The brand identity of wood in nonresidential construction: A case for communication with architects

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To better understand the current position of wood used as a structural material in nonresidential construction
To apply the concepts of branding management to wood in order to guide communications
To provide some foundations for the use of branding management concepts

Pictures: Sylvain Gagon
Nonresidential construction is a preferred segment to develop the market for structural wood products. In North-America, the market share for wood is 15% (rest is steel and concrete). Wood might target at least 50% share. Architects are among the most important specifiers of structural materials in that segment.

Sources: O’Connor, Kozak, Gaston and Fell, 2003; Gaston et al., 2001
A brand is a lever to generate value (Lewi, 2005)

Value results from a brand’s identity, positioning and marketing actions (Couvelaere et Richelieu, 2005)

Brands are made, not born (Keller and Lehman, 2006)

A brand is a promise perceived as such by consumers and specifiers (Lewi, 2005, de Chernatony, 2001)
Introduction

- Upon definition, the product category “wood” is not a brand
- However, a branding framework can benefit both the product category and individual manufacturers of wood products
A brand is the continuous quest for coherence between three figures:

- Desired identity
- Perceived identity
- Objective attributes

Source: Lewi, 2005
The current discourse on wood emphasizes its environmental merits
- Air and water emissions, climate change, carbon storage, solid waste, sustainability, life cycle

To a lesser degree, wood is also associated with energy performance
- At production and in service

The discourse is supported through science based tools comparing wood with other materials

Source: Athena Institute
A desired identity for wood

5. THE ECO-CYCLE OF WOOD PRODUCTS

Wood products as carbon stores

Carbon is exchanged naturally between terrestrial ecosystems and the atmosphere through a process of photosynthesis, respiration, decomposition, and combustion. This constitutes the carbon cycle.

Forests act as carbon sinks, since trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through photosynthesis and store it as carbon. When the trees are harvested, much of the carbon remains stored in all the ensuing value-added products, thus further mitigating Climate Change.

Wood products can be repaired and reused at the end of their useful life. Wood and wood-based products are recycled for manufacturing secondary materials or, increasingly, for energy recovery as a substitute for fossil fuels.

Wood is a carbon store, a renewable source of fibres, a substitute for more fossil fuel intensive materials and a biofuel.
The perceived identity of wood among architects in the North American nonresidential construction sector

Source: Robichaud, Kozak and Richelieu, 2008
The brand personality of wood among architects in the North American nonresidential construction sector

Source: Robichaud, Kozak and Richelieu, 2008
The perceived identity of wood in Quebec in the nonresidential construction sector

Source: Q-Web and L’Observateur, 2008
A branding framework

- The quest for coherence

Desired Identity
- Environment friendly
- Sustainable
- Carbon sink
- Energy performant

Perceived Identity
- Environment friendly
- Warm/charming
- Low fire resistance
- Low performance
- Low value

Objective Attributes
- Communication
- Marketing
- Product

Brand
The framework suggests that there is coherence between the environmental discourse on wood and the perceived identity of wood in nonresidential construction.

However, the perceived identity suggests a gap with respect to:
- Fire resistance
- Durability
- Structural performance
- Value

The framework also suggests that an emphasis on the aesthetics of wood would be coherent with the perceived identity.

Source: Robichaud, Kozak and Richelieu, 2008
A case for communication

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Brand
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- **Coherence**
  - Sustainable design
  - Environmental footprint
  - Project costing with wood
  - Wood suppliers' capabilities
  - Design with Glulam Beams
  - Regulations and standards
  - Design with Wood I-Beams
  - Design with solid wood
  - Wood durability
  - Speed of construction
  - Builders' capabilities for using wood

- **Gap**
  - I needed more information
  - I had enough information
  - No information need
  - Not applicable

Source: Robichaud, Kozak and Richelieu, 2008
A case for communication: information needs among U.S. architects when evaluating selected marketing brochures

- **Gap**
  - Design possibilities
  - Regulations and standards
  - Project costing
- **Coherence**
  - Sustainable design
  - Environmental footprint
- **Gap**
  - Durability
  - Suppliers’ capabilities

Source: Robichaud, Richelieu and Kozak, 2008
A case for communication: preferred information sources among U.S. architects

Source: Robichaud, Kozak and Richelieu, 2008
The analysis of the current discourse on wood was limited and deserves further work.

The branding framework applied to the product category (wood) was rather developed for individual private firms and specific products.

However, methods from the field of branding can be adapted to the product category:
- Associations
- Values
- Image
- Knowledge and awareness
- Personality
The branding framework can serve in identifying coherence and gaps.
Communication and marketing actions can be aligned to position wood in a coherent manner between desired and perceived identity.
| Conclusion |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| ▪ Generic communications on wood may further address gaps such as fire resistance, structural performance, durability and value |
| ▪ Looking forward, wood products will be intimately coupled to information; they are not dissociable |

Source: Robichaud, Kozak and Richelieu, 2008

Picture: Sylvain Gagon


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