



BRITISH AIRWAYS



How to aim for market leadership



Introduction

This is the story of the confident resurgence of a UK institution; of how an airline, after 10 years of setbacks, could reverse its decline and regain momentum through a strategy that reached out to staff, customers and culture.

After such a prolonged period of decline, this paper demonstrates how British Airways has revitalised its brand and is showing long-term evidence of leadership success.

Background

The world's favourite airline

Since its early beginnings when it operated as Imperial Airways¹, British Airways spent the majority of the 20th century in the pilot's seat leading the commercial aviation industry.

The airline was instrumental in helping pioneer the technology needed to make global air travel a viable reality whilst acting as a torchbearer to premium in-air customer service². It operated with a level of celebrity status that came from being the global airline of choice.³

From the British Royal Family to UK footballing royalty, everybody chose to fly British Airways⁴.



Source: ba.com

¹ ba.com/history

² ba.com/history

³ British Airways brand TV ad from 1997: "17 million of us Johnny Foreigners choose to fly your airline every year".

⁴ www.buckinghampalacenews.com



Changing market conditions

Navigating a turbulent decade

However 2001-2011 saw a series of consecutive external and internal challenges that took the world-class airline from leadership into a fight for survival.



Source: BBH

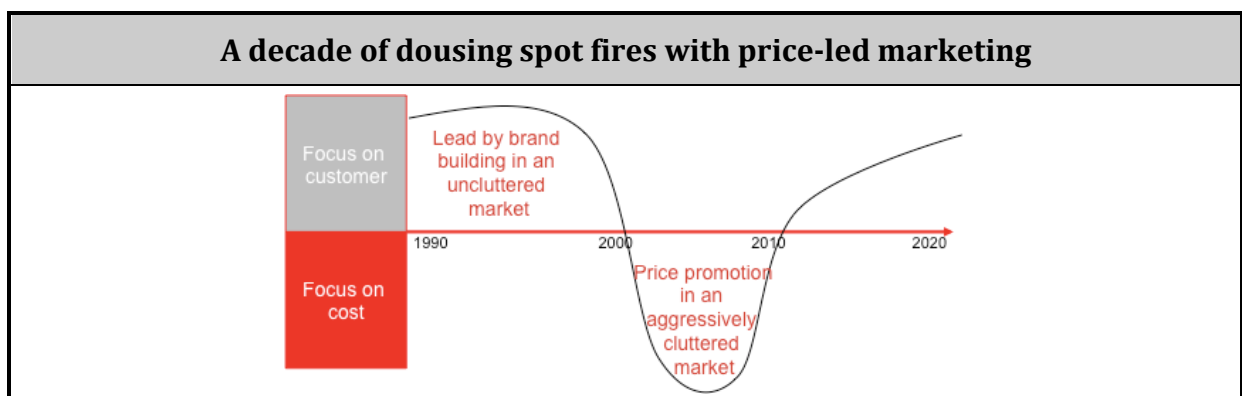
Brand decline

A company flying off course

By 2010, the core business had survived but the British Airways brand was in trouble. The brand's own measurement of marketing success had plummeted from a market-leading 30% to a market-fearing 10%.

(SLIDES REMOVES DUE TO CONFIDENTIALITY)

The airline had become preoccupied with solving business challenges through ruthless cost controls and short-term price promotion. The focus on customers had taken a back seat whilst the airline looked for quick fixes to regain increasingly lost ground.



Source: British Airways board presentation 2010



There was minimal investment in staff training and the customer experience. Media spend on master brand communication dipped as tactical spend rose. In the eyes of the customer, the brand was constantly on sale.

(SLIDES REMOVES DUE TO CONFIDENTIALITY)

British Airways also faced increasing competition from an evolving category. Younger, more agile, low-cost competitors were challenging the airline's short-haul European routes, whilst foreign premium airlines were squeezing the brand's global long-haul network.

Being squeezed on short and long haul markets	
Low cost carriers:	The logos for three low-cost carriers: Ryanair (a yellow harp and the text 'RYANAIR THE LOW FARES AIRLINE'), easyJet (the text 'easyJet' in orange and blue), and flybe (the text 'flybe.' in blue with a multi-colored dot pattern).
Full service carriers:	The logos for three full-service carriers: Virgin Atlantic (the red 'Virgin' logo and the text 'atlantic'), Singapore Airlines (the text 'SINGAPORE AIRLINES' and a stylized bird logo), and Emirates (the Arabic calligraphy logo and the text 'Emirates').

Source: BBH

The brand was suffering and it was beginning to show.

Perceptions of quality service had fallen. The airline, once a category leader of customer service, was playing second fiddle to arch-rival Virgin Atlantic⁵.

(SLIDES REMOVES DUE TO CONFIDENTIALITY)

Declining standards took its toll on overall customer satisfaction.

Falling customer satisfaction was coming full circle and being reflected internally. Customer-facing staff were losing pride in the brand.

(SLIDES REMOVES DUE TO CONFIDENTIALITY)

This vicious cycle began affecting the bottom line. Flyers were now thinking twice about booking with British Airways.

(SLIDES REMOVES DUE TO CONFIDENTIALITY)

⁵ [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/394647.stm](https://www.bbc.com/news/business/394647.stm)



By 2010, the company was at a crossroads: continue to chase short-term sale revenues or take a step back and figure out how to be a leader again.

(SLIDES REMOVES DUE TO CONFIDENTIALITY)

Marketing challenge

Getting the airline back on course

British Airways began making preparations for its comeback by embarking on Project Flight Path, aiming to uncover where the brand still led.

(SLIDES REMOVES DUE TO CONFIDENTIALITY)

Research and insight

Forecasting clearer skies for the brand

It was clear that flyers still had a latent love for the brand. Despite a decade of decline, on a good day the brand's core foundations remained intact: passion and expertise for flying, delivered with human, British service.

(SLIDES REMOVES DUE TO CONFIDENTIALITY)

Marketing breakthrough

Recommitting to an old promise

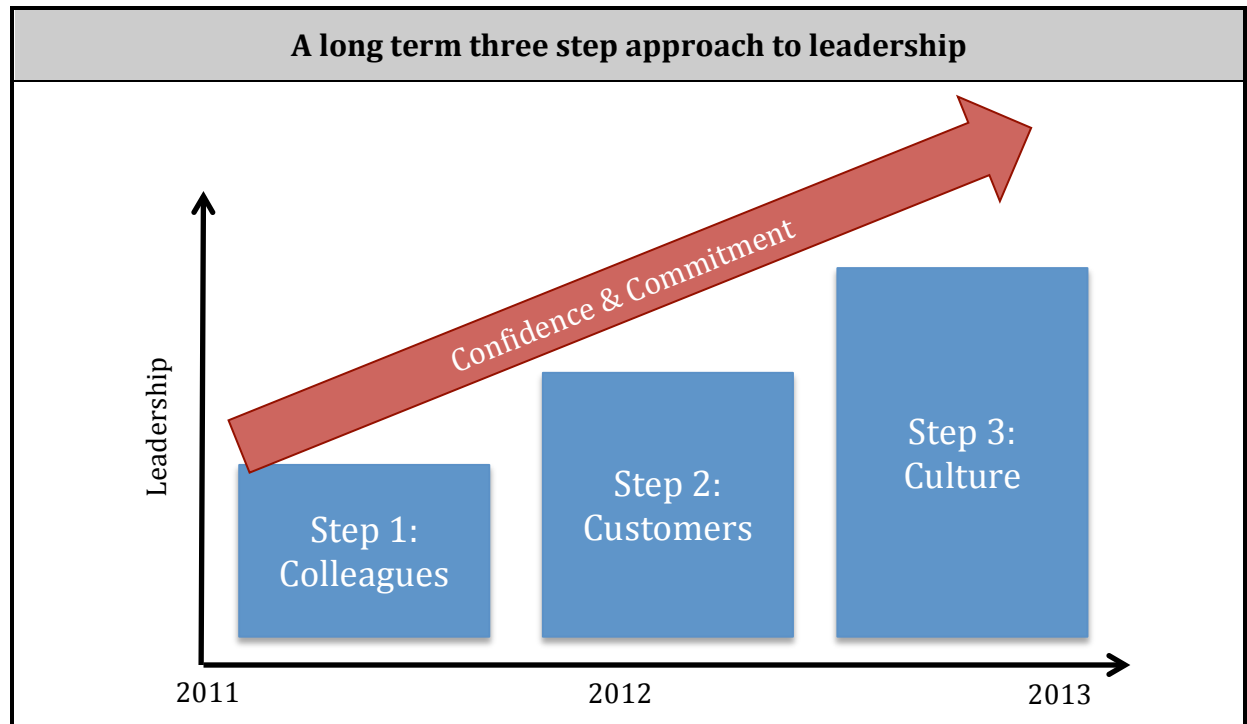
The challenge for BBH was to take these learnings and bring them to life through an idea that would put the brand back on a leading path.

(SLIDES REMOVES DUE TO CONFIDENTIALITY)



The brand took a three-step approach to execute To Fly. To Serve. and move back onto a flight path to leadership.

Its first aim was to re-build colleague morale and put service back into the heart of the business. With the staff on-board the airline could reach out to customers and, through successive marketing campaigns with the opportunity of the Olympics, re-assert its leadership back into contemporary culture.



Source: BBH

But first To Fly. To Serve. had to be given meaning.

The ethos had strong provenance having once been painted on all the airline's aircraft and was still stitched into every crewmember's jacket and pilot's hat.

If brought to life at every touch-point, To Fly. To Serve. would have the potential to reignite the brand's leadership ambitions.



To Fly. To Serve.: An ethos to lead with



Source: BA/For People

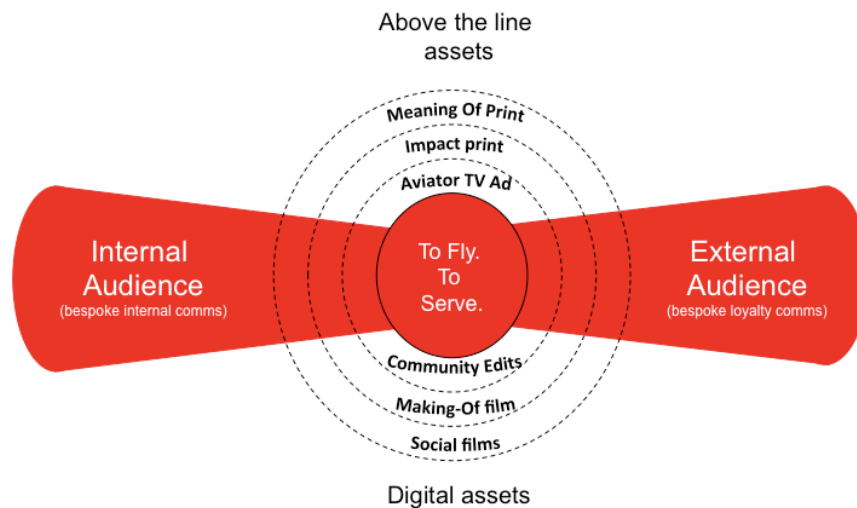
Engagement strategy

Climbing to the right altitude

An engagement strategy was created to affect the turnaround; it would reach out first to colleagues who would then help deliver it onto customers.

It was important to create a series of assets that simultaneously appealed to both the internal and external audiences.

The To Fly. To Serve. engagement strategy



Source: BBH



It started with the brand painting the ethos back onto its planes.

Making To Fly. To Serve. a visible commitment



Source: BA

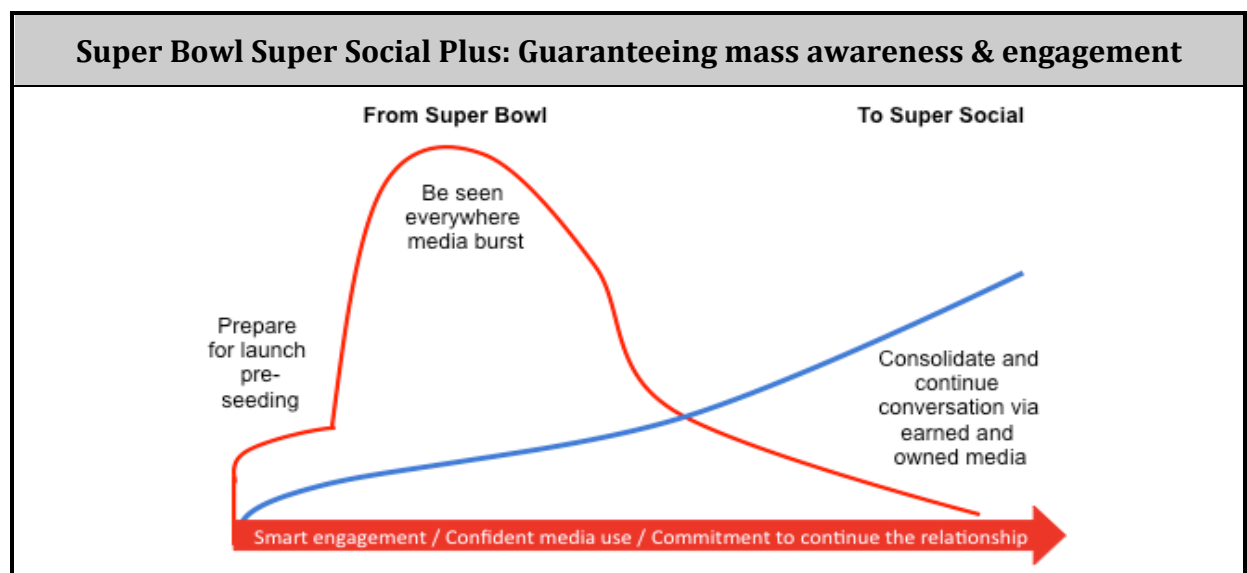


Media strategy

Flying with full colours

It had been ten years since British Airways had been in market with brand-led marketing. The airline needed a big impact to get its brand message across to customers and to demonstrate to staff that the brand was again aiming for top slot.

In 2011 Yeo Valley and BBH described a 'Super Bowl Super Social' media engagement strategy in the Marketing Society paper⁶. For BA's relaunch campaign BBH took this further with a Super Bowl Super Social Plus campaign strategy.



Source: BBH

The campaign

Getting ready for departure

A film was created to act as heart and soul and to align internal and external audiences behind To Fly. To Serve.

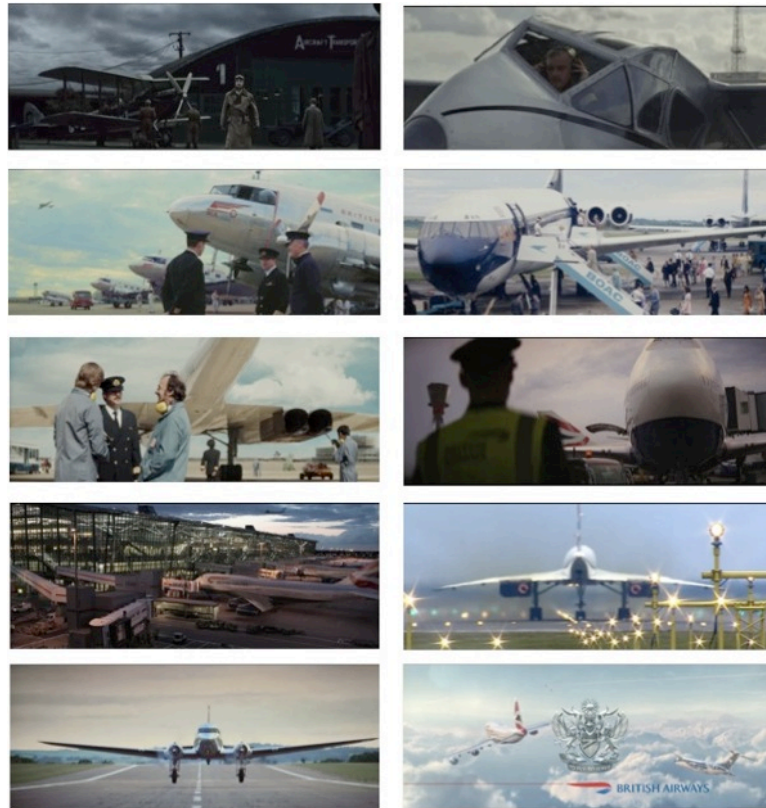
It needed to be representative of the people who would live it: British Airways staff.

'Aviators', a 90" and 60" film featured thirteen British Airways employees and focused on the most iconic example of To Fly. To Serve.: British Airways pilots.

⁶ Yeo Valley: Live in Harmony Marketing Society paper 2011



BA Staff recreating the brand's history



Source: BBH



Step One: Re-engage with an internal audience

Prepping the aircraft

British Airways staff members were the first to be shown the film and be engaged in presentations held at the brands hub, Heathrow T5.

Involving staff and breathing life into the brand ethos: T5 Internal launch



T5 staff brand launch



To Fly. To Serve. stick of rock handed to all staff

Source: BBH

At these sessions the company announced a 5-year, £5 billion reinvestment plan. BA was announcing its plan to get back on top, to empower its staff and put the customer back at the heart of its business. After years of aggressive cost-cutting the brand was now committing the business to a flight path of leadership.

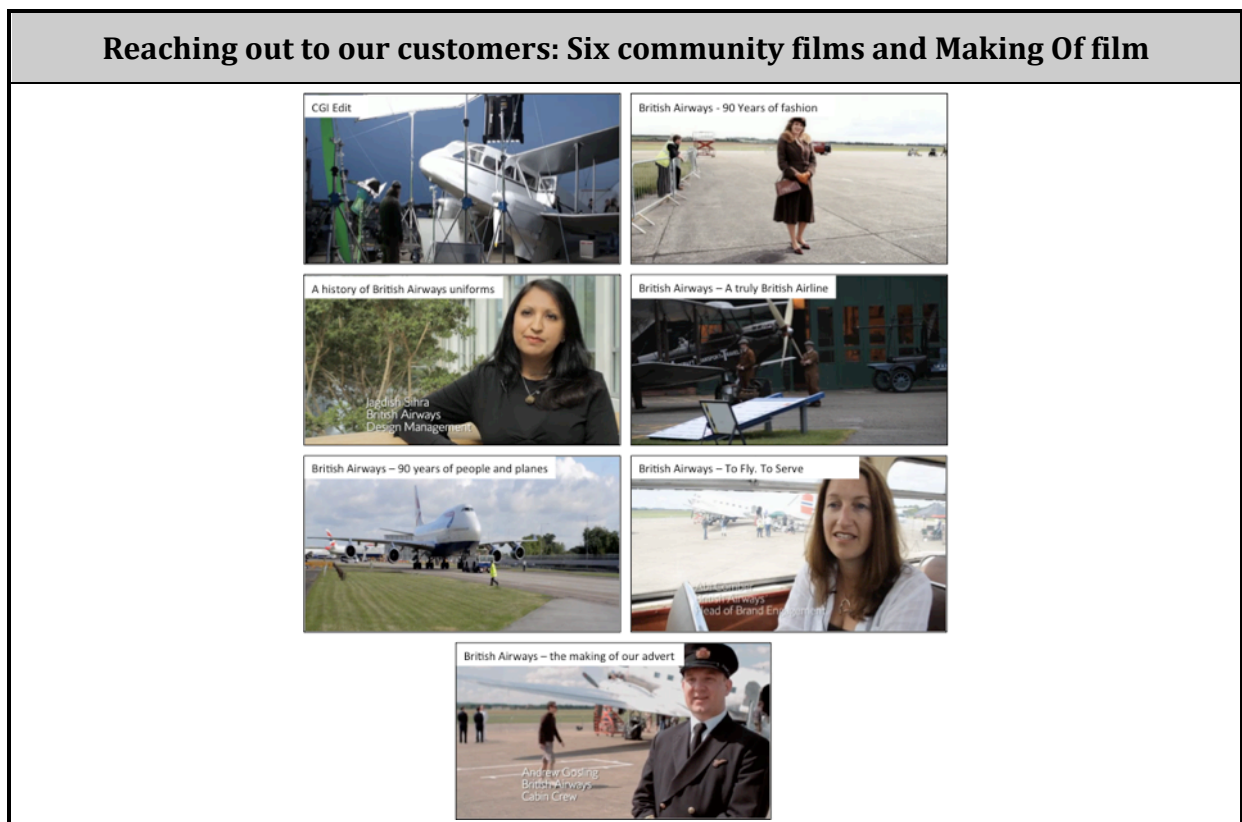


Step Two: Re-engage with the external audience

Commencing boarding

The next step was to reconnect with passionate flyers. These brand loyalists, properly engaged, would help promote the brand during the Super Bowl launch and act as brand advocates during the Super Social phase. It was the brand's first step into rebuilding its connection to customers.

Footage from the 90" film was re-cut into seven separate films and combined with bespoke footage and interviews from behind-the-scenes⁷.



Source: BBH

These short documentaries were seeded prior to campaign launch. Each film was aimed at a specific consumer group who were still passionate about the airline and its history.

A dedicated blogger team contacted each group and built a relationship sharing the films and exclusive information about the upcoming launch.

⁷ www.youtube.com/user/FlyBritishAirways



Some of the 236 loyalists contacted through the engagement program

Adverblog	Simplifying	Fly Travel Blog
Brand Republic	Airplane Geeks	BHX Flight Guide
Marketing Mag	Jet White	Airshows
Campaign	Elliott	Fly Past
Digital Buzz Blog	Flight Wisdom	Key.Aero
Marketing Week	Sky Blog - USA Today	PilotWeb
Contagious	Travel Blog - Bnet	Flyer UK Forums
David Reviews	One Mile at a Time - Boarding Area	Pprune
Creative Review	View from the Wing - Boarding Area	UKGA
Shots Mag	Plane Buzz	Airport Spotting
Ad Forum	Blog Southwest	World Airline News
Social Media Examiner	Flight Blogger - Flight Global	Airline Reporter
Ad Rants	Stuck at the Airport	Ask the Pilot
Adverlab	Wayne Farley	Aviation Queen
Ben Metcalfe	Aviation Across America	Thirty Thousand Feet
Brandflakes for breakfast	Neener International	Online Travel Review
Ad Age	NYC Aviation	Flying Mag
Creativity Online	Engineering	Aviation Chatter
Adweek	Engineer Blogs	Fly CRJ
Mashable	Think Engineering	Making Time for Flying
Golf Hotel Whiskey	Aircraft Engineers	Airplane Pilot
War Relics	Air Mech	Good Pilot News
Tnooz	The Engineer	G Calvin
Airline News	A2B Aero	Things in the Sky
Business Jet Interiors International	Aero Society Channel	Runway Girl - Flight Global
Planes Trains and Automobiles	Aviablog	Cranky Flier

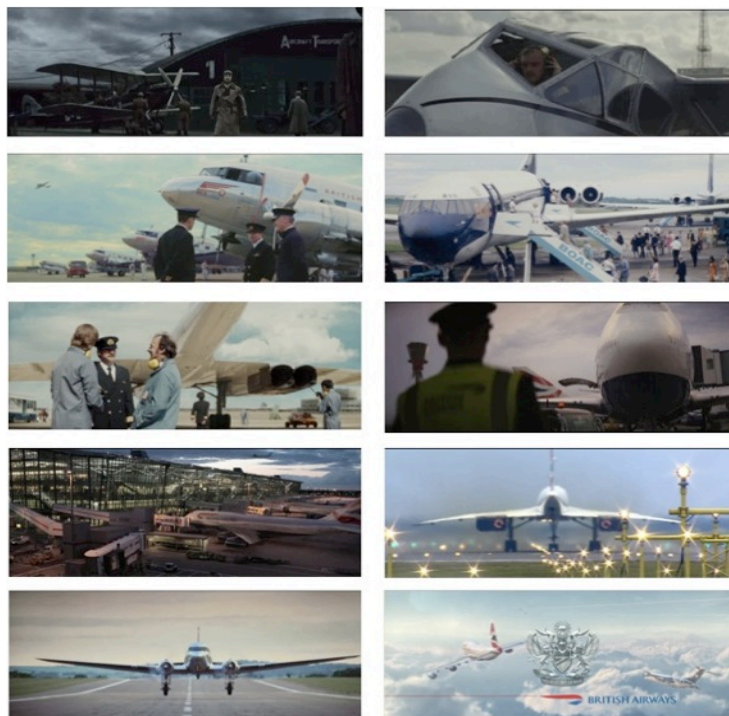
Source: BBH

Step Three: Campaign launch

Speedbird One, you are clear for take off

The campaign TV ad was unveiled on 21st September. It was first premiered on the brand's Facebook page⁸ at 11am, followed by the TV premiere on Channel 4 that night⁹.

'Aviators' 90" Launch TV Ad



Source: BBH

⁸ https://www.facebook.com/britishairways?sk=app_141603719265157

⁹ TV premiere: Grand Designs



The launch film was supported by outdoor press assets to help create greater impact around To Fly. To Serve.

A To Fly. To Serve. 'Manifesto' and 'Impact' print and outdoor put meaning to the brand ethos, its importance for the brand and for the customer.

The brand's manifesto: A message to rally around and lead from



Source: BBH

Impact To Fly. To Serve. press and outdoor: Demonstrations of the airlines total commitment



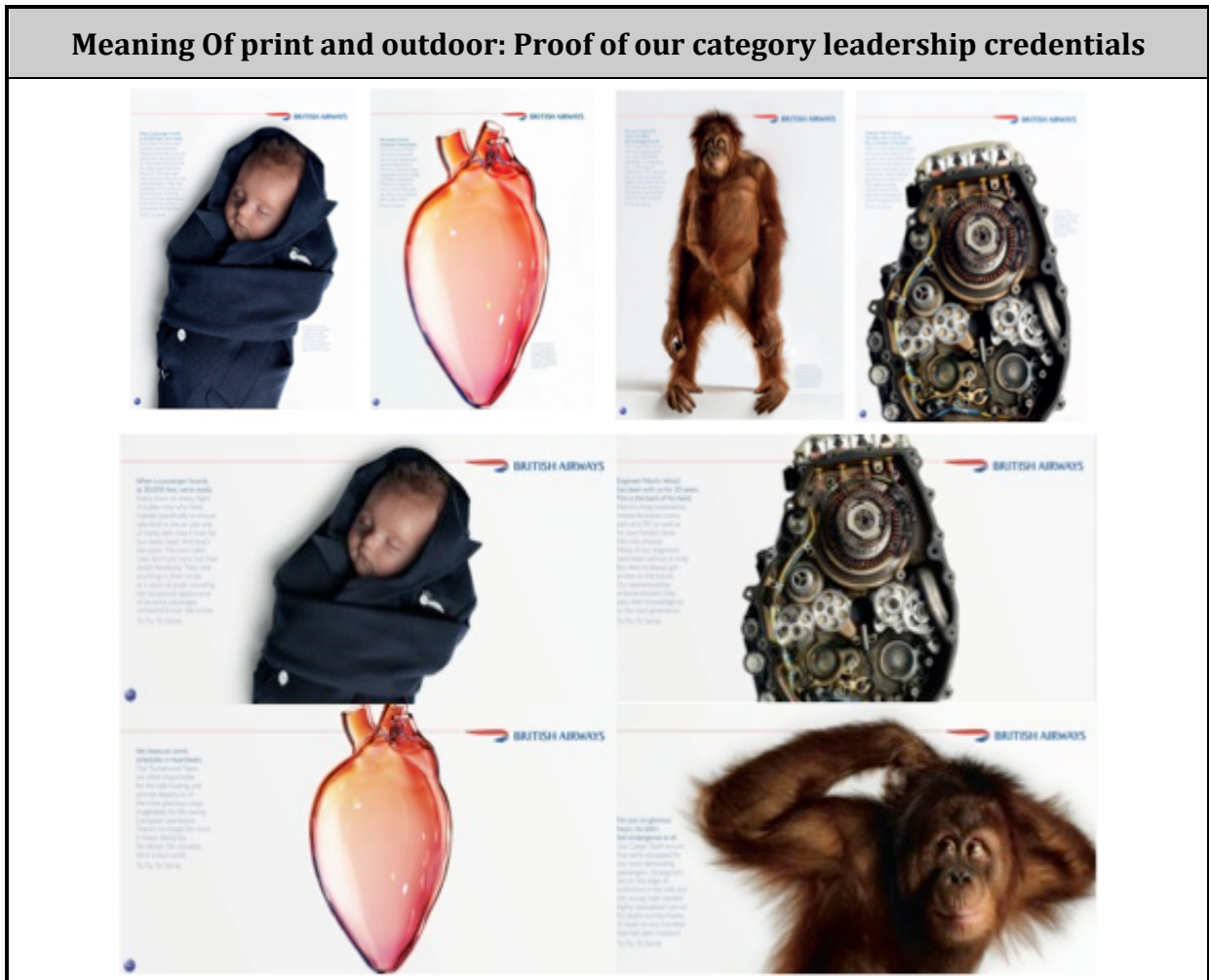
Source: BBH



Step Five: Sustaining the campaign

Rising in altitude

'Meaning Of' print and outdoor ads followed the 'Impact' print. These ads were designed to avoid airline category clichés by showing British Airways service benefits through staff-led brand truths.

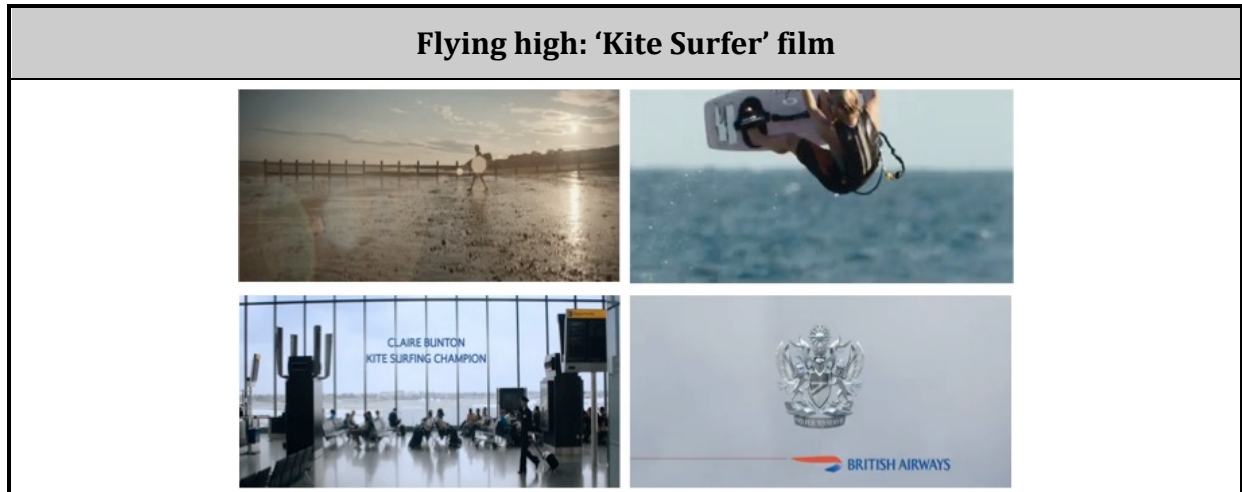


Source: BBH



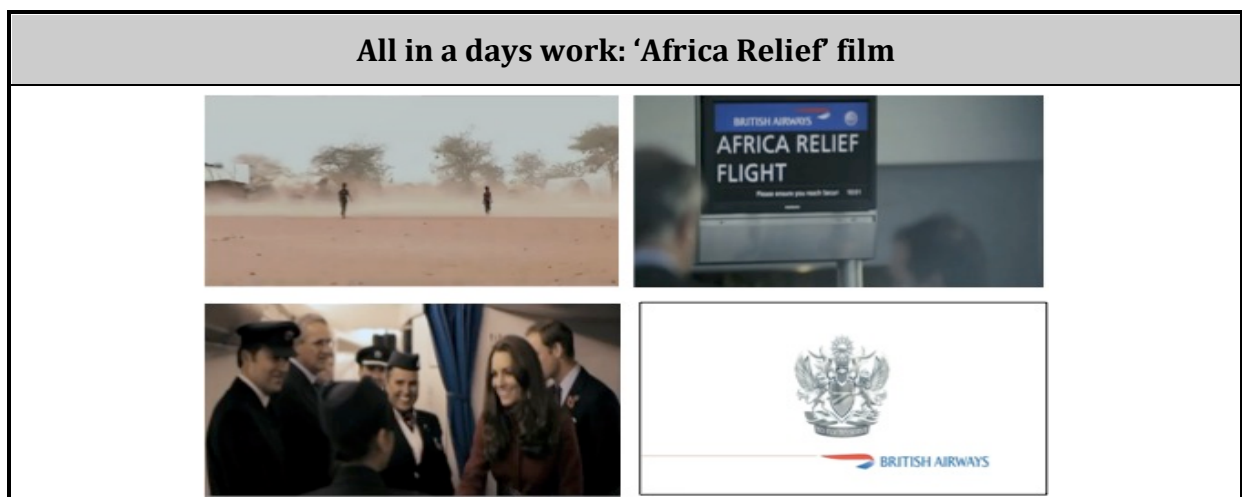
In the brand's digital space, online films dived deeper, telling the stories of the people that lived To Fly. To Serve.

'Kite Surfer'¹⁰, told the story of British Airways 747 pilot and world champion kite surfer Claire Bunton and her passion and commitment for flying.



Source: BBH

'Africa Relief'¹¹, followed the story of the British Airways volunteer team as they transported a passenger-planeload of Unicef aid from Europe to East Africa and back in under 24 hours.



Source: BBH

¹⁰ www.youtube.com/user/FlyBritishAirways

¹¹ www.youtube.com/user/FlyBritishAirways



Customer confidence and commitment:

From the outset of the brand relaunch, British Airways was always aiming to lead again.

To Fly. To Serve. reignited passion and pride amongst BA's staff and laid the groundwork for the airline to move into the Olympic year, as official airline partner, with momentum and confidence.

The *We're Ready* campaign was BA's demonstration of To Fly. To Serve. through an Olympics lens. The £5 billion reinvestment into the business was beginning to bear fruit and, with talk of chaos and upheaval in the lead up to the games, BA wanted to communicate the fact that it would be over-exceeding expectations.

In print the airline talked about the capabilities of its staff serving the equivalent of three Olympic sized pools worth of tea on board, and laying enough cable in new aircraft to cover an Olympic track eighty times.

Demonstrations of Olympic efforts in the lead up to the games

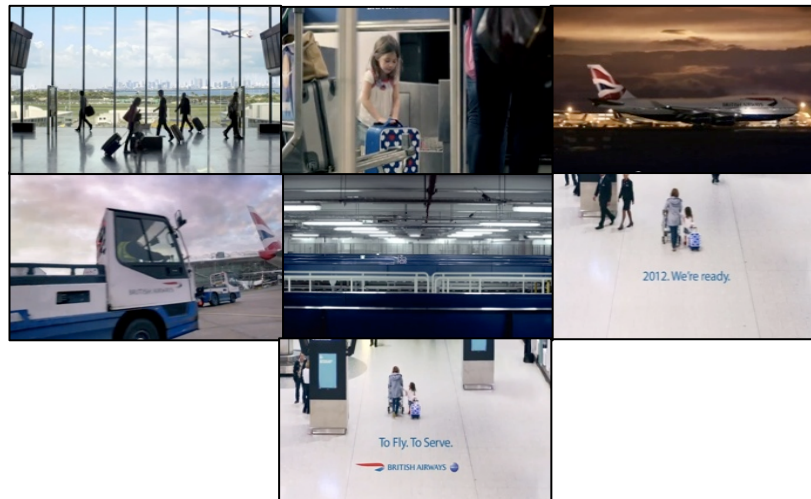
The image displays four infographics arranged in a 2x2 grid, each featuring the British Airways logo and the Olympic rings. Each infographic includes a small text block and a blue dot at the bottom right. The top-left infographic shows a torch with colorful cables, with text stating 'In 2012 our engineers will lay enough cable in our new aircraft to cover an Olympic track 80 times'. The top-right infographic shows two airplane seats, with text stating 'In 2012 our cabin crew will serve 31,293 cups of tea on board'. The bottom-left infographic shows a white teacup with blue mosaic patterns, with text stating 'In 2012 our cabin crew will serve 31,293 cups of tea on board'. The bottom-right infographic shows a gold medal, with text stating 'In 2012 our cabin crew will serve 31,293 cups of tea on board'.

Source: BBH



In TV, BA wanted to demonstrate the readiness of the one part of its business customers were most disappointed in. Its baggage crews.

Evoking the spirit of the Games with a bag race through T5



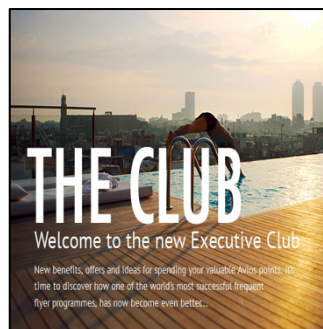
Source: BBH

During this period BA unveiled multiple brand improvements benefitting the customer experience.

Improving the customer experience from the front to the back of the plane



Height Cuisine: New airline food that tastes good at 30,000ft



New Executive Club: A new club for BA's new flyers



Supporting British talent: Olympifying the BA brand using Britain's most talented

Source: BBH & Ogilvy



Cultural confidence and commitment:

Having engaged customers through its Olympic warm-up campaign, BA now asked what To Fly. To Serve. demanded of the airline as the Olympic Games approached.

The Olympics' creative brief
WHAT COULD BA <u>DO</u> TO DEMONSTRATE THEY ARE THE MOST PATRIOTIC SUPPORTER OF TEAM GB?

Source: BBH

BA knew, as the national flag carrier, it had the right to claim a patriotic sponsor title but in order to achieve this it needed an idea that reached out not only to customers but also to culture.

The momentum brought about from To Fly. To Serve. gave BA enough confidence to develop an idea so bold it would guarantee cultural relevance for the airline during the games.

The British Airways Olympics campaign
The provocation: Don't Fly
The cause: Support TeamGB
The action: Be the Home Advantage

Source: BBH

The *Don't Fly* campaign gave BA a legitimate role to play in the Games. It let the airline command a new confident tone in communications whilst it was directing all activity into supporting and spurring on the home nation's athletics team.



In TV, BA demonstrated how it was helping the nation get behind the teams.

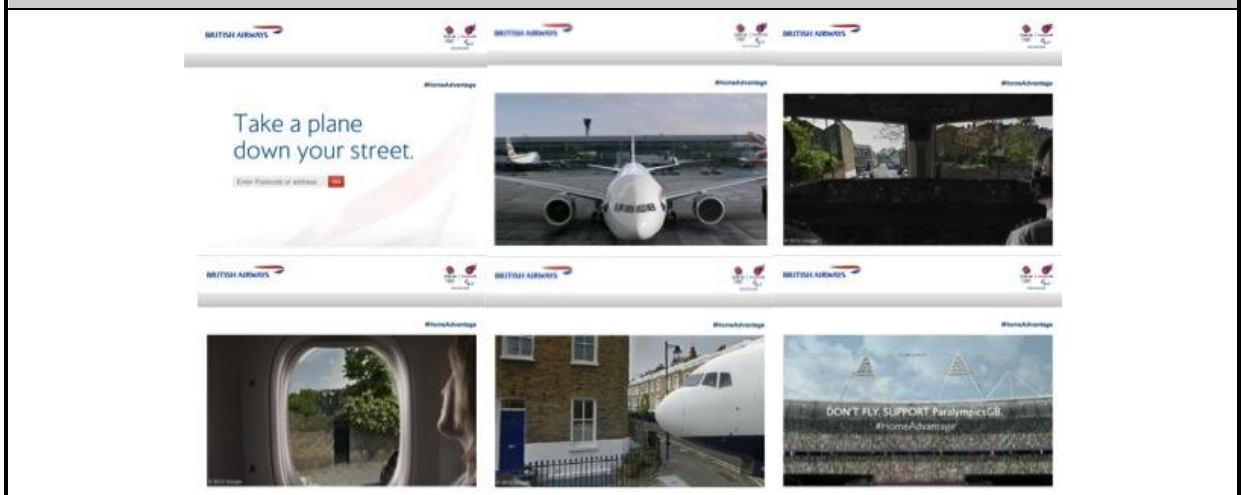
To the tune the Clash's 'London Calling', BA physically taxied people from the airport to the Games



Source: BBH

Online BA let people get involved by taking a BA plane down their street.

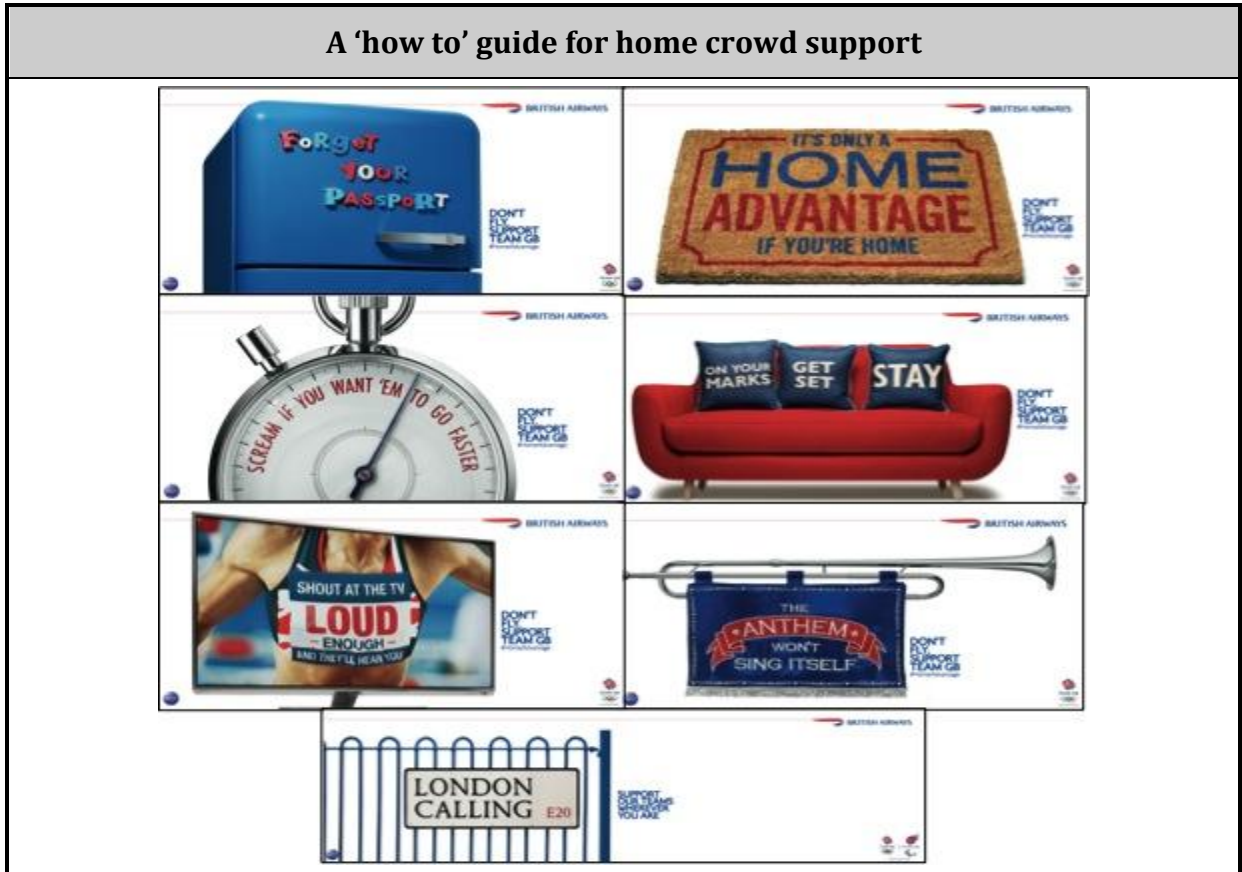
Taxi.ba.com: Giving online audiences surprise and delight



Source: BBH



In print BA rallied the nation to show its support for the teams and rally the Home Advantage.



Source: BBH



BA ran numerous pieces of activity over the Olympic and Paralympic games demonstrating it was at the heart of the games reacting to every moment.

BA sponsored ParkLive at the Olympics Park and ran daily reactive press ads supporting the athletes



Source: BBH

The games were a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for BA, but an opportunity acted upon with a wave of passion, confidence and momentum that had been rolling since the To Fly. To Serve brand relaunch.



Results:

1. Re-connecting with colleagues

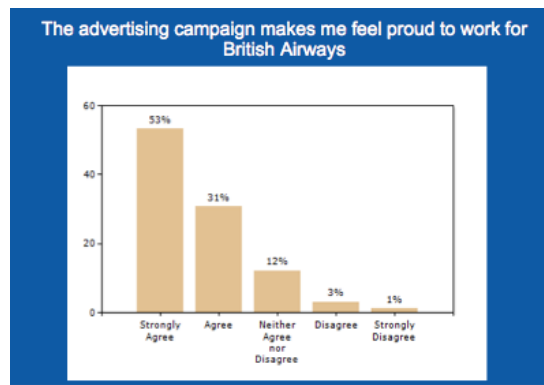
Flying back on course

The first step of the brand relaunch was to reengage colleagues. BA needed to re-establish morale and a sense of purpose amongst its thirty six thousand staff.

The To Fly. To Serve. campaign kick started this objective.

Eight out of every ten employees felt the relaunch activity made them proud to work for British Airways

84% of staff strongly agreed/agreed that the campaign made them feel proud to work at British Airways



Source: 2011 British Airways Internal Staff Survey

With successive activity the morale of the airlines staff has grown to new heights in step with the brand's renewed marketing confidence.

Flying high: From 53% staff pride to 91% pride in two years



91% are proud to work for BA

87% would speak highly of BA's products

87% say working for BA makes them want to do the best they can

67% would speak highly of BA's customer service

92% are confident that BA will be successful in the future

71% would recommend BA as a great place to work

Source: 2012 British Airways Internal Staff Survey



2. Focusing on customers again

Expanding the route network

Brand measures that looked at customer perceptions of the airline rose significantly after To Fly. To Serve. and have continued to rise with each successive campaign.

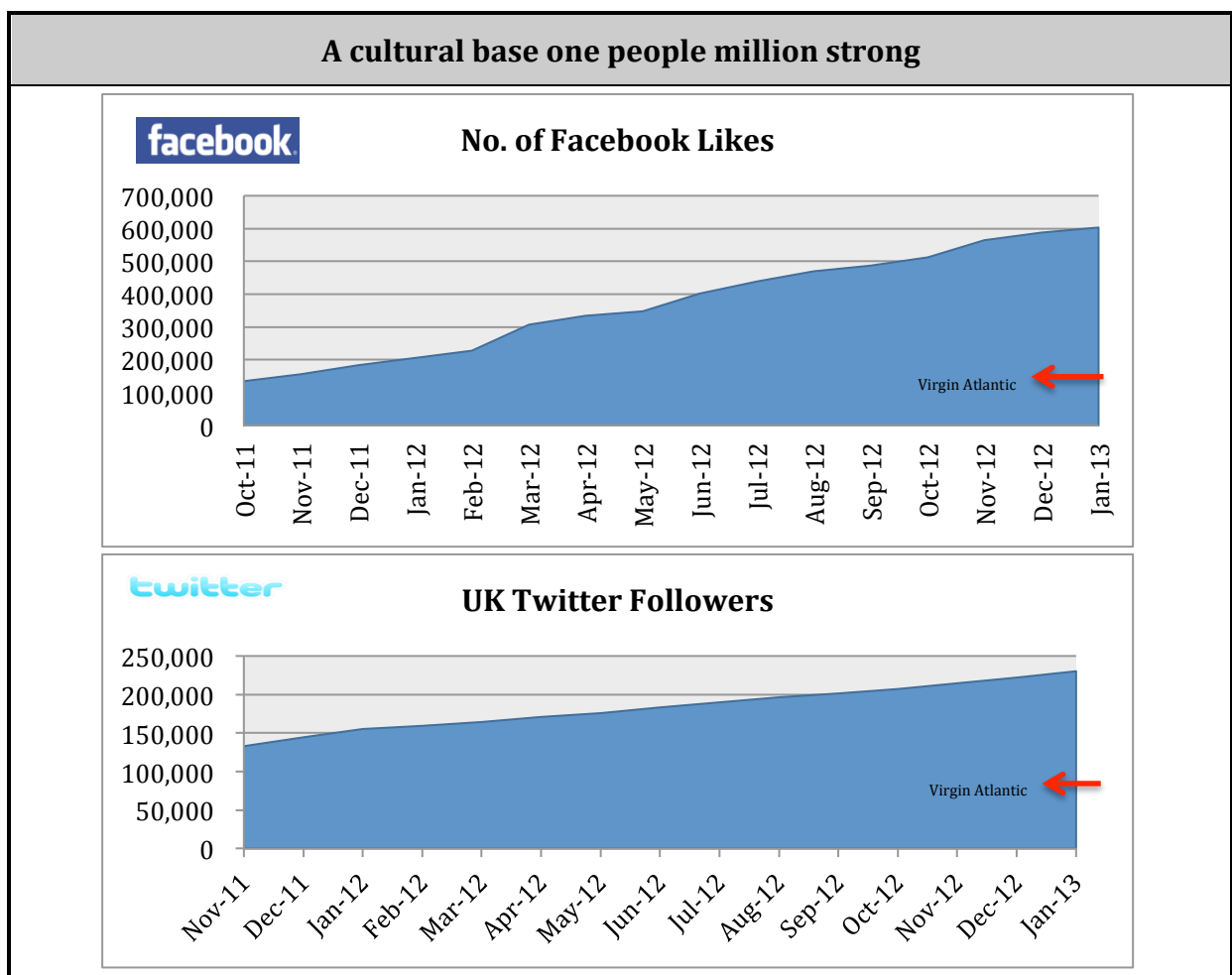
Desire, a BA metric that tracks customer choice when price is removed, has seen successive strong growth with each brand campaign.

(SLIDES REMOVES DUE TO CONFIDENTIALITY)

3. Culture

Becoming the favourite airline again

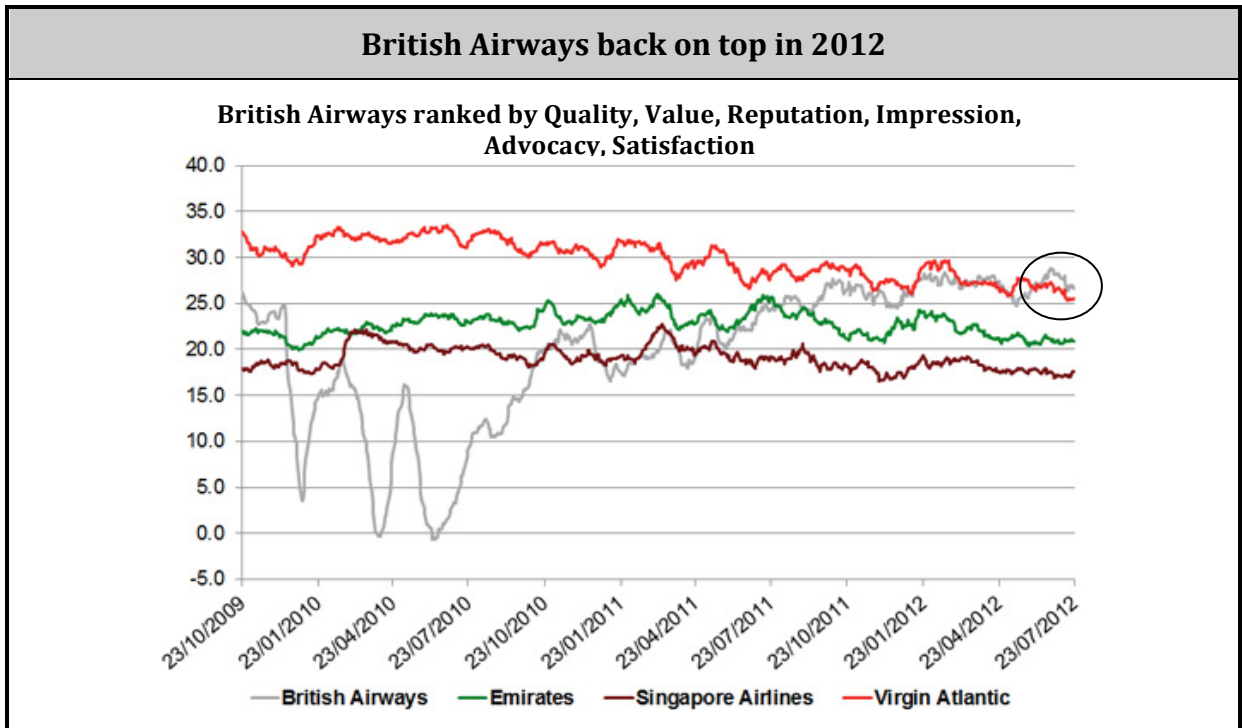
Since the launch of To Fly. To Serve. the airline's social media presence has only increased in significance contributing to its re-connected role in culture.



Source: BA

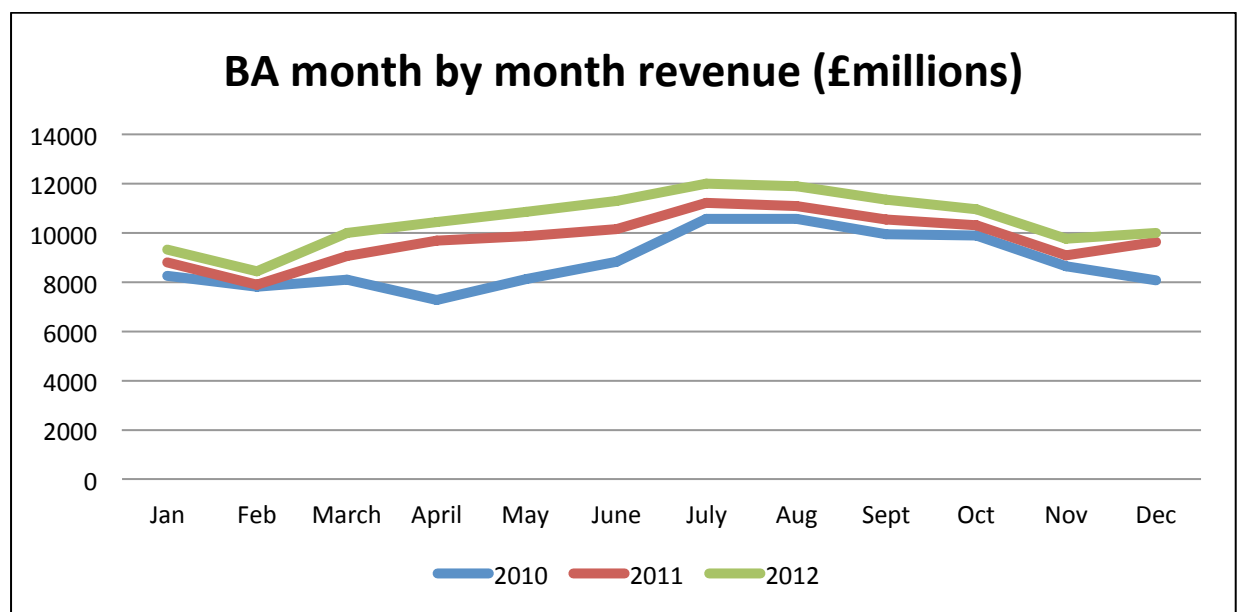


Independent bodies also responded to BA's cultural re-connection. After a steady climb YouGov judged BA to be the UK's favourite airline UK. A confident rise back into the leadership position.



Source: YouGov

BA has also seen successive periods of sustained growth since To Fly. To Serve., with month on month rises in revenue since 2010.



Source: IAGshares.com



Conclusion

Brand and market leadership is not something that can be reclaimed overnight. Only by committing to a vision and growing from a solid platform of colleagues, customers and culture can a brand hope to re-attain its place in the market and place itself on a flight path to leadership.