

WEST CORK (Ireland)

Developing a regional branded identity to promote excellence



The action

In 1994, the West Cork LEADER local action group launched an initiative to develop a regional branding strategy with a view to achieving a more coordinated marketing of the tourism and food production businesses emerging from West Cork's characteristic strength - a natural, unspoilt environment. In association with a variety of key local bodies, the independent entity "Fuchsia Brands Ltd" has been set up to oversee the strategic direction of this branding initiative. This has involved the implementation of a whole set of eligibility criteria, quality systems and integrated training programmes to enable potentially eligible companies to qualify for brand utilisation. Over 40 local businesses are now sanctioned to carry the brand logo, the Fuchsia, on their products as diverse as food, tourist literature and road signs.

Context

During the preparation of the bid for LEADER II funding for the West Cork region in 1994, the West Cork LEADER Co-Operative (the LEADER LAG) undertook an analysis of the region's strengths and weaknesses. The results of this analysis revealed some interesting features about the West Cork region. Among the disadvantages were an absence of cooperative marketing and a fragmented services sector. The region's strengths pertained to the clean unspoilt environment, magnificent scenery, friendly hospitable people and expanding range of speciality food producers. To capitalise on these strengths and overcome the weaknesses, it was decided to devise a strategy that would act as a focus during the lifetime of the LEADER II programme.

Starting point

A regional branded identity for selected locally produced goods and services was chosen as the flagship project under LEADER II. This was chosen to exploit the market potential offered by the positive association with the West Cork name, ie, a clean and natural environment, but also designed to emphasise excellence and quality. The food and tourism sectors were selected for this branded identity owing to the LAG's significant experience in the promotion of these goods and services under LEADER I. Careful thought and consideration were given to the development of the brand image, not least to encapsulate the clean, unspoilt image that was to be projected but also to ensure its complementarity with both the tourism and food sectors. After much debate, it was decided to have the image of the fuchsia flower as the centrepiece of the regional brand because of its bold and striking image and its ubiquity throughout the region. The Fuchsia logo is displayed with the wording "West Cork - A Place Apart" on the tourism side and "A Taste of West Cork" on the food side.

Key elements

- > Bringing together key public and private sectoral organisations in a single structure to devise and implement an integrated regional branding strategy.
- > The launch of a regional brand that encourages high standards in indigenous companies.
- > The creation of an association to represent food producers in West Cork.
- > The use of one of the area's biggest assets - its clean, unspoilt environment - as a tool to promote local tourism providers and food producers.

Implementation

To ascertain the viability of a branding initiative, the LAG commissioned a market research agency to test out the idea on consumer groups, and to seek their opinions on different variations of the Fuchsia logo. The general reaction to the concept was extremely positive and respondent's opinions of various logo options were taken into consideration in the definitive logo. Meanwhile, a separate legal identity, "Fuchsia Brands Ltd", had been set up to oversee the implementation of the initiative. This body, housed within the premises of the LAG, was founded by the LAG, West Cork Tourism, Cork/Kerry Tourism and joined at a later stage by the West Cork Food Producers Association (WCFPA). The latter organisation did not exist at the outset of the branding initiative, but was created following a series of meetings organised by the LAG in October 1996.

One of the first tasks of Fuchsia Brands Ltd was the determination of eligibility criteria to use the brand. On the food side, a list of seven criteria was the outcome of a consultative process involving the LAG, the WCFPA and two technical bodies. They are: regulatory body approval, membership of a relevant professional body, implementation of a certified Quality Control Programme and a Code of Best Practice, commitment to Best Practice in packaging and labelling and sourcing raw materials locally, and monitoring by Fuchsia Brands Ltd. The 6 criteria governing tourism were drawn up in discussion groups made up of the LAG, Cork/Kerry Tourism, West Cork Tourism and CERT (the national tourism training authority). These are: West Cork Tourism membership, commitment to training, the implementation of a Code of Best Practice and the availability of a consumer response card and ongoing monitoring by Fuchsia Brands Ltd.

Since the very essence of the West Cork Regional Brand is based on quality, Fuchsia Brands Ltd has initiated the implementation of several quality training programmes. A tourism training programme has been developed in

conjunction with the LAG and CERT (Irish Tourism Training Authority). The programme comprises 7 different courses, including Customer Care, Marketing and Food Hygiene. Tourism businesses wishing to use the Fuchsia Brand logo must attend the relevant courses. For this purpose a tourism training matrix has been drawn up which sets out the mandatory courses for each category of tourism business, i.e., accommodation provider, restaurant or amenity etc. By summer 1998 around 200 participants had completed the various programmes on offer.

In association with the National Food Centre and the IAG, Fuchsia Brands Ltd has developed a food safety training programme based on the internationally recognised HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) concept - a systematic approach to quality control from growth right through to harvesting, processing, storage and distribution. This modular-based training course, which takes around 8 months to complete, involves tutorials, workshops and on-site practical visits and is coordinated by the National Food Centre. Two courses have been completed to date involving 29 food companies and a further 26 companies are currently on the programme. In conjunction with the training programme, Fuchsia Brands Ltd has also endorsed a "code of practice" for display at the premises of qualifying food producers. It comprises a list of seven commitments covering such aspects as source of raw materials, environmental practices, co-operation with fellow producers and upgrading employee skills. A number of marketing-related activities were carried out in 1997 including attendance at several holiday trade fairs, the publication of a guide to the best of West Cork produce, and the organisation of cookery demonstration evenings with a celebrity chef. The first 6 months of 1998 recorded almost 10 trade fairs/shows around Europe, a tourism pamphlet and brochure and some media and trade coverage. The acquisition of stands and material in early 1998 means that in-store tastings/promotions are becoming a regular feature on the marketing activities calendar.

By Summer 1998 26 food producers and 17 tourism providers, plus the LAG and West Cork Tourism, had been sanctioned to use the Fuchsia logo. Targets for 1999 are 40 food and 100 tourism businesses - this critical mass will enable Fuchsia Brands Ltd to engage in marketing and promotional activities of a significant scale. In perspective, the Regional Branding Initiative could be extended to other environmentally sensitive sectors such as arts and crafts and certain clean technologies, thereby leading to strong integrated growth in an area of spectacular landscape and devoid of major heavy industry. Copyright has already been secured and the process of trademarking the brand is now under way.

WEST CORK

West Cork (pop. 100 000), a coastal region located in the south west of Ireland, is characterised by an unspoilt and diverse environment. The agri-food sector is the main contributor to the West Cork economy and fosters a strong small-scale food enterprise sector producing a wide range of high quality food products. In coastal areas-fishing plays an important socio-economic role. Tourism represents a sector of increasing importance attracting approximately 500 000 visitors per annum.

Budget

The overall budget invested in the West Cork Regional Branding initiative is approximately MECU 1.5 over 4 years. LEADER II funds this initiative at a rate of 50%. Matching finance is invested by the private sector, sectoral interests and patronage. Expenditure during the establishment phase, 1996/97, has been approximately ECU 250 000 and a further ECU 625 000 was invested per annum during 1998 and 1999.

Innovative elements

Mobilising the population and social cohesion

The LAG has played a key role in setting up the WCFPA and in mobilising the bodies needed to devise and carry forward the regional branding initiative. This has led to the creation of a framework for strategic cooperation between West Cork's tourism and food businesses, whereas previously these sectors had operated in a fragmented manner.

The area's identity

Only businesses meeting high standards qualify for brand utilisation which makes the Fuchsia logo a symbol of quality. This helps differentiate Fuchsia branded goods and services from others and sends out a strong positive image about West Cork. To ensure consistency in the reproduction of the logo, a brand utilisation manual has been edited.

Competitiveness and access to markets

Fuchsia Brands Ltd has put in place the necessary structures and quality standards which companies must attain and uphold if they wish to carry the regional brand on their products. These measures strengthen the capacity of producers/providers to meet customer expectations. The proactive marketing of the Fuchsia brand at home and abroad has served as an unpaid salesforce to the businesses sanctioned to use the logo and helped some identify new markets. Promotion under the Fuchsia banner has enabled significant economies of scale to be achieved.

Improvements in the use of natural resources

The coordinated promotion of products and services based on a natural and clean environment both capitalises on the region's main strength and further emphasises the care of this invaluable asset.