

Regional Marketing Strategy Update – October 2004

1. Introduction

The first and major task of a Regional Development Agency, such as Advantage West Midlands, is to lead the development of a commonly agreed and understood Regional Economic Strategy aimed at identifying and meeting the needs of the local economy in terms of sustainability and growth. RDAs are tasked by central government with leading the economic development of a region. In this context, they identify and bring together partners from across their region to set the vision and define how it will be realised.

Following its establishment in 1999, Advantage West Midlands led the development of the vision for the region, which saw it, by 2010 being:

'Recognised as a world-class region in which to invest, work, learn, visit and live and the most successful in creating wealth for the benefit of all its people.'

This vision and the strategy to support its achievement is set out in the Regional Economic Strategy and Action Plan, first developed in 1999 and refreshed in 2004. (APENDIX 1 – RES Summary)

2. Regional Economic Strategy – Challenge and Implementation

The Regional Economic Strategy says that:

'To realise the vision, we will need a strong and sustainable economy. This means working together to develop our assets, seize our opportunities and overcome the barriers that limit our growth.'

The strategy for achieving this is expressed as four pillars, as follows:

- Develop a diverse and dynamic business base
- Promote a learning and skilful region
- Create the conditions for growth
- Regenerate Communities

To these has been added a fifth pillar, which is seen as underpinning and amplifying the original four:

- Develop a powerful voice for the region

The work to promote the West Midlands Region and to ensure that it is recognised for its strengths as a place to work, live, invest, learn and visit directly supports and helps deliver this pillar of the Regional Economic Strategy. It recognises that perceptions affect investment and development choices which, in turn, directly impact on the economic health of our Region.

3. Developing and Delivering a Powerful Voice with Partners

The effective development of a powerful voice for the region as outlined in the Regional Economic Strategy comprises two strands:

International to take the advantage of international opportunities (particularly European Initiatives)

Image to create a positive image of the region and to market it more effectively to national and international audience. This entails clarifying and defining what we do well and telling others about it.

It is clear that the development and dissemination of a common perception of the region has to happen right throughout the region to be truly effective. Promotional work of organisations and individuals across the region need to have a common focus and direction. This will amplify and strengthen what we do creating a collective, powerful voice. Advantage West Midlands can start the process of developing and delivering messages about the region to defined audiences, but without further alignment and activity, the effect will be limited and sporadic.

The Regional Economic Strategy is appended by an implementation framework defining which organisations lead on implementing defined parts of the Strategy. This is supported by a Regional Concordat agreed in July 2003 (APPENDIX 2 “Regional Concordat”). Concordat partners have pledged to work together to deliver the regional agenda and define how this will happen in practice. Concordat partners are:

- Advantage West Midlands
- West Midlands Regional Assembly (local authority, business and other stakeholders)
- Government Office West Midlands
- West Midlands Local Government Association
- Regional Action West Midlands
- West Midlands Business Council
- West Midlands Life (the Regional Cultural Consortium)
- West Midlands Higher Education Association
- West Midlands Learning and Skills Councils
- Sustainability West Midlands
- EMBRACE West Midlands (Ethnic Minority and Black Regional Action for Community Empowerment)

Concordat partners agreed to work together to enhance and add value, speaking up for the West Midlands at every opportunity and working in a way that is open and clear to partners and the public.

In terms of promoting the Region, the Concordat states that Advantage West Midlands leads the development of work to market the region, including:

- Leading the development of a Regional Marketing Strategy and providing an overall lead on the promotion of the West Midlands within and outside the Region
- establishing a common language to describe the region

- improving the image of the region amongst business decision makers and the media
- measuring the impact of the programme

The Regional Assembly leads on:

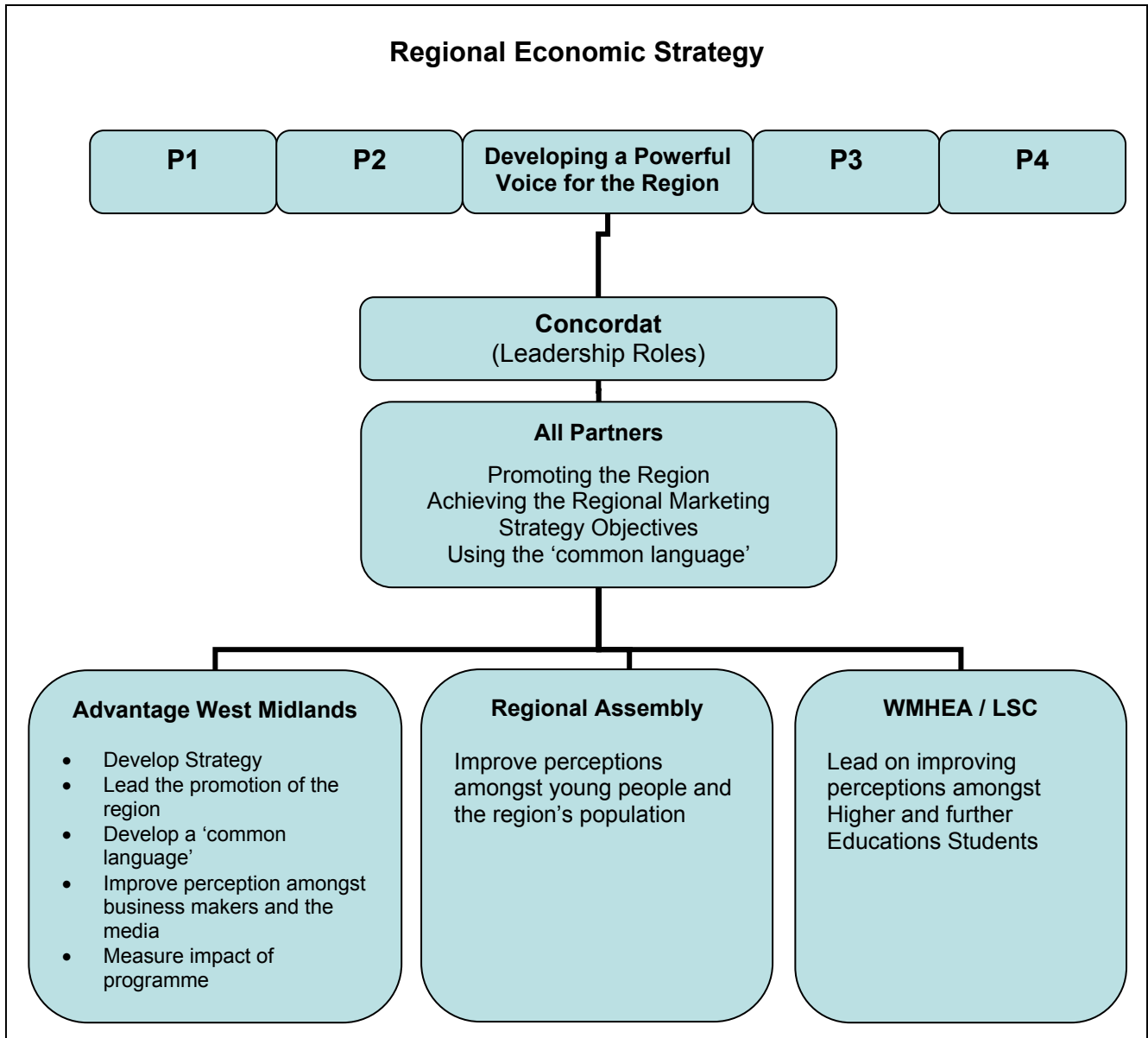
- Improving the perceptions of our own population and young people

Whilst the Learning Skills Councils and West Midlands Higher Education Forum lead on:

- Improving perceptions amongst Higher and Further Education students

The Concordat also states that:

'A wide range of Partnerships outside the Concordat Partnerships will be represented amongst the strategy's delivery groups. Local Authority and sub-regional organisations will have an important role in promoting specific elements of the region. All agencies and partners will be expected to employ the consistent language developed to describe the region in their work.'



4. Development of a Regional Marketing Strategy on behalf of the Region

Following the agreement on the need to develop and maintain a powerful voice for the region, and Advantage West Midlands' leading role in doing this, the Agency lead on the development of a regional marketing strategy which was completed in 2002.

The strategy built on the views of partners from across the region and on their reaction to research evidence gathered to inform the development work. It aimed to define how partners would work together to promote the West Midlands.

Research conducted included:

- A review of media perceptions of the region
- Lessons learned from other regions successful at developing profile

Generally, awareness of the region as a whole was low with variable profiles between sub-regions. However coverage was more positive than negative and Regional strengths which emerged from the media study were as follows:

- The strength of our educational institutions and of a number of cities and towns as places in which to enjoy student life
- The region as a centre of youth culture and a lively leisure scene
- The entrepreneurial capacity of the region population
- Ethnic Diversity
- Ability to host and organise large events
- Specific regional icons – Shakespeare, Stratford, Elgar, Cadbury's, NEC, Tolkein – are very favourably perceived

4.1 Strategic Objectives

The strategy aimed to build on strengths; strive for a sense of place; work across sectors to deliver the strategy; work over time. These are crystallised in four objectives for the region:

Objective One: Develop a common language to describe the West Midlands and do what we can to ensure that this language is used consistently across the region.

Objective Two: Improve the region's image in the eyes and minds of specific audiences whose perceptions of the West Midlands have an impact on the economic well being of the region.

Objective Three: Support and extend the work of partners across the region, where their planned activities make a direct contribution to the delivery of changed perceptions among our target audiences.

Objective Four: Quantify our ambitions for each audience and report annually on our progress towards achieving them.

Key Audiences

Key audiences identified in the strategy are:

- Business decision makers
- Visitors to the region
- Students
- National and international media
- Regional population

In line with the concordat, some of the audiences were to be primarily targeted by Advantage West Midlands, some by the Regional Assembly and some by the Learning and Skills Council and the West Midlands Higher Education Association.

4.2 Progress Against Strategic Objectives

To date (October 2004), some objectives have been achieved while others are in development or may need to be reviewed. Advantage West Midlands has itself learnt more about effective implementation as this aspect of the work has developed and, following the launch in October 2004 is in a position, with regional partners, to review of the Strategy in Spring 2005. This will be an opportunity to ensure progress is being tracked, revised objectives set, some partnerships strengthened and others formed.

In general, progress to date is as follows:

Objective One: Progress against these objectives has been achieved and the results will be launched in October 2004

Objective Two: Groups were established to consult on the common language developed to describe the region and to find out what partners needed to implement and amplify this. Delivery groups, by and large, have not been established, but delivery against the business decision making, government and media audiences has been progressed and launched in October 2004. Changes at partner organisations meant that Visit Heart of England have led on delivering to the visitor audience and are also launching their campaign in October 2004.

Objective Three & Four: Research to quantify current perceptions and to provide a baseline for measurement has been carried out. Partner information, enrolment and supporting material have also been developed and will need sustained effort in the future.

5. Development of a Common Language

Following the publication of the Regional Marketing Strategy, Advantage West Midlands, led a series of workshops to develop a common language to describe the West Midlands which could be used by Partners from across all geographical and sectoral boundaries in the region to inform their own marketing and communications and start to build a unified and powerful voice.

A group of marketing communication professionals, mostly from private sector organisations, came together facilitated by Communications Consultancy, Cricket. Their approach was not about re-branding the region or creating a slogan or a one-off campaign. Their aim was to develop a 'governing idea' – a single relevant thought that was pertinent to and could be used by all in talking about the region and would remain constant over time. Looking at past, present and future they considered the physical, emotional, geographical, cultural and sociological aspects of the region and distilled

these into three themes; Connected, Centred and Genius. The rationale behind each theme is given below;

Why Centred?

- Physical location at the centre is a unique indisputable asset
- Sense of being at the hub/ heart of England
- Positive coexistence between urban areas and the countryside
- Attitude and mindset: balanced, pragmatic, grounded, honest, open-minded, confidence, feet on the ground, reliable, can-do.

Why Connected?

- Physical links (road, rail, air)
- High broadband penetration connecting the region
- Excellent people/business networks that make things happen
- Exchange of learning with universities: know-how and spirit of collaboration
- Accessibility -Welcoming people – history of immigration into area
- Cultural diversity – fusion of music, style, food, fashion
- Interregional importers and exporters
- Connections of apparent opposites uniting the region (eg rural and urban)
- In touch with the past, present and future

Why Genius ?

- A history of Pioneers: doers, entrepreneurs, the extraordinary (eg Birthplace of Industrial revolution, Watt, Brindley, Shakespeare, Darwin, Elgar, Tolkein)
- Continuing innovation and creativity that designs and produces some of world most advanced technologies (eg auto-motive and ICT)
- Dynamic region that embraces new ideas and reinvent
- Open mindset, attitude, process
- The endeavour of ordinary people to delivering extra-ordinary results

The development of this ‘common language’ or governing idea formed the basis for the next phase of the work, including campaign implementation.

6. Implementing Regional Marketing

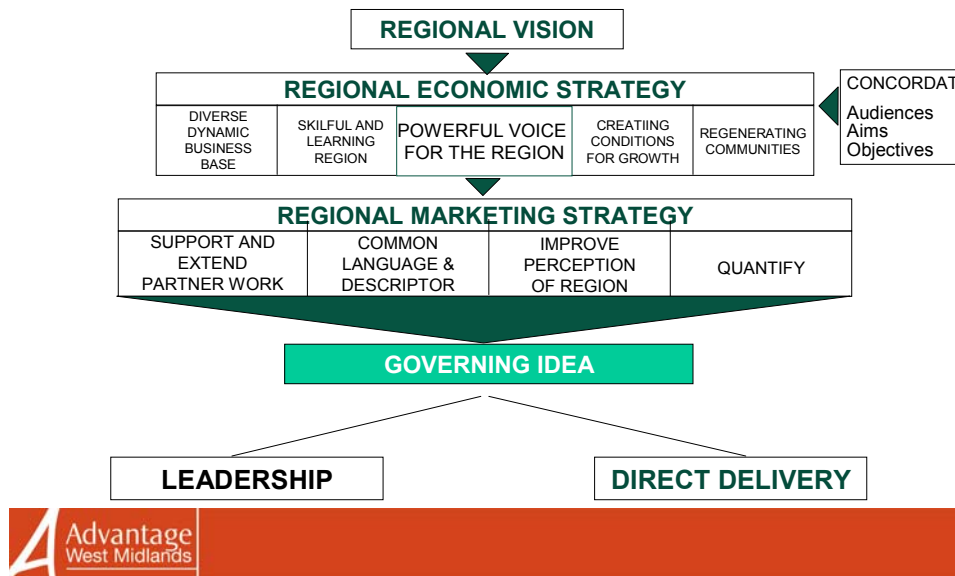
Having lead the Region in developing the Regional Marketing Strategy and a common language for the Region, Advantage West Midlands was now at a stage to ensure that the strategy was aligned with the stated needs of the regional partners and to move further on implementation. To make this as clear as possible, the Agency differentiated between its two main areas of activity, as follows:

- Leadership – of the strategy and overall guidance, with an emphasis on finding out what others needs to implement the governing idea in their own

marketing and communication work and supplying the tools and support to do this;

- Direct Delivery – of campaigns against audience with an initial clear focus on business decision makers, government and the media;

Advantage West Midlands' role in marketing the region



6.1 Leadership of Regional Marketing Strategy

In order to lead the region effectively on marketing the region, it is imperative to create understanding and support amongst regional partners for the marketing strategy and the Governing Idea.

In particular it is important to convince partners of the benefits of a regional approach, and to motivate them to use the Governing Idea in their own marketing activity.

In April 2004 Advantage West Midlands held four partnership workshops with over 100 participants from the public sector, tourism, education and private business. The workshops explored reaction to the Governing Idea and the partnership approach. Both achieved good levels of buy-in. However partners clearly sought further leadership and tools to enable them to create a consistent voice for the region.

These tools have been developed and will be launched in October 2004. These will be available on a web-based '**Regional Library**', which will grow and develop over time, but initially will include:

- Marketing Strategy outline and rationale
- Evidence to support the Governing Idea

- Research regarding perceptions of the region (Business and residents)
- Communications guidelines (messages and visuals)
- Image bank
- Examples of partner communications using Governing Idea

The Communications Guidelines give examples of ways to describe the region, and image styles which reflect the governing idea. The Image Bank will be available to journalists and partners, and provide easy access (at no charge) to positive images of the region which reflect the Governing Idea. The examples of partner communications are intended to demonstrate how the Governing Idea can be incorporated into partners' on-going work.

In addition to developing the toolkit, Advantage West Midlands has undertaken over 130 one-to-one and group meetings with key opinion formers throughout the region, to gain their confidence in the approach. The programme has included the following organisations;

- Concordant members
- Local authorities
- Inward Investment Agencies
- Tourism
- Business networks (eg Chambers, CBI etc)
- Advantage West Midlands delivery vehicles (eg Corridors, Zones, Clusters)
- MP's

The objective of the meetings has been to create understanding of and support for the marketing strategy at the highest level, creating 'Advocates' for the region. In addition Advantage West Midlands has sought contact with communications professionals from each organisation to find 'Champions', who will reflect the Governing Idea in their own promotional materials.

Following the launch it will be important to implement a communications programme with both Advocates and Champions, to keep them engaged in the process of marketing the region.

It is recognised that early adoption of the Governing Idea, and will serve to demonstrate how the Governing Idea can be used and will create momentum across the region. The Regional Library will include case studies at the launch; one from 'Visit Heart of England' tourism, and one from Sandwell MBC. This will be built upon as partners adopt the Governing Idea.

As part of their leadership role, Advantage West Midlands has created communications materials to market the region which use the Governing Idea.

Regional portal

A regional portal has been developed to promote the region to a broad audience. A number of information channels, 'To Do Business, To Live, To Explore, To Learn. The business facing channel will be the most content heavy channel. It has two main elements:

1. at the Launch phase
2. The Regional Library

Light copy will populate other channels, which will be developed as Advantage West Midlands works with regional partners on the messages relevant to these audiences. The business facing channel will serve as a one stop shop for business considering re-locating into the region or who are in the region and who need support to grow or adapt. It will contain links to sites dealing with access to finance, inward investment agencies, regional news, facts and figures

Generic Brochure for West Midlands

Advantage West Midlands, The Regional Assembly and the Confederation of Chambers of Commerce have worked together to develop a generic brochure to be used by those representing the region. This will be made available to all partners representing the West Midlands

6.2 Measuring current perceptions of the region

The regional marketing strategy identified the need to assess perceptions of the region amongst the target audiences, in order to measure progress. The Concordat assigned responsibility for this measurement to Advantage West Midlands. Benchmark research been undertaken, which explores current perceptions of the region, both within and outside the region. The research findings will be available for partners to inform their marketing activity. In detail the research comprises

- Quantitative sample of 4,300 mirrored business and general population. 1,600 in the region, 200 in each of the other English regions. The research measures a range of attitudes and perceptions. It will be the main benchmark to measure the success of activity, for PR purposes and to provide material to help ourselves and partners plan future activity;
- Qualitative in depth interviews with top level business decision makers who have recently moved here, are considering a move, or advise business on where to locate in the UK. The research tests 'soft' factors in depth and will be used to inform planning and for PR;
- Media baseline study of national and trade press showing how much profile the West Midlands receives in relation to other regions and what the general profile of ourselves and other regions is.

6.3 Direct Delivery of Regional Marketing Campaign

The Concordant assigned responsibility to Advantage West Midlands for improving perceptions of the region amongst two key audiences; business decision makers and media.

6.3.1 Direct Delivery against Business Decision Makers

A brand positioning statement has been developed for the West Midlands against business decision makers that reflects the Governing Idea. The key message to communicate to the business audience is

'The West Midlands at the Heart of it all'

Or

'The West Midlands. Put yourself at the Heart of it All'

This is supported by three supporting messages;

The West Midlands brings ideas to life

The West Midlands is where the future of business begins

The West Midlands has cities and shires that touch the imagination

Phase One of the marketing campaign has been developed with advertising agency, McCann Erickson, and will include national daily newspaper and trade press advertising and direct mail (and e-mail). Media Schedule will run from 26 October and last until December. Phase Two will be planned in autumn 2004 and commence in spring 2005.

Phase One of the campaign will be strengthened through public relations, including media coverage. Visual elements of the campaign will be communicated through existing channels and regional networks, the regional portal, regional media both print and broadcast.

The creative execution of the campaign builds on the governing idea. Using ordinary street scenes, innovations and inventions from the region are highlighted to illustrate subtly the centrality of the region to the lives of everyone in the UK. This is anchored by a graphic device and the call to action or assertion: 'Put yourself at the heart of it all'; to 'At the heart of it all', and the new website address. Finally, each of the region's countries and metropolitan areas are named to close the copy

6.3.2 Direct Delivery against Media

Advantage West Midlands are working directly with the media to promote the region.

Public relations

An extensive PR plan has been prepared to support the leadership and enabling work and direct delivery aspects of the campaign. This focuses on regional media and business trade press.

Sponsorship

Advantage West Midlands are working with ITV Central to develop a four part series highlighting the most prominent innovators and business people in the region. The series will be presented by Digby Jones and will be called 'Living Genius'. The series will use a title sequence which illustrated the 'governing idea'.

Parliamentary

An early day motion focusing on the unique strength of the region based on the governing idea has been tabled. Advantage West Midlands are working to secure a debate on the West Midlands on the floor of the House.

Both national and regional press have been invited to the campaign launch at the Houses of Commons. Advantage West Midlands will create a PR campaign to establish the Governing Idea themes as strengths in the way the region is portrayed.

Events

The leadership of regional aspects of the campaign is launched on 14th October at Advantage West Midlands. The campaign will be launched to a business and parliamentary audience at the Houses of Parliament on 26th October.

7. Next Steps

Following the launch phase of the regional marketing campaign the next steps are as follows;

1. Review of response to phase one, amongst partners and target audience.
2. Development of phase two activity for Advantage West Midlands's direct delivery target audiences (business and media)
3. Work with Concordat partners to create campaigns to change perceptions of other target audiences identified in the marketing strategy (eg. Regional population, Students, Visitors)
4. Continue work to align partners, and recruit advocates and champions to the Regional Marketing Campaign. Implement a communications programme with both Advocates and Champions, to build involvement in the process of marketing the region.
5. Work with partners to create activity that reflects the Governing Idea.
6. Work with partners to review the Regional Marketing Strategy and Implementation Plan.

It is acknowledged that changing perceptions of the region will be a slow process, as there are many people with long-held views of the West Midlands. It is only by a sustained effort by all stakeholders, creating consistent messages about the region that we can start to challenge these perceptions. Research to measure changes in perceptions is planned for 2007.