
- The lack of emphasis placed by tourism marketers and management agencies in conveying effective World Heritage messages has created, in some instances, weak linkages between the public and the specific World Heritage site name.
- The lack of up-to-date visitor data leads to best guesses by management agencies when developing long term communication plans.

(also known as a style guide or a brand standards guide) details how brand elements will be presented in all situations – from business cards to websites, interpretive panels, road signs and brochures.

## 2. Implement a World Heritage brand plan

The concept of World Heritage as well as the Outstanding Universal Value of the specific site should be expressed in terms that emotionally connect with the visitor and promote positive brand equity. Developing and implementing a brand plan is one strategy to achieve this goal. The brand plan details which World Heritage brand messages will be communicated, how they will be communicated and where they will be delivered to the public. It can stand alone or be part of larger communication or interpretive plan. Such brand plans should include how to best:

- **convey the World Heritage story.** Communicate the story which led to the development of the World Heritage concept and ratification of UNESCO's World Heritage Convention. Sharing this story helps visitors understand and appreciate the motivation behind the establishment of the World Heritage brand.
- **share why the site is World Heritage.** Tell the story of the Outstanding Universal Value and its components for which the site was inscribed and the

reasons a person should care that it is protected. Emphasize that World Heritage is the highest honour a protected area can receive as this appears to be a factor in building appreciation for the broader World Heritage concept (King, 2011). If the site has a World Heritage name that is different from the specific location or park name (for example, Lamington National Park is part of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia) explain why the site has two names.

- **relate major controversies over a site's inscription.** Often the history of a particular site's World Heritage inscription involves some degree of controversy. These issues are usually of interest to a visitor, but are rarely presented on-site. Relating these issues adds richness to the concept and can further build an emotional connection in the mind of a visitor between the conservation of the site and its World Heritage status.
- **present on-site experiences from the perspective of inscription criteria.** Develop or reorient public communications such as signage and visitor experiences to relate to the relevant world heritage criteria relevant to the site. For example, interpretive signage could point out to the visitor that he/she is about to embark on a track that highlights the exceptional natural beauty of this particular World Heritage Area. Indicate that its 'exceptional natural beauty' on a global scale is one of the reasons that

Understanding World Heritage values can come from wonderful experiences like watching the sunset over the floodplains of Kakadu from Ubirr Rock. Photo © Sally Greenaway, Commonwealth of Australia



this place was designated as World Heritage. In other words, design visitor experiences that reinforce the reasons the site was declared World Heritage and communicate that knowledge to the visitor to help build positive brand equity.

These approaches are also consistent with the goals of the National Landscapes Initiative of Parks Australia and Tourism Australia to enrich the tourism experiences in Australia's outstanding natural areas – many of which are in whole or in part World Heritage Areas (see Chapter by Schofield).

## Conclusion

World Heritage is an internationally renowned brand signalling a property with irreplaceable resources and values to all humankind. Presentation of the World Heritage brand inside many Australian sites could be considerably improved. Management agencies that develop a World Heritage visual identity guide and brand plan ensure that they are effectively communicating the brand and its values to maximize

visitor appreciation and commitment to the concept of World Heritage.

## References

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View south along escarpment from The Pinnacle Lookout, Border Ranges National Park to Nightcap National Park. Photo © Paul Candlin, Commonwealth of Australia



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Lisa M. King PhD, is a Senior Research Fellow with Curtin Sarawak Research Institute (CSRI), part of Curtin University Malaysia. Lisa holds a MA in Ecotourism and a PhD in Tourism (James Cook University), an MEd in Curriculum and Instruction (University of Hawaii) and a BSc in Marine Biology (University of Texas). Her research areas are tourism, marketing, capacity building and protected area management. Lisa is a member of the IUCN WCPA Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist Group. Previous consulting work includes the Asian Development Bank and the U.S. National Park Service. She has also worked on a range of coastal tourism projects within the Pacific.

