



## The Marketing Society UAE Awards 2024

### Category: Brand Evolution

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### Summary

If the marketing challenge of attracting 24 million visitors to Expo 2020 Dubai during a global pandemic was complex enough, the task of evolving the Expo site and brand into a strategically significant new district of Dubai was equally challenging.

Expo 2020 was a flagship national project to raise the profile and reputation of the UAE on the world stage, and so the site's evolution into a new offering was always going to be held under great scrutiny.

The 'Expo City Dubai' brand was unveiled following a major reorientation project run in conjunction with the brand consultancy, Bellwether. This extensive project dived into understanding the core tenets behind the success of Expo 2020, ensuring Expo City's vision and purpose were built on the legacy achievements of the mega-event and remained true to its values and principles.

The Expo 2020 brand identity was evolved into a bold new entity aimed at reshaping perceptions around what the location would offer. The positioning looked beyond the physical components of a city – buildings, infrastructure, retail spaces – and focused on defining Expo City's purpose as a catalyst for human collaborations and meaningful partnerships, embodied by a sense that 'cities can propel human progress'.

This objective was most powerfully exemplified when Expo City acted as the host of the United Nations' COP28 climate conference in Nov/Dec 2023, attracting record numbers of official Blue Zone delegates and hundreds of thousands of visitors to the public Green Zone.

The entire Expo City site covers an area twice the size of Monaco and represents an important pillar within Dubai's 2040 Urban Plan. A city defined and developed as a global blueprint for sustainable urban living, its brand evolution also contributes to the wider positioning of the UAE on the world stage.

*After Expo 2020 Dubai closed its famous portal gates, the evolution began to create major new district of Dubai, Expo City*



## Section 1: The Objective

### Transforming Expo 2020 from a one-time event to a new 'destination with a purpose' for Dubai

Expo 2020 Dubai was an incredible achievement which saw 192 participating countries and more than 24 million visitors come together in Dubai in a spirit of hope and optimism, and with a shared purpose towards collectively solving some of the world's greatest challenges.

The first major international event to be held during a global pandemic, Expo 2020 shifted perceptions of the UAE while igniting collective conversations and shining a light on key issues facing the future of people and the planet.

Determined to build on what had been achieved and ensure the long-term legacy of the World Expo, the Dubai Government and Expo team set out to ensure Expo 2020's role shifted from a six-month event to a permanent, purposeful destination with an ambition to drive solutions and inspire connections, further amplifying the positioning of the UAE on the world stage.

*Reference to strategic development process for Expo 2020's evolution to Expo City Dubai*



There were three main marketing-related objectives to this brand evolution project:

1. **Brand Vision:** Explain what Expo City Dubai will become as a city, based on a carefully evolving master plan that reflects all the key components of what goes into creating a city: real estate, commercial leasing, events and entertainment, culture and education, retail and F&B, and sport and wellness offerings.
2. **Brand Strategy:** Define a distinctive, differentiated strategic purpose for Expo City Dubai (including the articulation of the internal culture needed to shift the mindset away from operating as a mega-event space) which builds on the role of Expo 2020 to bring together nations and communities – but does so in a way that portrays the city as a catalyst for good, rather than merely a collection of physical buildings and infrastructure.

3. **Brand Identity System:** Establish key messages to help tell the next chapter of Expo City Dubai's story across diverse segments, including visitors, businesses, and residents. Develop a new brand architecture and identity system (visual and verbal) to take account of existing and future assets, and provide the brand building blocks to create an integrated community in the city of residents, tenants, retailers and visitors.



## Section 2: The Approach

In late 2023, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, announced Expo City Dubai as a destination for pioneers and meaningful partnerships focused on preserving and sustaining our planet – here is the announcement on 'X'.



Post



HH Sheikh Mohammed   
@HShkMohd

Ten years ago, the world entrusted Dubai and the UAE with the profound responsibility of bringing the world together at Expo 2020. Since then, we have continued to connect minds to create a better future for all. Once more, world leaders and global institutions gather together at Expo City Dubai for COP28, which aims to deliver ambitiously for our planet. At this occasion, we proudly announce our vision for this city: its central pillar is sustainability, a destination for companies focused on sustainability and meaningful partnerships; a centre to launch initiatives focused on preserving and sustaining our planet.

This statement positions Expo City as a place to inspire and enable planetary solutions, addressing humanity's most pressing challenges and exporting these from Dubai to the rest of the world.

To achieve this vision, it was important to convey that Expo City is more than just buildings, infrastructure, conference centres, performance venues and art installations – it is what happens in and between these spaces – the connection of people, the conversations, the inspiration triggered, the ideas tried and tested, and the experiences enjoyed.

A destination with sustainability at its core, a free zone, an education enabler, a nurturer and connector of innovative ideas, designed around the needs of people and home to technology, culture, events and entertainment, Expo City Dubai is human-focused, progress-driven and inspiration-fuelled – which we articulated as *“a city shaped for, and by, you + me...a city powered by ‘we’”*.

This principle of *“a city defined by the power of ‘we’”* reflects how societal change can only come when a coalition of people collaborate for the greater good – defining Expo City's purpose to harness the power of the community for a more sustainable and collaborative future for all.

This strategy has enabled Expo City to focus on building a community powered by collaboration. It also involved the refinement of the organisation's values to help shape a culture that promoted empowerment, accountability, integrity and courage.

**Brand platform**

<p><b>Ambition</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. To exemplify the solution-creating capabilities of a human-centric, smart, sustainability-driven city that's informed by science, inspired by art and motivated by compassion.</li><li>2. To reinforce Dubai and the UAE's strength in hosting the world, in the spirit of cooperation and collaboration.</li><li>3. To cultivate a strong sense of personal agency among tenants, visitors, employees and partners because inspiring action on the individual level empowers change on the global level.</li><li>4. To attract like-minded companies and institutions to establish presence in Expo City Dubai.</li></ol>	<p><b>Purpose</b></p> <p><b>A city that propels human progress by harnessing the power of 'we'</b></p> <p><b>Positioning</b></p> <p>With a deep-rooted belief that change can only come from a broad coalition of humans collaborating for a greater good, Expo City builds on the legacy of Expo 2020.</p> <p>By creating an equitable ecosystem, Expo City will harness the power of community for a more sustainable and dignified future for all.</p>	<p><b>Personality</b></p> <p><b>Optimistic, inquisitive, open, tenacious, forward-looking</b></p> <p><b>Values</b></p> <p><b>Integrity. Collaboration. Responsibility. Courage.</b></p>
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The Expo 2020 brand marque had huge recognition globally, and had been originally developed as a symbol of connectivity and resilience, connecting Dubai's past with the future of the Emirate. Our task was to build on that narrative, while updating the logo and identity system to stand for its new purpose.

Using the circles upon which the marque was designed, we connected them to represent Expo City Dubai's eco-system, with different parts coming together, forming new circles and rippling out into the wider world.

We changed the colours from the gradient of copper tones to a bright yellow, the colour of optimism, positive energy and happiness.

The visual system uses the organic shapes in the symbol as windows for photography and copy. The ripple effect on the graphic alluded to the impact the city seeks to have on the world.

We retained the unique and recognisable custom Expo font as a continuation thread from Expo 2020 to Expo City Dubai, while helping us tell the next chapter in its story.

Lastly, we developed the new brand's tone of voice where themes of 'inviting', 'compelling', 'earnest' and 'bold' would help shape how the city's next chapter should be communicated.

Transitioning from the Expo 2020 logo to a new identity for Expo City Dubai





References to Expo City Dubai's visual identity system



## Section 3: The Risks

As the gates of Expo 2020 closed, the inevitable question was how easy it would be to harness the project's incredible energy and success to build a long-term, meaningful legacy, without falling into the traps of lost momentum and public apathy.

Creating a new, stand-alone brand with its own identity and a bold vision for an exciting new future – while still reflecting the legacy of what the 2020 World Expo had achieved in the very same location – is a huge challenge which came with three major risks:

1. **Lost momentum** – after Expo 2020's famous portal gates closed on 31 March 2022 (with 430,000 visitors attending on the final day), there was always going to be a demanding process of dismantling hundreds of pavilions and exhibitions, dissolving the Expo 2020 organising body, and then creating a free zone entity to run the new city. Against this backdrop, we had to manage the risks associated with losing the key talent and expertise needed to launch an entirely new district of Dubai.
2. **Public confusion** – such was the scale, profile and visibility of Expo 2020, we knew we would need to convince a wide range of audiences the venue was not just a mega-event space but would become a major new destination where people will 'live, work and play'. This required a reorientation of our entire communications strategy until we were able to unveil tangible examples of what the city will become – the first being in March 2023 with the initial launch of the city's real estate offering.
3. **Defining a new city paradigm** – the most complex risk from a strategic perspective related to how we would explain the city aimed to embody a purpose beyond being a collection of buildings and infrastructure. After the success of Expo 2020 in delivering its all-encompassing promise of 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future', we knew we had to be bold and visionary in defining Expo City's purpose as representing a 'blueprint for sustainable urban living', built around a collaborative community which seeks to 'propel human progress'.

*Images of a communications campaign to unite Expo City's 'live, work and play' offerings.*



## Section 4: The Results

### 1. Expo City's key digital & social media metrics for 2023

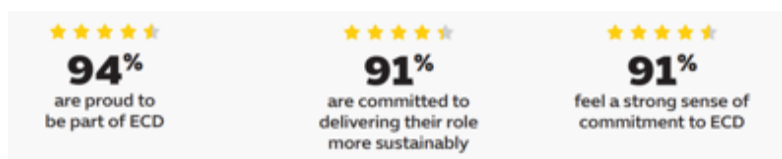
- ❖ With a reach of 152 million, 117 million views, and 692 million impressions, we achieved an impressive engagement score of 8.2 million amongst our community of 5.6 million followers.
- ❖ With more than 8,500 pieces of content shared, we've successfully captured the city's development and the story of it coming to life.
- ❖ Our website received 4.8 million sessions.
- ❖ By the end of 2023, we had succeeded in building a subscriber base of 1.8 million contacts – in 2023, we ran 89 email campaigns, comprising 17 million emails with an average open rate of 26% and a minimal unsubscribe rate of 0.16%.

### 2. Expo City runs a 6-monthly Brand Health Tracker amongst the UAE audience – here are the latest results from end-2023:

- ❖ Expo City Dubai's brand awareness has reached 96%.
- ❖ Brand Advocacy – 84% are willing to recommend the city.
- ❖ Brand Uniqueness – 78% find the city unique.
- ❖ After just one year, the Brand Equity Score has already achieved a very high 82/100.

### 3. Internal Staff Engagement:

The new brand has been embraced internally, with staff indicating they are focused, engaged, and aligned with the organisation's values and purpose:





## Section 5: Impact on Marketing's Reputation

The Marketing & Communications functions played a critical role in the impact of Expo 2020 – most tangibly demonstrated by the event being recognised by Brand Finance as the biggest contributor to the UAE's five-place jump into the Top 10 (for the first time ever) of their Global Soft Power Index for 2023.

The success of Expo 2020 led to incredibly high expectations being placed on the MarComms team to raise the bar even higher when launching the city – for example:

- The shift from a six-month event to a permanent, purposeful city has been an organisation-wide challenge requiring collaboration, communication, and leadership. The MarComms team has played an essential role in this journey, acting as an aligner of strategies, a definer of shared purpose, and a powerful communications force to ensure the city is speaking with one consistent voice.
- With the September 2023 launch of Expo City's sustainability strategy, the team has championed the importance of Expo City as a 'blueprint for sustainable urban living' and was instrumental in the development and release of the city's widely applauded Decarbonisation Roadmap.
- The launch of Expo City's brand positioning supported the city's high-profile role as the host of the UN's COP28 climate conference – there is no doubt that hosting this landmark event propelled the profile, status and recognition of Expo City Dubai on the global stage.

*Expo City welcomed over 180 world leaders when it played host to the UN's COP28 climate conference in Nov 2023*

