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THE WASH UP FROM BP'S LEAK DISASTER



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There can be no denying that the global furor directed at BP that has ensued since the calamitous disaster that is the Gulf oil spill is well founded. The company has been the focus of scorn, derision and anger from the world's media and environmental groups since the spill hit global headlines, and rightly so. As details come to light it seems the whole mess could have been completely avoided if the company had acted on advice to invest in a simple, relatively cheap upgrade on its equipment. Herein lies the rub – for the company who embarked on setting the standard for corporate responsibility in its sector (famously in its Green Helios marque) to have failed so spectacularly, and so publicly, signals the fundamental fact that repositioning only works if the company does so from the inside out.

The corporate mission their rebranding eloquently signalled was either seen as an admirable, progressive move or, for cynics, an exercise in managing a tarnished corporate reputation. However, the rebrand signalled a paradigm shift in how oil and energy companies needed to re-evaluate their business and the way in which they conducted it in this new era of corporate responsibility for corporations as social institutions. For us in the branding business it articulates the power of corporate identity as the public face of a company's mission, and essence and thus, a critical touch-point in stimulating the dialogue between its powerbrokers who steer the course, its stakeholders, and the communities it operates in.

The lesson the Gulf spill has triggered is just how important aligning and delivering on your corporate mission is, especially when you wear it on you sleeve through your consumer interface (CI). Witness the recent call to arms from Greenpeace in enlisting the public to revamp the famous Green Helios of BP's once lauded CI – and the groundswell of brilliantly articulate, bightingly insightful interpretations that have come to light. The culmination of this guerrilla movement surely must be Greenpeace activists scaling the corporate façade in London and replacing the company flag with a more descriptive and reflective version.

Greenpeace has done a brilliant job of exposing this truth by turning BP's livery on itself to show that best intentions are not enough – businesses need to live up to promises a CI delivers, and it all starts from the inside out. Let's hope the captains of industry hear this and use it as a catalyst for real change before this happens again. ■