

HIGHLAND  
*experience*  
TOURS

**DBA DESIGN EFFECTIVENESS AWARDS 2010**

<b>Project Title</b>	Highland Experience Tours Rebrand
<b>Category</b>	01 Corporate/Brand Identity
<b>Sub Category</b>	1.2 Design and Implementation costs under £100,000
<b>Client Company</b>	Highland Experience Tours Ltd.
<b>Design Consultancy</b>	H&A Graphic Design Ltd.
<b>Current Date</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2010

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The tourism industry is a tough playing field, especially in Scotland where there are so many attractions fighting for each visitor's pound, dollar or yen. However, one dynamic and passionate tour company has managed to achieve real growth thanks to a re-branding exercise which allowed it to really differentiate itself from its competitors.**

In a world of identikit brochures all featuring the same glens and tartans, Highland Experience Tours (HET) employed H&A to come up with a new marketing approach that emphasised the experience that visitors would have on their trips. This approach has proved extremely effective and has allowed HET to get noticed and grow.

Following a re-branding and re-design of all the company's key marketing tools, the results prove that HET's re-branding has borne fruit:

- Business generated through the HET shop increased by 40%
- HET Agent sales jumped by 200%
- HET online sales went up by 50%
- Within two months, HET had realized a full return on their spend with H&A

By the end of 2009 HET had enjoyed an overall increase in turnover of over 60% compared to 2008. This growth was achieved with no other major spend on PR or publicity and took place within the context of an unpredictable tourism market where visitors were looking for 'credit crunch' value.

220 words

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## OUTLINE OF PROJECT BRIEF

Highland Experience Tours (HET) is a tour provider operating in Scotland's competitive tourism market. As part of its drive to position itself as a leader in this market, HET approached H&A to refresh its brand and marketing material. The aim of the project was to help HET clearly differentiate itself from its competitors and get over its unique USPs - and so increase turnover and overall customer numbers.

The key marketing/business objectives were:

- To define HET more clearly in the market place
- To strengthen the HET brand
- To increase turnover and overall customer numbers

## DESCRIPTION

HET is based in Edinburgh. It provides a wide range of single and multi-day minibuss tours around Scotland. Tourists are the main stay of HET's business and the company caters to both foreign and domestic visitors.

HET was formed in 2005 and has pursued a programme of incremental growth since then, adding tours and buses as its turnover has increased. HET's aim from the start has been to be a market leader in the Scottish tours industry and provide a service that is acknowledged as being the best in terms of quality and value.

At the time of the re-branding project, HET operated six vehicles (ranging from a 16 seater to a 41 seater) and had a flagship office in a prime position half way up Edinburgh's Royal Mile. It employed four full-time management staff, six full time drivers and up to 15 part-time drivers at the peak of the season.

## OVERVIEW OF MARKET

The Scottish tourism market makes up a significant part of the national economy. This means that nationally HET competes against a wide variety of tourist attractions and companies.

In its particular sector of the tourism market, HET operates in a highly competitive business environment that contains a large number of competitors. There are ten direct competitors operating in the EH1 postcode alone (EH1 is where HET is based); all offer tours to predominantly the same locations at very similar prices.

At the time of the re-branding exercise, the Scottish tourism market was in a state of some flux. According to Visit Scotland, in 2009 domestic tourists increased the number of trips they took by +2.6% (compared to 2008). At the same time, per capita expenditure fell by over 2.7%. Over the same period, International Tourism increased by 3%, while their average spend per night decreased by 2%.

Visit Scotland commented that the recessionary conditions experienced over 2009, compared to the turbulent credit crunch environment of 2008, produced some interesting trends. Consumers were increasingly concerned about value for money and the 'staycation' idea became more apparent over the year. This meant that HET's potential customer base was increasing, but that the company was having to fight for customers looking for the best value.

Overall, the 2009 season was seen by HET as a key opportunity for expansion because of the rise of the 'staycation' market and because of the tourism boost that the Homecoming Scotland 2009 celebrations were expected to produce. However, the company's management recognised that to make a significant step forward – and fully capitalise on the expected spike in Scottish tourism numbers - it would need to make significant improvements to its corporate brand image and to its key communication and marketing tools.

## PROJECT LAUNCH DATE

The new brand and associated communication materials, signage and website was rolled out during February and March 2009 in time for HET's key summer season.

## SIZE OF DESIGN BUDGET

<£15,000 design and consultancy fees paid to H&A Graphic Design.

## OUTLINE OF DESIGN SOLUTION

Before the project started H&A were commissioned by HET to research the market. From this report (see *Appendix A*) H&A made a number of recommendations on how HET could improve the return on its marketing spend.

From these recommendations HET commissioned H&A to:

- Define HET more clearly in the market place
- Strengthen the HET brand
- Roll-out new branding across all marketing materials

It was clear that a major challenge facing the company was the fact that it was not strongly differentiated from its competitors. Its marketing material and messages were strikingly similar to those of other Highland tour companies and they gave potential customers no real reason to choose HET over the competition.

H&A worked with the managers and staff at HET to identify the company's key customers, its channels to markets and its key brand strengths. This research was used to strongly position the company, to create a new HET brand essence and to focus and simplify HET's marketing material and the messages they carried.

It was clear that HET's key strength was the quality of its tours and, in particular, the personal touch that the company's highly experienced and engaging guides brought to each tour. Another key strength was the company's ability to provide a more bespoke experience than that provided by its competitors.

To highlight these strength and to differentiate HET in the market, H&A shifted the focus of HET's marketing from simply providing details of the tours (which were, at first glance, very similar to those of its competition) to showing customers what they really wanted to know: that if they booked with HET they would have an unforgettable, fun and, most importantly, Scottish experience.

A new brand essence was developed ('The Best Way to Experience Scotland') and a new logo was produced for the company. The new logo placed a clear emphasis on the word 'experience' using a customised, hand-written typeface that incorporated a Saltire. HET's corporate colours were also updated to give a more modern, Scottish feel.

Using this new brand essence and logo, H&A then redesigned the look and feel of HET's marketing materials, including its 2009 tour brochure, shop signage and POS material. Design templates were supplied to 'reskin' the existing website and a corporate folder and agent pack was produced. Written content was developed from scratch and, in order to differentiate HET from the competition, its focus was shifted from 'buses and views' to 'people and fun'. Visually, larger photographic images were used, and a scrapbook feel was introduced – again to reinforce the 'experience' message.

419 words

HIGHLAND  
*experience*  
TOURS



*New HET logo*

*Old HET logo*



*The new brand essence*



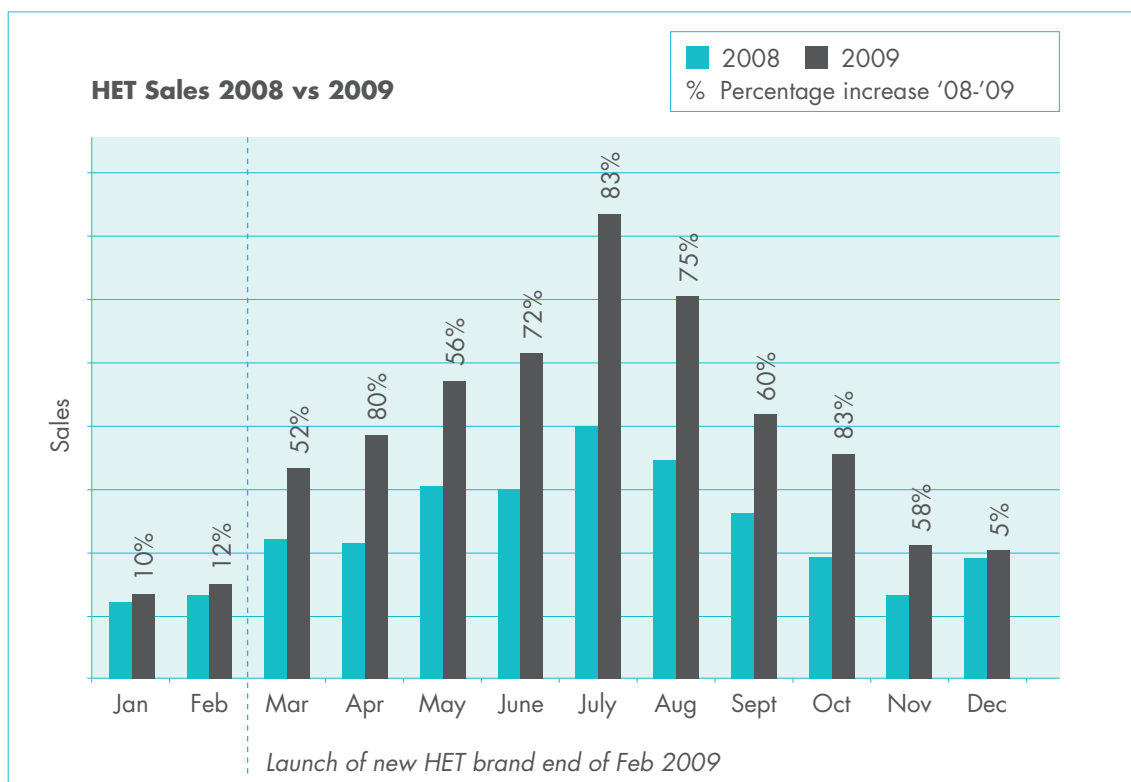
Examples of new corporate and marketing material

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The effects of HET's new position and re-brand were immediate and sustained. Key results for the year are set out below. As illustrated (see *Graph A* below) the pick-up in sales (relative to 2008) immediately followed the launch of HET's new brand and marketing material (in Feb/March). This continued strongly throughout the rest of the year. The key Summer months saw particularly strong growth in sales – so boosting HET's revenue.

### INCREASE IN SALES

- Within one month of the new brand launch HET recorded their busiest Easter weekend ever – up **50%** on the previous year
- Over the year, business generated through the HET shop increased by **40%**
- Year-on-year agent sales jumped by **200%**
- Annual online sales went up by **50%**
- By the end of the year HET had enjoyed an overall increase in turnover of over **60%** compared to 2008



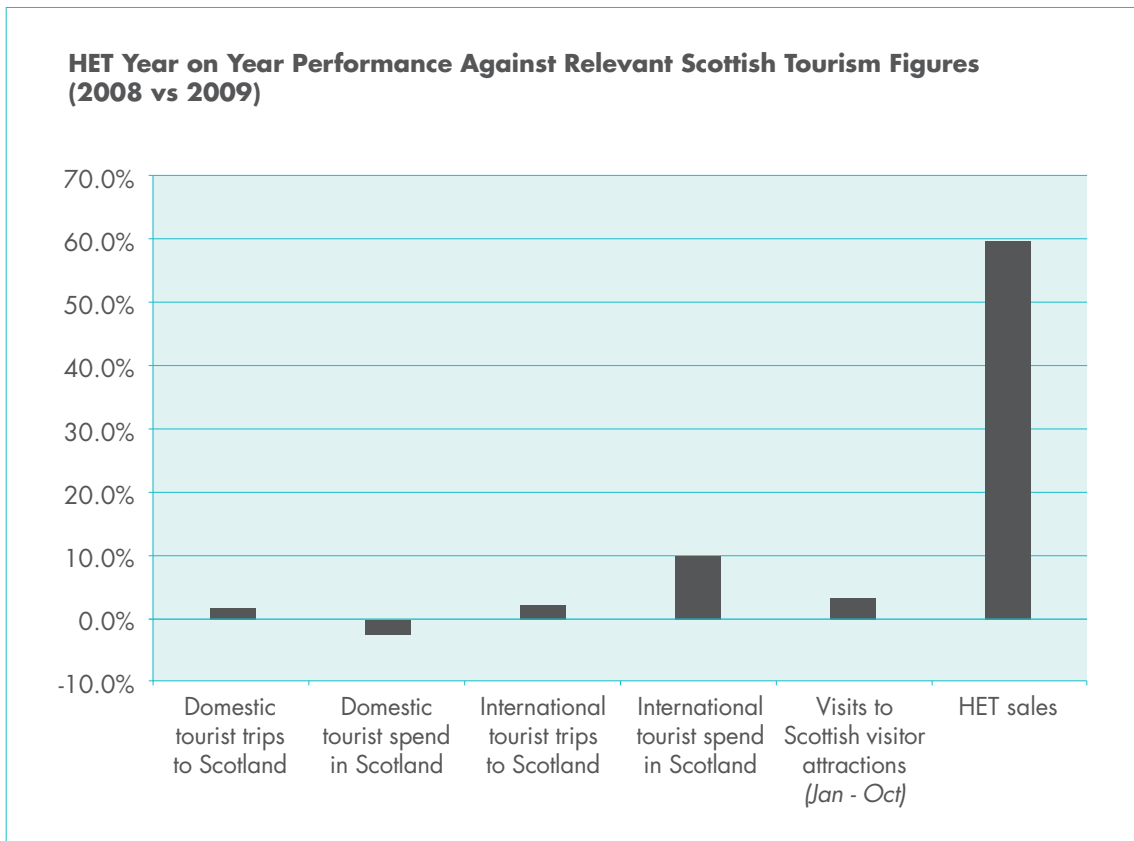
Graph A  
Source: HET internal sales data

## RETURN ON SPEND

Within two months of the re-branding exercise, HET's increased profits provided them with a full return on their spend with H&A.

## BEATING THE MARKET

In comparison to the overall Scottish tourism market, HET's growth was impressive. As illustrated (see *Graph B*), the company's growth was significantly above that of tourism in general – beating growth in all key subsectors by a large margin.



Graph B  
Source: Latest Tourism Figures from VisitScotland.org and HET internal sales data

## CORPORATE GROWTH AND EXPANSION

Due to the growth in its business achieved in 2009, HET has been able to expand and, at the beginning of the 2010 season was running 12 vehicles and employing 10 full-time drivers and up to 20 part-time drivers. As stated, at the beginning of the 2009 season the respective figures were: six vehicles, six full-time drivers and up to 15 part-time drivers.

The highest profile evidence of HET's strong showing in 2009 has been its decision to open a new sales office in Glasgow and operate a series of tours starting from this city. The new office opened in time for the start of the 2010 season.

HET is now set to build on their brand position in 2010. They have asked H&A to continue the development of their marketing and communication material to reflect and drive the continued growth of the company.

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
Full-time drivers	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>
Part-time drivers	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>
Vehicles	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>
Offices	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

*Table showing areas of HET growth and expansion  
Source: HET internal sales data*

## CHANGES IN PERCEPTION WITHIN INDUSTRY

HET's 2009 visit to the Visit Scotland Expo was their busiest ever, with all appointment opportunities with agents booked up (compared to less than 50% the year before). This shows that potential agents and partners liked the new 'look' of the company.

HET was able to convert this interest into important new contacts – shown by the significant increase in agent sales throughout 2009. It is also clear that, because the new marketing material put over the consumer benefits of an HET tour more clearly, agents were able to 'sell' the company to visitors much more easily.

## AWARDS

HET were recognized for the excellence of the experience they offer customers through their nomination for a 2009 Thistle Award in the 'extra mile' category.

## IMPROVEMENTS IN STAFF MORALE AND RECRUITMENT

The response from HET's staff to the new look of the company has been very positive. According to HET's management, key benefits include:

- Sales staff have found it easier to sell the company and highlight why it is better than its competitors
- Staff training has become more focused and effective
- All staff have become more enthusiastic about working for a company with a clear vision and strong 'personality'
- Due to the increased profile of the company and its more professional appearance, HET has seen more applicants of a higher quality applying to work with it

*"As soon as I saw the new Brand I loved it – it sums up perfectly what we do. Now we do what it says on the tin!"*

*Shelbey, HET Sales Staff*

## IMPROVEMENTS IN CONSUMER ATTITUDES

The company saw a significant rise in popularity. In January 2009, HET's ranking on Tripadvisor was 4 stars and it was ranked as the 44<sup>th</sup> most popular attraction in Edinburgh. As at May 2010, HET had achieved the website's maximum 5 star rating and ranked as the 19<sup>th</sup> most popular attraction in Edinburgh.

The following customer feedback is from [tripadvisor.co.uk](http://tripadvisor.co.uk) – it is plain that customers are getting the 'experience' message.

*Following a friend's advice I took the two day tour of the Highlands and it was such a wonderful experience! The small, comfortable bus created the perfect, personal environment to meet new people and enjoy the beauty of Scotland.*

*The tour was wonderful- not only did we see some of the most famous spots in the highlands but we were introduced us some seemingly quite "secret" spots. Micheal, our guide, truly made the experience for us.*

*Thank you to Tim (TOUR GUIDE EXTRAORDINAIRE) for a wonderful experience travelling through the Scottish Highlands, wind, rain, snow and all. Tim's enthusiasm for his country, his great sense of humor and his knowledge of the history and the environment was inspiring.*

## TESTIMONIALS

*"H&A starting working Highland Experience Tours in 2009. After a consultation process with Ross and his colleagues I know we had joined with the right team to take our company forward. Throughout the rebranding process H&A understood our concept and created a winning look and positioned our product in the 2009 tourism season where we experienced a 60% increase in turnover. Customers can now see straight away why they should choose us. We will continue to work closely with H&A going forward."*

*Michael Bremner, Managing Director, Highland Experience Tours*

## RESEARCH RESOURCES

- Latest Tourism Figures from VisitScotland.org (see Appendix B)
- HET internal sales data (see Appendix C: only in confidential version)
- Tripadvisor.co.uk

## OTHER INFLUENCING FACTORS

### **Was it advertising or PR?**

HET did not increase its advertising or PR budgets between 2008 and 2009, so any significant increases in sales cannot be attributed to advertising or PR spend.

### **Did HET change their prices?**

HET did not change their pricing structure or run any significant offers in 2009.

### **Was it just the market?**

Although the overall tourism market in Scotland increased during 2009, the increase was relatively small and uneven. As highlighted in the relevant sections above, growth in tourism numbers (2.6% for domestic; 3% for International) was significantly smaller than the growth in HET's turnover (60%).

Therefore it can be argued that H&A's rebranding contributed significantly to HET's growth in 2009 and has allowed the company to take its place as one of the market leaders in its sector.