

Project title

Manchester Central Rebrand



Category	1 Corporate/Brand Identity
Sub category	1.1 Design and implementation costs over £100,000
Client company	Manchester Central Convention Complex
Design consultancy	Hemisphere Design & Marketing Consultants
Current date	12 June 2009

“Undoubtedly, the rebranding of Manchester Central as the hub of the city centre’s convention product has been one of the most significant developments to happen to Manchester’s conference and exhibition offer in the last decade - this new approach has allowed the city to compete at a whole new level internationally.”

Paul Simpson
Chief Executive, Visit Manchester

1. Executive Summary

(299 words)

Business tourism is big business.

The economic impact (EI) of the 'meetings industry' in the UK is estimated as over £20 billion annually. UK cities are therefore constantly investing in their convention facilities to attract this business, particularly the highly-lucrative international conference market.

In 2005, the performance of Manchester's main venues, GMEX and the Manchester International Convention Centre (MICC), was lagging behind competitors such as Edinburgh and Birmingham. In addition, brand new facilities opening in Liverpool and Dublin were likely to reduce Manchester's appeal.

Hemisphere was tasked with rebranding GMEX and MICC in 2006, creating a more coherent proposition to an international target market, delivering increased economic impact and raising the city's profile as a conference destination. The solution was presenting the combined facilities under a single name, Manchester Central, with the addition of a more elastic brand name - Manchester Central Convention Complex - to encompass other business tourism facilities in the area, effectively creating a convention 'one-stop shop'.

Since the venues' relaunch at the end of 2006, Manchester Central has:

- **won significant national and international events;**
- **achieved annual income, EI and profitability that average 16-19% above pre-rebrand levels;**
- **achieved a 64% shift in the proportion of its business that comes from the lucrative conference market, from 32.2% to 52.9%;**
- **won a number of prestigious industry awards;**
- **helped Manchester achieve 3rd place in the European conference city rankings in 2008;**
- **helped Manchester rise from 86th place to 69th place in the ICCA (International Convention & Congress Association) rankings from 2006 to 2008.**

These successes have all been achieved against a background of increased competition and a declining market. 2009/10 sales targets have already been met by end April, despite the overall reduction in business tourism nationally as a result of the recent economic downturn.

2. Project overview

(494 words)

2.1 Project brief

Task

- To rename and rebrand GMEX/MICC and the surrounding ‘convention quarter’

Key objectives

- To promote GMEX/MICC as one combined proposition, including the wider ‘convention quarter’ facilities
- To improve the venues’ (and city’s) profile as an international conference destination
- To increase the proportion of national/international conferences and other prestigious events
- To maximise the venues’ impact on the city’s economy

Key issues

- GMEX is a conversion of an old Victorian Central Station and a dominant feature of Manchester’s skyline. Changing its name would need to be handled sensitively.
- Existing industry perceptions were of old and tired exhibition facilities at GMEX, plus limited space for conferences at MICC.
- Other local conference businesses saw themselves in competition with GMEX/MICC and were sceptical about working together to create a ‘convention quarter’.

Pre-rebrand identity
and literature



2.2 Project Description

MICC, a purpose-built conference auditorium, opened in 2001 on a site adjacent to GMEX. By 2005, the combined facilities had not made the anticipated inroads into the international convention market, and the city was lagging behind its competitors.

The management of the two venues was then restructured with the aim of improving their performance. The existing GMEX/MICC dual branding was considered a barrier to achieving results and rebranding was seen as an opportunity to reposition the venues within the marketplace and to change the operational ethos of the organisation.

2.3 Overview of the market

Business tourism is highly competitive area for major cities. This has led to growth in the number of cities building new conference venues and enhancing existing ones.

But, despite this increase in supply, the UK conference market has been declining steadily; the market has experienced a downturn of over 18%* in direct revenues to venues for the three year period 2005-7 compared to 2004-6, with figures expected to worsen as a result of the current economic downturn.

For GMEX/MICC, this increased level of competition in a declining market was exacerbated by the opening in 2008 of a new convention centre in Liverpool in its Capital of Culture year.

*Source: British Conference Venues Survey 2008

Examples of competitor brands

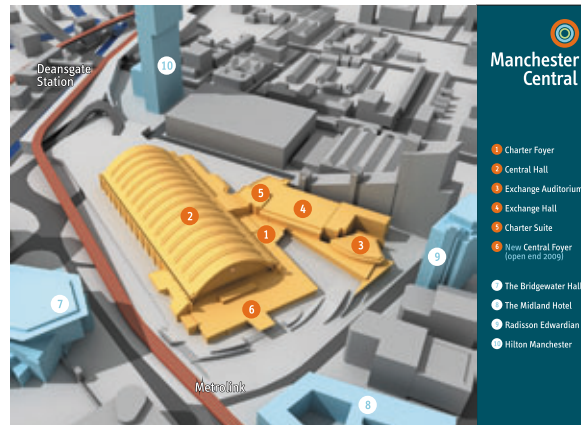


2.6 Outline of design solution

Consultation revealed two points of competitive advantage for GMEX/MICC; their location at the heart of the city centre and Manchester's renewed reputation. The characterful architecture of the Grade-II listed railway station was also seen as an asset compared to the 'concrete sheds' of venues such as NEC.

Hemisphere's solution was to name the whole site **Manchester Central**, reflecting the historic origin of the main building and encapsulating the venues' key selling points. The strategy also proposed using **Manchester Central Convention Complex** for the wider network of convention facilities, creating an 'elastic' brand that can be used to bring together a varying number of venues and services.

Manchester Central Convention Complex; Wayfinding totem



The design solution was influenced by the need for greater international appeal and took as its starting point the European signage symbol for town/city centre, with each of the concentric rings coloured to reflect different physical aspects of Manchester Central's location.

Core brandmark; Photographic usage of the graphic circles to illustrate environmental surfaces



2.4 Project launch and budget

The rebrand was launched in December 2006. The budget for design and implementation was £35,000 and £100,000 respectively.

3. Summary of results

Due to the long lead time in booking national and international events, it is only in the last financial year (2008/9) that the effects of Manchester Central's rebrand in 2006/7 have become quantifiable. The positive impact looks set to continue, as the venue has already exceeded its 2009/10 sales targets by the end of April 2009.

3.1 Increase in sales

Sales for 2009/10 have already exceeded their budget forecast of £5,263,000 and stand at £5,322,100, **an increase of 19.8%** on the pre-rebrand (2005/6) level of £4,443,000.

Operating profit for the last completed financial year (2008/9) stands at £1,701,000, **an increase of 26.6%** on the pre-rebrand (2005/6) level of £1,279,000.

The number of events currently booked for 2009/10 stands at 119, **an increase of 30.7%** on the pre-rebrand level (2005/6) of 91. This is despite a number of cancellations of events within the property and financial sectors as a result of the economic downturn.

3.2 Increase in economic impact

Manchester Central's confirmed economic impact* figures for 2009/10 are **£58.3m**, **an increase of 46.5%** on pre-rebrand levels of £39.8m.

Manchester Central is currently hosting (or on the shortlist for hosting) national and international events that could bring **over £95 million** in economic impact to the city between now and 2013**.

*Economic impact figures are calculated using Visit Britain expenditure estimates (2006 base).

**Source: Visit Manchester Conference Bidding Unit

3.3 Change in business mix

Following the repositioning of Manchester Central within the market place, the business mix has shifted from high volume/low yield public and trade exhibitions to more profitable conferences and conventions.

	2005/6	% of total	2009/10	% of total
Exhibitions	£2,626,000	59%	£1,911,000	35.9%
Conferences	£1,432,000	32.2%	£2,816,000	52.9%
Other (concerts & corporates)	£387,000	8.7%	£595,000	11.2%
Total	£4,445,000		£5,322,000	

3.4 Major event wins

Manchester Central has succeeded in attracting a range of high profile events.

A number of these are political conventions, such as the **Labour Party Annual Conference** in 2008. Traditionally, these events have been considered too difficult to manage in an urban location, hence their long-standing tradition at seaside venues such as Brighton and Bournemouth. Combining forces with the hotels and concert hall under the umbrella of Manchester Central Convention Complex created a large city centre site that was able to meet all the needs of the conference in a close geographical area. Manchester Central is hosting the 2010 annual conference and is currently in discussions with the Labour Party about hosting both its 2012 and 2014 conferences.

Manchester Central has also enticed the **Conservative Party** to hold both its 2009 and 2011 annual conferences in Manchester, the first time ever the Conservatives have held their conference in a Northern city.

In another coup, Manchester Central has persuaded the largest HR event in Europe, the huge **CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development)** conference, to move from its traditional venue in Harrogate for the first time in 62 years.

3.5 Major award wins

Since its rebrand, Manchester Central has been the recipient of a number of major awards, including:

- A Silver award in the best UK venue category in the **2007 International CONFEX awards**
- The top award in the Business Tourism category at the **2007 Manchester Tourism awards**
- The top award in the Business Tourism category at the **2008 England's Northwest Tourism Awards**
- A Silver award in the Business Tourism category at the **2008 Enjoy England national tourism awards**

3.6 Return on Investment (ROI)

Manchester Central's increase in sales in the first year post-rebrand was £483,000, giving an **ROI on sales alone of 358%**.

If ROI is calculated on the basis of the additional economic impact created in the first year post-rebrand (£7m) then **ROI increases to 5,185%**. The ROI is obviously much greater if the impact on subsequent years is also taken into account.

3.7 Impact on city profile and rankings

As Manchester's major international venue, Manchester Central has a significant impact on the city's standing in the international ranking of conference destinations.

In January 2009, Manchester was named 3rd in the top 10 conference destinations in Europe by Conference & Incentive Travel magazine, behind London (1st) and Barcelona (2nd). This was all the more remarkable, as Manchester had not even featured in the rankings in the previous year.

The main conference ranking of international cities is produced by the International Convention and Congress Association (ICCA). In 2006, Manchester stood in 86th place in the international rankings. In 2008 it had risen to 69th.

3.8 Staff response and feedback

From the recruitment of a new sales team to the introduction of new uniforms and service standards, the rebrand has had a significant impact on the venue's personnel. Although this is difficult to quantify, the following sample comments from staff feedback forms give an indication of how the effects of the rebrand have been felt.

"The re-brand has had a real positive impact on my working environment...there's been a sense of change and excitement which has really made people feel proud to work here."
Head of Events Services

"The change to Manchester Central has undoubtedly helped us to raise our standards. Personally, I now feel that I'm working for a progressive organisation that's going places, and that really matters to me."
Head of Client Services

"We are now recognised as one the premiere events venues in Europe, and you can see that reflected in the high quality of applicants we now get for our job vacancies."
Operations Director

3.9 Planned capital investment

The success of Manchester Central since its repositioning has led the city to commit to further investment in its facilities. Although its position at the heart of the city centre mitigates against a major redevelopment, a £20 million refurbishment is taking place, planned over three stages to allow continuation of business, from the end of 2008 to 2010. The redevelopment will provide bigger, more modern foyer spaces and create greater flexibility in how the venue can be used by adding a third entrance.

4. Data sources

Data about the business tourism market is notoriously difficult to compile, as there is a large range of variables that can influence its economic impact (EI). However, there are standardised ways of calculating EI set by the UK's official tourism body, Visit Britain, and these have been used in compiling information for this submission.

- All income and profitability figures have been taken from Manchester Central's audited accounts and business plans, as approved by the management board.
- Economic impact figures have been calculated using the latest available data source from Visit Britain (2006). Figures used in this submission have been calculated and supplied by Visit Manchester, Manchester's official tourism organisation.
- Information on the conference market has been sourced from the 2008 British Conference Venues Survey.

5. Other influencing factors

5.1 Change in management

The change of management at Manchester Central has also been key in improving performance at the venue, including the set up of a new catering operation and the recruitment of a new sales team.

However the rebrand has undoubtedly given the team a more coherent proposition to sell to the market. It has also created a vehicle for the wider convention offering of the city centre to be presented as one joined-up product, bringing in events that would not normally have seen Manchester city centre as a viable option.

5.2 Venue promotion

The main promotional activities undertaken by the venue have not changed significantly, except for the expenditure on the rebrand itself and a brand launch event at the International CONFEX exhibition at Earls Court in 2007.

Items such as web presence, advertising, promotional brochures, giveaways, PR etc. have all continued at a similar level to previous years, however with the additional impact created by a much more joined-up promotional approach.

5.3 Role of Visit Manchester

Manchester Central has worked in partnership with the city's official tourism body on a number of major event bids, ensuring that all the city's resources and services work together to make events go smoothly (e.g. for major political conferences).

This has undoubtedly been influential in bringing certain major events to the city, but this relationship is no different than for Manchester Central's major competitors, each of whom will work in partnership with their local tourist board or marketing agency to attract business to the city.

5.4 Subvention

In keeping with all other major cities, Manchester operates a 'subvention' policy, where the city can choose to financially support an event to come to Manchester where the associated economic benefit is substantial.

This may have helped to secure certain events at Manchester Central, however, as in 5.3 above, the situation for Manchester Central is no different than for other cities' convention facilities. In fact, Manchester's overall subvention 'pot' is substantially less than that of a city such as Birmingham, for example. It is also worth noting that Manchester's subvention policy has been in place before and after the rebrand and that there was no substantial increase in subvention funds made to tie in with GMEX/MICC's rebranding.

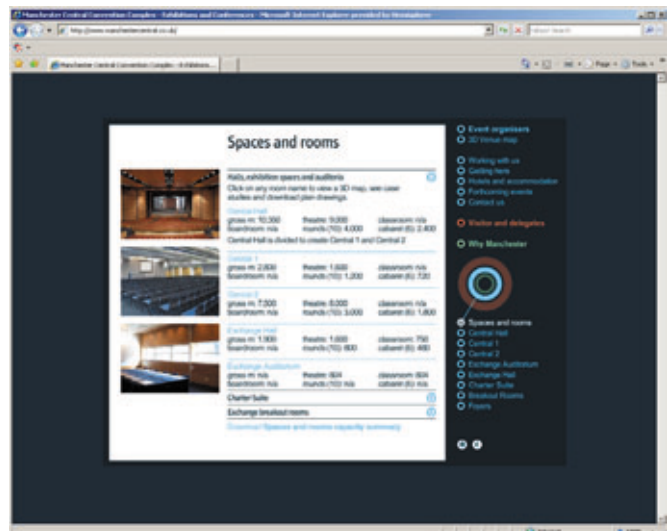
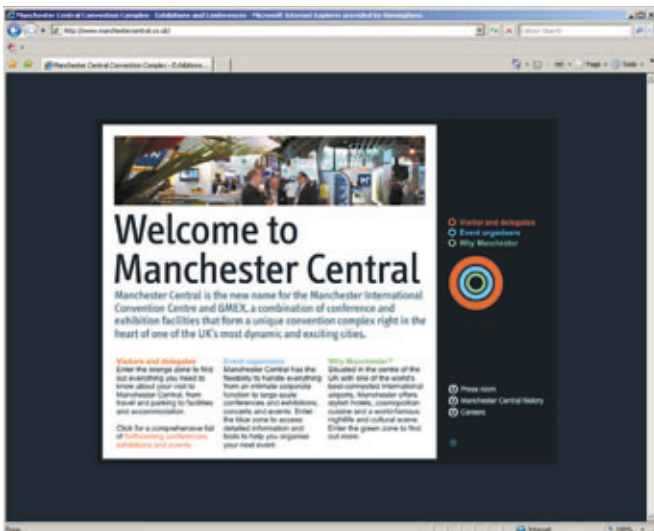
5.5 Redevelopment

The current redevelopment project may have added to the venue's appeal in the longer term, but it is more likely to have had a negative effect over the period covered by the figures in this submission, as many event organisers don't want to hold their event in a venue where building work is in progress.

This would indicate that for Manchester Central, the 'best is yet to come', as the revamp of its facilities is ensuring a very healthy-looking order book going forward.

Appendix 1.

Website



Appendix 2.

Brochure pack



Appendix 3.

Interior signage



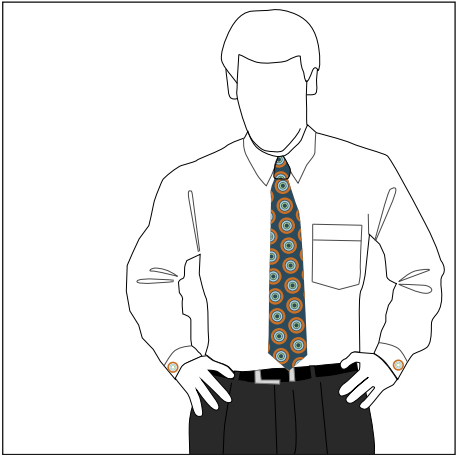
Appendix 4.

Redevelopment hoardings
& external wayfinding



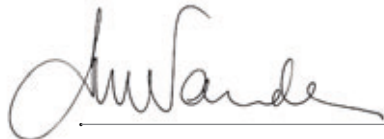
Appendix 5.

Uniforms and promotional materials



Declaration

On behalf of Hemisphere Design & Marketing Consultants



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On behalf of Manchester Central Convention Complex



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