FreePaul Nixon: it's Paul Nixon and today I'm with Adrian Day and today we're talking about how companies should go about expressing their brand online.

So Adrian would you like to introduce yourself?

Adrian Day: Yes hi I'm Adrian Day. I'm an independent brand consultant. I've had 25 years in brand consultancy working with the likes of Landor and Siegel & Gale and Uffindell. Worked on some big branding projects for firms like BA and BP and Barclays and also with not-for-profit and public sector companies and indeed some very small organisations.

So I'm now a freelance branding consultant and I'm particularly interested in this area of how brands, particularly corporate brands express themselves online. Not just through the website but also social media and I think it's an emerging area and I think there's some very interesting cross currents going on.

Paul Nixon: So let's start at the beginning and consider the sort of different approaches that companies can take, where they might start?

Adrian Day: Yes I mean I think the start point, my sort of simple answer to that is there really is only one approach and that's reflecting the brand and let's define that as the positioning, the proposition and the personality. The expression - just to get some definitions out of the way – the expression is how that positioning, proposition and personality is then expressed verbally and visually through all applications.

So how is the brand expressed through the online applications? And I think there's only one way of doing that and that is to express

the positioning, proposition and personality. I think anything less than that won't work. This really applies where the company is the same as the brand so Apple would be an example, McDonalds is an example, Ford is an example. Most financial services firms that would be the case. So if the company is the corporate brand then essentially the website is an expression of that brand. It's not an area of the website that should be dedicated to brand, it's not part of it.

Paul Nixon: Through design, through tone of voice, through imagery and so on.

Adrian Day: Exactly, exactly, absolutely. Design, tone of voice, imagery, functionality... I think the experience. And one of the parallels I use and we'll come on to it later is you look at the way retailers express their brand through their retail outlet it is how it looks, it's how it feels, it's also how the staff engage with you. And a lot of it's in the detail and I think there are some parallels that can be drawn when we're thinking about websites and other online presence.

Paul Nixon: So if you don't go about doing it, if you don't actually do this step and don't apply your character and say your website comes out quite flat and dare we say boring, people will perceive you as flat and boring.

Adrian Day: Absolutely. And I mean you make a good point there. One of the assumptions is that a company has a clearly defined relevant, appealing and engaging brand in the first place and that's not always the case. And we'll come on to some business to business brands later which they may be fine organisations but to what extent they've really defined their brand I'm not clear.

So if you are an Apple or a Virgin or a John Lewis it's going to be a lot easier to express your brand clearly through your website than if

you are an organisation that doesn't have a clear sense of self. So I would backup to the brand definition in the first place. Firms have to have a clearly defined brand and a clearly defined sense of self then it is much easier to express it. If they don't have that clearly defined brand then they're up against it from day one.

Paul Nixon: And do you think that people should have a brand section on their website where they actually state the brand definition, that brand identity and the brand promise? Because quite often users benefit from the subtle slap round the face saying "This is what we are."

Adrian Day: Yes, yes I think that is a good idea. I think providing that the website reflects the brand and other online presence reflects the brand then also having a sort of clear brand section, this defining it – the proposition, the personality, the values is useful, particularly useful for the likes of me when we're going through assessing websites because you kind of know what you're assessing against. And as I went through looking at websites for this exercise, I didn't always know what the brand was about and I couldn't find it on the website.

So I think it's useful. Of course it's also useful for other organisations that are helping that company. If you are a supplier and you know that the brand values are about honesty, trustworthiness, openness etc then providing the company behaves in line with that brand you kind of know what to expect. And it's the same for all stakeholders for employees, for shareholders etc. And of course the other part of a typical brand area might be actually some expression tools. So there might be some visual guidelines, there might be a tone of voice guidelines. More often or not they're on the Intranet so that employees can use them but I think it's quite enlightened to have some sort of external facing tools so that if a

journalist is using your logo then they're more likely to get it right if they've got the online tools there to use – the online assets.

Paul Nixon: So how much, when you work with companies do you vet their content and push it back saying "No no that's not right." Or do you think just by having done the necessary tone of voice or the image guidelines that generally people are good at following them and applying them?

Adrian Day: Yes I mean it's interesting. I think there's – and I've looked at a range of sites. Those organisations that really understand their customer and are used to engaging with their customer are better at translating their brand into the online community. So if you look at John Lewis, Tesco and Iceland as I did, each one of the brand experiences delivered by those websites is in line with what I would expect knowing about those brands.

So the John Lewis website is – if you've been in any of their stores or shopped there this won't be a surprise – it's clean, clear, it has a sort of maturity about it, it's well ordered just like the shop. There's an intelligence about it. It's stylish without being flashy or showy. It's cool and fairly calm so that it's not aggressive selling it's intelligent selling. They've got a best sellers' rating for many of the products and they make this clear commitment to advice as well as 'Never knowingly undersold' their famous line. It's also well organised like the shops.

So what I like about John Lewis is the fact that the online experience replicates the offline experience. And everything you'd expect about the brand and I think that's true as you go through different sectors that – and perhaps is not surprising that those organisations that regularly face customers have perhaps made a

bit more effort.

Iceland - I was fascinated by that.

Paul Nixon: Especially the "dark years" section.

Adrian Day: Yes that was fascinating. I mean I think too many sites are lost in corporate management speak which of course is not branded because it's interchangeable, it's generic. But Iceland as I understand it is run by the chap who originally founded it who went away and came back again.

Paul Nixon: Walker.

Adrian Day: Absolutely. I mean firstly it is very much like the store. There's an Iceland about five minutes from where I live and it's all about £1, £2 and £3 food and drink offers. And that's the first thing you see on the site. It's got some practical stuff there's a practical weekly menu planner, there's a party invitation creator. Perhaps slightly non PC but there's a whole section on why mums go to Iceland, it's perhaps slightly stereotypical but I guess if you are a mum going to Iceland it's helpful. And then a fantastic piece about the Iceland story, the business story – straight talking commentary, really…

Paul Nixon: It certainly doesn't pull any punches.

Adrian Day: It doesn't does it. No it talks about the previous CEO and quotes the press. But it's what they would say offline so if you were to meet them one to one so I think it's very laudable that they're open, honest and real on the site. And it's certainly changed some of my perceptions of Iceland.

So I think the sectors and we can talk about some more later, of all the sectors it's the retailers that absolutely fit. And I won't get in

detail but Tesco's exactly the same. If you've ever shopped in Tesco the online experience is very much in line with that bricks and mortar experience.

Paul Nixon: And do you think that because, particularly with a retailer where you know on the direct online shopping part of the site then you are looking to replicate that experience. But then if you've got your corporate site, separate from that and potentially with a separate design, do you think that you should replicate that [style] or not? Because you've got a slightly different audience, you know slightly more serious subjects about profitability etc or they might be joyous subjects depending on the situation.

But would you say mirror it all the way through or would you go with slightly different tone?

Adrian Day: I think if you're going true to the brand, the basic premise should be the same. So actually Iceland's a good example of this, okay he [the CEO] is talking about the performance of the business and their ethics and how they look after their employees but it absolutely chimes with the rest of the site albeit it's not as transactional.

John Lewis is the same when you look at the John Lewis Partnership site and indeed you look at the John Lewis Facebook page and the John Lewis Facebook page a lot of it's got the consumers on but it also has Partners who of course are – in John Lewis' case are the shareholders of the organisation. So it's got Partners making comments about the business in a very open way. So there's less differentiation between the consumer face and let's call it the business to business face.

And I think companies can afford to be a bit braver because people who shop in Sainsburys for example are also shareholders and analysts and we don't necessarily have these sharp divisions in our lives. I think the messaging can be slightly different and I think there maybe some subtleties in the tone of voice. But I think those organisations and of course it's much easier if you're a private company and you're run by a single CEO who has a strong sense and you see that with a number of… You saw it with Richard Branson, you saw it with Stelios and Easyjet when he was there, Anita Roddick when she was at the Body Shop – a number of founder owners if you like (a) those brands tend to be really clear in their focus because there's one person essentially guiding them but also their tone of voice whether they're talking to corporate audiences or consumer audiences is pretty much the same. Anita Roddick didn't always go down well but she would talk to the city in the way that she would talk to anyone. Little harder when you're a more broadly based, a range of shareholders, you're a PLC but I did look at some pure business to business sites of some very good companies. One was Rolls-Royce that's the engineering firm not the car.

Paul Nixon: No not the cars! A key brand issue there.

Adrian Day: Exactly. Then I looked at Melrose almost an investment site but they do turnarounds in engineering and have been very successful in buying British engineering firms and adding value to them. And I also looked at one other – Invensys that was it another engineering company. And I found that a lot of the language is interchangeable. I mean I got a clear idea of what they did and what made them different but they tend to drop into "management-ese".

And there was much less sense of what made these organisations

different and appealing, much less use of social media. Okay I understand why Rolls-Royce might not want to be on, think it relevant to be on Facebook but they have, Rolls-Royce have 7,000 employees on LinkedIn which you can access direct through LinkedIn but no LinkedIn button the website. So surely it'd be interesting to learn more about Rolls-Royce and its employees from looking at some of the profiles of these people and what they say than a sort of page of corporate speak about our employees, you know they give their all, they work hard, we're proud of them the sort of platitudes you get on corporate sites and annual reports kind of doesn't get read. But go on to the Rolls-Royce on LinkedIn and there's 7,000 employees all around the world doing interesting things with points of view etc.

So I think as you might expect some of the corporate and the B2B sites are behind some of the more communicative consumer sites.

Paul Nixon: They've yet to break through that barrier.

Adrian Day: Exactly.

Paul Nixon: And one of my clients actually was – they've started Tweeting but under a generic tweet address for the company and there are two of them that use it. And they've found issues with making tweets. Because one of the spokespeople is very jokey and the other isn't. And therefore depending on who you've got managing the Twitter account and doing the tweets you'll get either a more or less jokey person.

Adrian Day: Yes absolutely yes yes.

Paul Nixon: And that consistency I think adds an additional challenge for people getting a consistent tone of voice for the company. But ultimately we still want to know they're all human and personable.

Adrian Day: Absolutely. And I think John Lewis is very good at this. The Tesco both the Twitter and Facebook site is very good. Fascinating and probably no surprise is on the Ryanair site there is no social media buttons of any type.

Paul Nixon: That would cost money.

Adrian Day: It would cost money and you go on to Ryanair on Facebook and yes sure there's a lot of comments but it clearly hasn't been setup by Ryanair so it's just a stream… No it's probably about 90% sort of invective and then the other 10% are happy customers but there is no intervention by anyone from Ryanair because as you say that would cost money.

                But actually that's what I'd expect from the Ryanair brand. I mean Ryanair is very honest about it you take it or leave it what's interesting is with Ryanair is people have taken it because if you go on to their website and every year they grow their customer numbers by huge amounts. So they're growing a successful business. It goes against all the guidelines and the best practice in customer service but I wouldn't expect Ryanair to have a moderated or any sort of social media with an intervention because they're all about paring costs right down so you can fly to Alicante for ten quid. So it is actually on brand that behaviour it's just not what makes me particularly comfortable.

Paul Nixon: And what are the sort of things that you think don't work?

Adrian Day: Yes I mean I think the absence of social media is a, completely it is a bit of a no no. I think corporate puffery and management speak which we've touched on it just gloss over it.

Paul Nixon: I particularly find that frustrating where I make the effort to go to a page and it tells me nothing.

Adrian Day: Yes, yes. And it kind of is brochure ware.

Paul Nixon: Or you know it's the sort of generic stuff that could apply to absolutely anyone, any company and gives you no distinction of it being that company.

Adrian Day: And like financial services firms and many sort of business to business firms. And dare I say even communication firms and ad agencies and PR firms can be guilty of this which is ironic given it's their business. I think it's some of the consumer firms that are best.

Anything clearly that doesn't work now that's much less of an issue now particularly with superfast broadband and better technology that anything that doesn't work. I think one interesting thing is that and it's just a sort of trend and it'll be interesting to see where it goes is [that] ten years ago most websites were brochure ware and there'd be a big use of flash, there was lots of animation. Typically you'd have to wait while something loaded and it would be quite image conscious actually to the frustration of people because it really was a, it was more like a, often a sort of advertisement online.

Most organisations now particularly customer facing ones have moved much more to a transactional functional model. And I was sort of musing on this yesterday and I think partly it's because the most successful web-only brands or digital brands if you like have

indeed been founded on a function. So whether that's Amazon or eBay or Facebook or Google or LinkedIn or Skype if you've got that, you know it's a digital brand. They've all made their names – Groupon if you think that's going to go anywhere I'm not sure it will – but they've all made their names through actually pretty functional based brands.

Paul Nixon: Yes not by being flashy.

Adrian Day: Not by being flashy. Not really on image it's what it does. So it's interesting when you go on British Airways' site now which used to be quite flashy it is essentially a, the home page is a function site it's where you can book flights and see flight availability etc etc. The same with Virgin. Of course what that means is British Airways and Virgin's home page other than the name and the colours are very much similar because they're probably using the same back end technology for the booking systems.

But I just wonder if that trends gone too far and that but perhaps it's what the customers want. And that not enough of the brand comes through in the experience.

Paul Nixon: But that, mentioning British Airways I think is an excellent example where because of the merger with Iberia you then look at the International Airline's Group sites which is very, well it lacks personality, is very neat and tidy but is pretty thin in terms of the level of information. And is certainly not uplifting and is not, it doesn't leave you in any way with any memorable level of experience.

And given that British Airways certainly were so focussed on brand before when they were independent it's interesting that they have

not focussed on that. And still will in part direct people to the individual sites.

Adrian Day: Absolutely to Iberia.

Paul Nixon: But I think you can assume that the corporate site and providing the corporate information or investor relations information and so on is just a leveller and is… You just make sure everyone's got the same information and then you can safely comply with disclosure. But you're missing a trick I think because you're not reinforcing that story, you're not saying "Okay what is this new international airlines group about? Which flavour is going to dominate of which brand and how will that play out?" So there's no telling of the overall story, there's no emotional engagement and so on.

Adrian Day: No and I think that's a very good example. And I did look at IAG you know there is a, as you say you click through to BA. The BA site itself I don't think captures the current 'To fly to serve' campaign idea positioning. I mean you'll find it somewhere on there but it's kind of hidden away. But I absolutely agree the IAG site actually almost has the feel of an interim site that was put there post the merger and nothing's happened to it.

Paul Nixon: We've got to get something up quickly so here it is.

Adrian Day: Exactly exactly, yes. But you make a very good point. Ryanair on the other hand, love them or hate them, again perhaps easy because you've got one dominant character, it is a one brand organisation the corporate information on Ryanair is all about, you know there's a whole load of pictures of O'Leary complaining at various airports where they've put the taxes up. And it's a rail against all the things he wants to rail against. There's a rail against the EU and that's the corporate area.

But at least there is a, you know that tone of voice is in line with the way you hear him on the radio, you read about on the press. And there's no attempt to sanitise. Now I suspect if you're a more, you know you've got a broader shareholding and you're trying to satisfy the City, the City shareholders you need to be a little bit, a little bit more measured. But I think a little bit more of the, sometimes the individuals and the corporate personality can come through without the… I just think sometimes website content is just overly controlled and you end up with something that is, as you sort of pointed out is kind of bland and you don't notice the difference between one company or another.

Paul Nixon: You could never accuse Ryanair or Iceland of not having personality in terms of their sites.

Adrian Day: No no. And I think I've probably picked a couple of almost extreme examples to make the point yes.

Paul Nixon: But I think you know in other cases so for instance Rolls-Royce getting the… It's all about engineering pride and fantastic products and the quality and history and you know it's… And that is an emotion that you do want to bring out and show runs through the core of the culture and the company.

Adrian Day: Yes. And I think they do that to some extent. The next question might be well how do they do that? I think that's tough in a digital environment. I mean I think looking at the Rolls-Royce site they could make better and more impactful use of video for example and sound.

Paul Nixon: Although the corporate video is fantastic they've always made excellent corporate videos.

Adrian Day: Yes yes. I mean I was looking, I don't know if Rolls-Royce were involved in the dream liner as I've just seen that 20/25% of the components are made in the UK. If they are then I just think you know let's close down the home page. Let's just have that, the whole first page you visit it's a full screen of the dream liner.

Paul Nixon: A big ta-da.

Adrian Day: Exactly yes yes. And okay it only has to be like that for a week or two but I think a lot of these corporate sites they're kind of, okay they have their news updated and they've got their tickers etc but you don't get a sense they're being actively managed for an audience. You get the sense that they are, they're probably someone's responsibility but people aren't actively thinking how can we make more of this on a sort of daily, weekly basis.

Paul Nixon: But I think maybe that by coming at the corporate site from investor needs there's a standard way of doing things that everyone expects to do things. So that paradigm hasn't been challenged perhaps as much as it could be compared say to the retailers.

Adrian Day: Yes, no I think that's absolutely right. And of course the retailers, perhaps the other difference is the retailers will argue that they put more time, effort and people into their site because they're doing x percentage of business through it. The likes of Rolls-Royce will not be doing business through their site clearly it will influence investor audiences and other stakeholders but…

Paul Nixon: It's their salesmen on the ground that are doing the deals.

Adrian Day: Exactly, exactly, exactly right yes yes.

Paul Nixon: But now what I do see is more innovative use of those top images on the home page in terms of either storytelling so if you look at the

Syngenta site [http://www.syngenta.com] where you have five major stories that are being told about the sort of issues that they're tackling. And immediately lifts you to thinking "Wow they're tackling [that issue]…" Clearly you recognise that the hugeness of the issues that they talk about, the choices that they offer of which one is a no brainer yes so one is a no brainer no. And then talk about how they are tackling that one.

And then it goes on into the next sequence and you've got moving text that engages you and as a storytelling mechanism is excellent. So I think we will see better use of home page estate and so on because that is really, where you set the tone for the whole website. And if you can start raising people up to say so at the end of the first page you come away saying "Thank god for this company" or are feeling positive about it, you interpret everything else that you read in that light.

Adrian Day: Absolutely, very much so. And just you were asking about "don'ts" earlier I was actually looking at the Invensys site they had a rebrand a year or two ago. On the upside it is very visual and it's quite visually arresting and it's very modern however you want to define that. And they do have their values on the site their agility, innovation, integrity, courage, meritocracy. And the expression is reasonably courageous but innovation is one of the values and I've contrasted that with on the home page there's a link to, it actually says 'Links' and there's a list of about 15 PDFs.

And for an organisation that's all about technology and innovation I don't want to have to, if I was interested in all 20 I'd have to, that's 20 clicks waiting for the PDF to open and read. You would expect that content to be part of the normal website.

Paul Nixon: The younger generation would lose the will to live before getting beyond two.

Adrian Day: Exactly exactly, absolutely absolutely. And another "don't" - you would think it was obvious but there's firms that are doing it again not to pick on Invensys but their visual identity two of their colours are lime green and light grey and that type appears on the white background of the website and I struggle to read it. Which again for an engineering firm which is also around getting things right it's kind of a basic and it's those sort of things that just need to be got right at the beginning.

Paul Nixon: So let's also talk about timing given that we are going through turbulent times and there might be some stakeholders who if they see a rebrand assumes that it costs loads of money and a new brand interpretation. And from the company's marketing department point of view establishing and strengthening the brand may be a very good thing to do but other people might say "Well why are you spending all this money in this time?"

So my next question is about timing and is there a good time to do it or should you just, you know if you're not expressing it [the brand] strongly enough should you just go ahead and do it no matter what? And should you temper your approach do you think in light of current circumstances?

Adrian Day: Yes I mean I think it's a very good question. I think what's interesting actually in the last year is the number of organisations that have looked at their branding has gone up exponentially. I mean organisations that just – and I'm talking about the UK and wider Europe. Organisations did stop doing this in the… During the credit crunch for the first sort of couple of years but even though

you know economic and financially it's not great just now firms have been investing a lot in the last year. And in fact new business has been very busy.

I think the reason for that is that (a) there's a sort of backup if you like, a back log of organisations wanting to look at their brand but also firms have realised that it's also a period of change. And the time to look at your brand is when your market 's changing dramatically, when the organisation is changing dramatically or in particular when your brand is out of sync with the business strategy and out of sync with consumers. And it can get to the point where if your brand expression and your brand is out of sync with any one of those is actually doing you damage online because it's saying one thing and that's not reflecting the reality of the organisation. And why would any organisation want to do that.

So I would counsel against spurious image making or let's say superficial makeovers of websites or tinkering. But I think when an organisation has – there's proper strategic change. British Airways would be a good example of an organisation that's had a tough three or four years it has decided to – it's now part of IAG – it's decided to invest and differentiate itself from some of the budget airlines. 'To fly to serve' is all about that, the customer service, the commitment to flying. There's some lovely sort of case studies of things they've done about looking after dangerous chemicals and animals when they're flying and this sort of thing.

So it's all round the added value of British Airways. For the website not to reflect that would be a mistake and could actually cost money because you continue to perceive them as the organisation they were three or four years ago. Of course 'To fly to serve' has also

got a big staff message because BA's had all these issues with its employees over the last three or four years. So there's a staff pride issue. So it makes absolute sense and I would urge BA to go further for the website to reflect that.

Do you take a slightly different approach because there's a downturn? Only insofar as your business, you take a different approach to your business. I mean the purpose of brand is to reflect the business strategy so if you are, if you've got an aggressive growth strategy even in a downturn then the brand must reflect that. I don't think there's... customers, they don't want to see money wasted but they also want their brands to be confident and have a good sense of self.

Paul Nixon: And of course you may have a different brand perception in different geographies. So in UK and Europe we may be familiar with the major brands that we know and love and yet if they're trying to establish themselves in Asia and developing markets and so on then there's a stronger case for establishing or making more of the brand particularly in the primary shop window which is now the corporate website.

Adrian Day: Yes, absolutely. And I think the… A lot of the companies we've mentioned their growth has come from the BRIC countries and other emerging and developing markets and particularly Asia. And as we know with websites there's no boundaries to be accessing a website so yes I think just following, calibrating your website to one particular market could be a big mistake.

I was looking at Jaguar's website which I think's pretty good. I mean the product is very much the hero just like Apple where the product is very much the hero. And I think again I think with video

you could probably get more of the product portfolio over but clearly someone like Jaguar – big market in the States, big market in the Middle East, big market in Asia – that's really where this website is pointed if you will.

Paul Nixon: And it maybe that some of those areas even America don't have that great broadband?

Adrian Day: Very true, yes.

Paul Nixon: And so we had one, one of our US reviewers marked a FTSE 100 site very low [for Design] and [the company] came back and asked us about it. And in fact the root cause of the bad experience was about speed of [their website]. They'd put some flash elements on the site and the speed of download was bad and poor so the user experience was terrible. But of course they didn't realise that because they're sitting in the UK, in London a nice bit of broadband and everything's fine.

It's very easy to just go ahead and assume everything's fine from that point of view. And if you get the user experience wrong or if design trumps usability then you really come a cropper and you may not realise it because you may be patting yourself on the back for all your marvellously designed site. When actually your users are not having that great a time.

Adrian Day: Very good point, yes yes.

Paul Nixon: So let's move on to social media because I think that is a very interesting area where instead of a single dimension of communication of just push you're now interacting and therefore that's an extra dimension on your tone of voice or how you express yourself and so on.

So what do you think…? Are there right and wrong ways that you counsel people to do that or which tools do you use and so on?

Adrian Day: Yes I mean the first thing is to embrace it. I think you know we talk about some organisations that are almost still pretending it's not there and it is. And people will be talking about your brand on it okay Ryanair have decided not to engage in the Ryanair Facebook site but that's, you know that's fine, that's their approach. At least they've done that deliberately and I think you know at least they have a strategy which is not to waste money and time in engaging on what they see as a waste.

But I think a lot of organisations still don't quite know how to deal with it and it is tough because I was on the John Lewis Facebook site this morning and there's lots of positive stuff but there's also customers complaining. And they have, I don't know they call them moderators but they have some staff who are actively and in a very timely manner are commenting on some of the complaints. So you know I can't find these boots that are £29 within two minutes you will find a John Lewis Partner commenting on that. And then it can get a little bit sort of scratchy because it's not a face to face conversation.

But the likes of the, particularly the retailers John Lewis, Tesco etc (a) they've realised you kind of have to engage and (b) they're using it positively. So you'll find, at the moment on both sites you'll find all sorts of Halloween offers and Halloween discussions they're using it proactively. I have a personal view that I think social media is probably slightly overrated and I think, it's gone through a boom time and I think like so many things it'll settle down to find its natural

place. But I think it is odd if you're a large organisation and you don't have a LinkedIn page.

Okay if you're a business or a corporation organisation it's more likely to be LinkedIn than Facebook but it still surprises me… In fact I was working with an organisation earlier this year where one of their main products was a digital product and yet half the Board weren't on LinkedIn. And I'm just thinking well it doesn't show them as part of the world in which that they're, you know the company's operating.

Paul Nixon: The way they are surfing.

Adrian Day: Exactly. The tough thing about social media is how to behave on it and if you've been used to very sort of rigid, corporate guidelines about how you speak and communicate what do you do when you've suddenly got as in Rolls-Royce's case 7,000 staff on LinkedIn or who may post something occasionally and they update their profiles etc etc.

The fact is you can't actively control it. And those firms that really have strong brands in the sense of brand the people will do the right thing. So you can't imagine there's too many Apple employees that won't be supportive of Apple online, in fact they tend to be product evangelists themselves. And the same with…

Paul Nixon: Same with Microsoft as well I mean they have really sort of empowered their employees to use blogs saying "Please do. And you're all grown ups, these are the guidelines, don't say anything your granny would be embarrassed about or we would or you'd be embarrassed about at work."

Adrian Day: Absolutely. And I think that is the only way to go. If someone is bad mouthing the company they work for in public then that's a different sort of issue. Of course there's always, you know social media is only an amplification of what always went on you know 20 years ago it might be you and some friends down the pub talking about the organisation you work for. It's just that didn't get the wider broadcast if you like.

Paul Nixon: The Red Lion hadn't gone global at that point.

Adrian Day: Exactly exactly right. And that's all social, that's not all social media is because many more people can partake in it but it just gives you a much wider exposure. But I think organisations do need to embrace it. I don't think anyone fully understands the effects to date but if you're not taking part in the sort of social media explosion then you never will understand. And I can understand it's scary when it's not the old controlled model of you know we put a press release out, it might appear in the FT, we'll brief the journalists take him or her to lunch and we're kind of assured of a decent piece. It's a very different world to that.

Paul Nixon: But there are equivalents. So to make sure that your A list, what I would say your A list press release or the story that you actually really do want to invest time in making sure that it has got the interesting and sharable elements. I mean whether it's attached images or embedded video or so on those things we know from studies go further get shared more and so on.

                   Courting the right set of bloggers as opposed to just the traditional journalists. And as exercises that we've seen where people have involved us, Sainsburys and the like, on certain areas we've seen incredible results from people treating bloggers with respect and

the sort of scale or buzz that then gets created from that and all of it generally positive.

So I think there's a whole set of new rules for PR Departments to learn. I think they have to embrace social media, understand its use and how to leverage that. And a new set of empowered communicators who are out there commenting on the business.

Adrian Day: Absolutely. And I've got a very good example just to build on that with Greene King obviously acquired a lot of breweries around the country and have actually consolidated a lot of the brewery operations that they're facing in Bury St Edmunds. And were getting a lot of criticism from CAMRA and in particular a blogger whose name I won't remember now but he's one of the main beer bloggers, very critical of Greene King. I think he termed them GK stands actually for Greedy King because of the ways that they've been acquiring these breweries. They engaged with him, they took him on a tour of the Bury St Edmunds brewery, they showed how actually a lot of the individual ways the acquired beers are brewed are still in a customised form albeit it's at one place not 20 different places round the country.

And I remember reading his blog on… And he talked about that visit and he talked about his experience and actually said "My views of Greene King have changed." And you just see in his tone, I mean he's still critical of some things but the change of his tone is quite marked because he's been engaged. And I think that would be a very good example of exactly what you were saying. Whereas if Greene King had continued to ignore him they would still be getting commentary which perhaps is not as accurate as they would of liked.

Paul Nixon: And people do get turned off. I mean people's attention spans on the web and the way their opinions are formed is much shorter nowadays. And because they've got so many information sources and so much going on they've only got a little bit of time to pick up.

Adrian Day: Absolutely. And it was interesting when I was looking at some of these sites yesterday I was thinking… And it's often the same when you sort of look through annual reports professionally, how many other people have genuinely read all the pages on this website. And people, as you say people just don't have time particularly if they're accessing the website and we haven't talked about it a lot but on mobile applications on their BlackBerry or their phone or whatever they're just not going to go through a whole ream of different content.

Paul Nixon: Particularly if each page takes 30 seconds to load.

Adrian Day: Exactly exactly.

Paul Nixon: Because I think there's a risk - going on to mobile now - there is a risk with iPhone and BlackBerry [usage].In general more sites are compatible with those phones and with the Smartphones [without providing dedicated mobile sites]. And therefore you could say "Look here's our website, it's small and you can zoom in therefore that's fine isn't it?" And the answer is "No it's not." Partly because the user experience is so poor but secondly because Google actually rates if you build a mobile optimised site and if it's accessed from a mobile, it will rank through its search the mobile optimised site higher than the other ones. And therefore you will get a higher visibility and you will get a better share of voice if you actually take the effort to do that [by building a mobile optimised site].

Adrian Day: Right, okay.

Paul Nixon: Now given that we've seen [companies building] some mobile optimised sites how do you go about expressing the brand when you've got less to play with there?

Adrian Day: Yes and I think that is, in some ways I think that can be a positive because I think some of the sites we've talked about you know you're forced not to use long paragraphs of corporate speak on a mobile site. So you're getting to the point more quickly.

Paul Nixon: Which they could learn from actually.

Adrian Day: Exactly exactly. I mean it is that old less is more and if you can get the American constitution one page of paper and the Ten Commandments on one page of paper etc etc then why can't you get the key points about an organisation on x number of mobile pages. So actually I think it helps focus the mind and could actually be an aid to getting sort of stronger brand presence online.

Paul Nixon: I mean initially the focus has been providing tools and news. To provide the easy things; the share price, the mini chart, the news access and maybe the events so things that are reasonably – well I guess press releases aside – are factual, a statement of fact. But the press releases are key sets of information that you need to let people know that you've done certain things. But I would be interested to see if people start to try to tell the story through the mobile site a little bit better. And as you say in much clearer, simpler forms – simple diagrams.

When I look at websites where you've got much better highlighting of information – Marks and Spencers has got key large fonts figures on its key results at the top of the results page. Unilever is very

good at highlighting summary facts at the top of each section, I love the way that's designed. So I think people have got to get used to the idea of highlighting their information and helping people absorb it because otherwise you know too much information and you're dead.

Adrian Day: Absolutely, no no agreed, agreed.

Paul Nixon: So to kind of tie the conversation up what are your favourite sites or the ones that you kind of look at and really go "Yes that really impresses me in terms of how they have expressed themselves?"

Adrian Day: Yes, yes I mean I think we've mentioned two or three of them. I think that those retailers and I deliberately looked at three different retailers – John Lewis, Iceland and to some extent Tesco I think were spot on. I looked at some car companies as well and I really liked Smart cars again an organisation with a real strong sense of brand, a differentiation you know you can spot a Smart car a mile off.

Paul Nixon: Well they were very fresh and oriented from the start weren't they?

Adrian Day: Absolutely, absolutely. The site's a bit quirky which is exactly what you'd expect given the cars, very good use of video. Quite an entertaining video on minimising petrol use on environmentally friendly sort of driving styles if you like. It's what you'd expect from knowing the brand and the product although one slight, it may have been my misuse but there was a web survey that popped up halfway through in German which threw me a little bit.

I've talked about John Lewis which I thought was excellent and I think Iceland we've talked about as well. I think the, you know not so much corporate sites but it also comes back to what I was

saying about the most successful web brands. If you like have been these functional brands you know and time and time again the Amazons and the eBays and the Facebooks okay you get some criticism when some of the functionalities change but they are, they set the standard for online experiences, if nothing else.

What is lacking I think and I can't really think of a site although I was doing some research for another project the other day and this will be the closest which is quintessentially the sort of premium concierge service aimed at very high net worth individuals. I think what's lacking is some of what I used to criticise in the past as brochure ware, sites which do give you a sort of feast of visual experience and are more than transactional sites. And you get a real sense of a brand experience if you like. And there aren't that many of those and I just think there is an opportunity for better use of sound and video and colour and pacing and also some things that people more creative than me can come up …

Paul Nixon: So ultimately what you would like to see is people giving that full emotional connection, that full expression?

Adrian Day: Yes yes.

Paul Nixon: How far do you think people could take it?

Adrian Day: I mean when you look at the emotional engagement that is achieved through cinema, through television. Actually there's a convergence between television and television in effect is an online presence, there is convergence there. But when you look at what television and cinema achieve in emotional connections through visual and sound stimuli I think there's quite a way for websites to go whilst not perhaps stepping into the mistakes of the past where do you end up with image ware that just irritates.

I mean there is still a need for – I don't know what the figure is you may well but x percentage of websites are only accessed because someone suddenly wants the address or the phone number because they're on their way there and you don't want to go through five minutes of film if you're looking for the address. So there needs to be a balance. But I think there's quite a way to go.

Perhaps something could be learnt from games you know some of the visual and verbal quality, sound quality, oral quality on computer games perhaps more of that could be brought into the websites for those brands where it merits it. So this is not for Amazon or LinkedIn or Facebook but those… Perhaps a little bit of Jaguar, technical and access challenges notwithstanding you made a good point about broadband access. But if those could be overcome then perhaps something can be learnt from some other well in effect our digital disciplines.

Paul Nixon: So finally as a result of some of these brand exercise projects and the many that you've done has there been the sort of positive feedback from the clients in terms of what they would see as ROI from improving how they are online. I know it's a whole extra, you know there's a whole huge discourse we could do on this but in terms of this sort of short punch line discourse there.

Adrian Day: Yes and I think one thing about you know and I'm a branding person with an interest in digital rather than a digital expert. But I think actually it's the digital piece of a rebrand that can be most easily measured and generally that tends to be the piece that's positive.

Now whether you measure that in engagement through things like

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page hits or whether you actually measure it through sales if you're selling through the site or whether you measure it through online surveys or perhaps even more effectively offline surveys I think generally it's the digital life of a rebrand that seems to have offered the most value. And I think that is one thing about the digital world it is more measurable. I've put projects in for rebranding awards in the past and it's very hard if an organisation changes its, updates its brand and changes its brand expression to overall measure the impact of that. The bit you can measure is the digital, the digital element yes.

Paul Nixon: And so those that have done it would swear by it?

Adrian Day: Yes I mean I think the… I mean it's a tangible element of a rebrand so you can see it immediately. They tend to be, you know it tends to get positive feedback if only because you're bringing the brand into line with the business and the brand expression. So I think yes I think it's certainly a positive thing to do.

But I'd also say as I mentioned earlier you know don't just update the website because you think you need a sort of image makeover, it needs to be founded in the organisational change and the organisation's values and personality. And the best websites as we've discussed are those that just seamlessly seem to fit with the organisation. Coming back to them again but Ryanair and John Lewis and Iceland just seem right for those organisations. And I think if you try and force it and there is a disparity between the website and the business/brand then something's wrong.

Paul Nixon: That's a great note to finish on. Adrian thank you very much for your time.

Adrian Day: Fantastic thank you very much.