

**Continuous**

**Branding**

**For Service-Based Organisations  
Ambitious to Grow**

**Craig Thatcher**

CHAPTER 8: Case Study  
**Building Rapport  
Guest Services**

The market for front of house services in the corporate world has developed significantly in recent years and is far more crowded with the entry of new and increasingly smarter and more sophisticated competitors.

As a result organisations in the City of London like banks, professional services and media companies now enjoy a far greater choice of service providers.

When I last counted there were seven major competitors and six minor ones. This is the story of how a new and highly successful guest services brand was built and is continuing to grow.

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Greg Mace was originally appointed Managing Director of RA Business Services, providing reception management services alongside Restaurant Associates, the caterer and restaurant operator. Both were part of Compass Group UK & Ireland, the market leading international foodservice and support services company. Compass Group's strategy was to provide a wider range of support services to clients and within six months Greg concluded that RA Business Services needed a new brand name and identity with a clear, compelling proposition that would help him to grow the business. Our research revealed that the new brand should provide a highly personal experience based on anticipating the individual needs of every guest. From this insight, a brand story was developed that would set the strategic context, help to define the brand personality and set the framework for selecting a new name.

If you've ever met or worked with Greg, you'll know that he is entrepreneurial as well as a perfectionist and doesn't believe in doing anything unless you put absolutely everything into it. And I mean everything. Your heart and soul. As an example, his father, told me a story about him as a boy, spending summer holidays at the family home on Bryher, a small island of eighty people in The Isles of Scilly, 28 miles (45 km) off the coast of Cornwall, England. Apparently, Greg was always trying to think of ways to make a little extra pocket money. Buying a metal detector one year he would

scan the whole beach outside his parents' house for coins dropped by holiday makers. He quickly noticed that they preferred to put their towels on clear parts of the beach without seaweed or driftwood. So he started to rake the beach in small areas to encourage them to sit there, which meant that he had less beach to scan and a better return on his time. When I mentioned this to Greg, he told me that the real turning point in this enterprise came when £1 coins were introduced as legal tender, because they were much heavier than other coins and were sandy in colour. So when they fell out of pockets they sank below the surface instead of resting on top. He recounted that he detected more £1 coins than any other types.

Back in London, Creative Director, Mark Dresh and I left our initial briefing meeting with Greg, thinking that it was going to be tough to create a new name and brand identity that would live up to his high expectations. So we headed straight off for a cup of tea at the Four Seasons Hotel on London's Park Lane. As we approached the hotel entrance, there were a couple of people washing a car. They both smiled at us, before one stopped what he was doing and opened the main door for us. We walked in towards the reception desk, which had a queue of people in front of it. One of the receptionists stood up and walked around the desk to greet us. She could see that we didn't have any heavy bags so clearly knew that we weren't checking in.

I asked where we could have a drink and she led us through two sets of doors, where we were met by a very smart young man. She introduced us to him by briefly explaining what we wanted to do. He took over and led us to a table by the window in the restaurant having asked us where we would prefer to sit. At the bar or at a table? Despite being engaged by three different people, the whole experience was seamless and totally effortless on our part. We were both made to feel totally relaxed and welcome as we were guided to our destination. We didn't have to repeat ourselves in any way to find just what we wanted. Sitting down, we both agreed that this was precisely the type of service that Greg was re-creating every day in the receptions of major financial services clients in the City of London and it was our job to propose a new name and brand identity for his organisation.

Whilst having our tea and less than an hour after our meeting with Greg, we realised that the new brand, whatever we were going to call it, needed to sum up everything in the following sentence:

*“To create a very personal, intuitive service, anticipating needs, saving valuable time and making guests feel welcome and relaxed”.*

This value proposition provided a clear articulation of what it would feel like to experience the service and the benefits of buying it. The next week we visited some of Greg's existing clients and reviewed all of the communications materials before concluding that there was a real opportunity to position the brand in a unique and highly defensible way. One that would be impossible for competitors to copy if it was defined clearly and claimed with confidence and conviction. All the key messages to be communicated to clients were also developed and established at the same time.

We brainstormed over five hundred possible names; five were shortlisted and scored against a set of criteria before the name Rapport was selected. This name represented the brand story the best and worked on two levels. The name Rapport sums up the desire to focus on the need of each individual guest and the first two letters, 'RA' tie it into sister company, Restaurant Associates which was commonly abbreviated to RA. We presented our research findings along with the shortlisted names, possible strap lines and design concepts.

Greg said: “When I first saw the name, Rapport, I thought it was fantastic! And I love it as much now as I did when I first saw it however this was just the start of our branding journey”. He went on to explain that, “We had also developed a distinctive logo, represented by the word Rapport and a two-way ‘speech bubble’ or marque, as we call it. We think of this as being shorthand for our Rapport ([www.rapportservice.com](http://www.rapportservice.com)) brand. In a similar way that Nike have their famous swoosh and I was particularly keen on this because I could see the potential for it’s use in the future development of the brand”.

“The logo and marque are highly flexible and they can be adapted for creating stories and engaging with people. For example, the marque was made into lapel pins and cuff links which are presented to winners of Service Excellence Awards. They’re prized because they mean so much, even though they’re so little. That’s the real power of branding”.

A design for a very simple and easy to navigate website, taking visitors on a carefully orchestrated journey to greater enlightenment of the brand was proposed by the design agency. Then they recommended creating a 60 second movie with a specially commissioned unique sound track for the website. This movie was designed to reflect the guests’ seamless experience and further reinforced the brand’s positioning.

*Rapport logo, strap line and marque*



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Establishing the tone of voice for the brand was the biggest challenge because it had to appeal to corporate clients that tend to be reassured by business partners of a substantial size and geographical reach. Yet, yearn for the quality of personal service found in smaller, more agile organisations. It also had to convey the new positioning based on anticipating the needs of each individual guest.

I contributed to the early development of the brand's vision, mission and values. These guiding principles helped ensure that the people who work for the company (or Rapport Ambassadors as they're called) provide the guest experience that perfectly matches the brand promise. They do this by personifying the brand just as Greg envisioned. The internal launch of the new brand took place to 200 people at a central London hotel, one month before the official launch.

Having worked with many clients in different organisations there are few that I'd call exceptional. However, Greg Mace is one. Within a very short time Rapport has become the leading guest services company in its market. This is largely down to Greg, his background in five-star hotels along with his vision and determination to provide corporate clients with exceptional front of house services. He thinks and behaves like a brand owner by combining an entrepreneurial spirit and an unswerving commitment to service excellence, that is rarely found, and which continually drives the organisation forward.

Branding, design and marketing communications have played an integral part in helping Rapport to grow. Market positioning has been very powerful and has created the space for growth of the service brand. It's a mixture of strategy, science and art that has resulted in a brand that resonates well with the right type of clients. They all buy into Rapport's point of view about the way that guests should be looked after, because it's precisely the way they'd like to be looked after themselves.

But the real growth has been achieved by the fantastic team of Rapport Ambassadors. Each is motivated and then supported to provide their clients and guests with outstanding service. Recognition and rewards come in a variety of different ways, from the popular and highly regarded annual Service Excellence Awards, to visits to leading five-star hotels, one-to-one meetings with Greg, numerous social get togethers and fundraising events. Year on year growth has been achieved by bringing every one of these individual components together and continually monitoring and maintaining them.

Greg adds, "Within a relatively short space of time, Rapport has become highly recognised and admired in the market and firmly established itself within the Compass Group UK & Ireland family. It's amazing what has been achieved by bringing the brand to life in so many different ways. One of my greatest pleasures is seeing the way our clients and our Rapport Ambassadors have taken it to their hearts".

But that's not all, Rapport has won Best Front of House Team two years in a row at the Catey Awards, a significant achievement as these are the most prestigious hospitality awards considered equivalent of the 'Oscars' in the film industry. Rapport was ranked number 21 in the Caterer's Magazine Top 30 Best Places to Work in Hospitality and accredited with one star status from Best Companies, the organisation behind the Sunday Times Top 100 Companies to Work For. The ratings system is similar to the Michelin Guide where the best restaurants in the world are awarded one, two or three stars.



The financial results have been impressive too. In the first full financial year following the launch Rapport grew by 20% and in the second by 35%”.

Continual improvement is actively encouraged and supported through the use of an internal engagement portal called myRapport. It allows Rapport Ambassadors to stay in touch with each other despite working in different locations, to share news and best practices which helps everyone to continually provide the best possible service. A monthly e-newsletter is sent to clients and Rapport Ambassadors and features a video intro from Greg himself. There is an invisible but very powerful 'cultural glue' that binds them all to each other and their clients. It's based on brilliant internal communications that engage, challenge and motivate everyone to be the best they can be.

It's inspiring to see how Rapport Ambassadors now personify the brand every day in such amazing ways. Here are three examples.

1. *Just after 11am at the Canary Wharf offices of a Rapport client, a man was late for his important meeting. Rushing up to a Rapport Ambassador at the reception desk he realised that his phone was on the back seat of the taxi pulling away outside. Still distracted by his missing phone he was shown to his meeting room. By the time he'd finished, the Rapport Ambassador had contacted the taxi company, traced the cab and arranged for the driver to return the phone.*

2. *An American guest on her first trip to London mistakenly arrived at the wrong office and was advised by a Rapport Ambassador that her meeting was about to begin on the other side of town. Feeling anxious, the guest wanted to take a cab but was told that at that time of day the underground was the only way to get there in time. Panic. She had never used the underground before, didn't know where the station was, what ticket to buy or where to buy it. Without hesitation, the Rapport Ambassador walked her to the station, handing over her personal Oyster card so that the guest didn't have to worry about payment, indicated which station to get off at and directions to the correct office.*

3. *A Rapport Ambassador was told that a man had suffered a suspected cardiac arrest and was bleeding. An ambulance had already been called, he phoned reception and security to ensure no delays for the paramedics to find him. As a trained first aider he went to help and a colleague was already performing CPR. He checked for breathing. Nothing. Concluding that because of the size of the man's frame the pressure was not enough, he took over CPR until the paramedics arrived. After bringing the man out of an induced coma, the hospital said that this quick action gave the patient the chance he needed.*

These are examples of exceptional service. But they go on every day because Rapport Ambassadors are empowered to take control of situations like these. Occasions like this make Rapport's clients look really great in front of their own clients and all the extra effort really pays off. Not just for the clients, guests and stakeholders of Rapport but also for the Rapport Ambassadors themselves as new business wins have created exciting career opportunities.

The reason why market leaders lead is because they keep doing new things before anyone else does. As an example, Rapport, in collaboration with ComXo ([www.ComXo.co.uk](http://www.ComXo.co.uk)), a switchboard support specialist, created an 'industry first' by celebrating the professional role of their telephone operators. Between the two organisations, they created the first National Telephonists' Day on 10 March – the anniversary of Alexander Graham Bell making the world's first ever telephone call. Many high profile companies supported the event by getting involved by taking part in the light hearted competitions, uploading pictures and funny audio stories to a dedicated website for the day. The event was an outstanding success, was picked up by the national press and is set to be repeated annually.

*National Telephonists' Day logo*



Rapport continues to grow in two ways. Firstly, by winning and developing new contracts and secondly by creating additional services so there is always something new and exciting to talk about. A very useful and helpful concierge service has just been added for clients who want tickets for prestigious events or seats at exclusive restaurants. Called [www.cityconciiergebyrapport.com](http://www.cityconciiergebyrapport.com) it also features hospitality tickets for major sporting and cultural events by Keith Prowse, which is also part of Compass Group.

Inspired by what can be achieved? Do you have ambitious plans for your organisation? Then you're in the right place to start your branding journey. In the next chapter I'll explain the stages and outline when and why you should start, what to start with and when you can expect results. I'll also share my top ten tips to help you prepare for your journey. Let's get going.

## Key points in this chapter

- Greg understands the power of Continuous Branding by linking it to his strategy and his people and putting the five principles at the heart of everything he does.
- **Principle 1:** Greg thinks like a brand owner by continually building the value of Rapport through excellent service and growing the company at the same time. Clients want to appoint Rapport because they're the best in the market and to experience their unique brand of hospitality.
- **Principle 2:** Greg leads from a powerful market position because he understands that his clients crave an intuitive service, one that anticipates needs, that saves time and makes their guests feel welcome and relaxed. This is conveyed through the Rapport website, driving home its market position and continually reinforcing it with 'industry firsts' like National Telephonists' Day to celebrate the role of professional telephone operators.

- **Principle 3:** Greg and Rapport have an engaging point of view. With his five-star hotel experience, he has a crystal clear idea of how clients and their guests should be looked after. Although, his real gift is his ability to inspire his people to personify the Rapport brand by thinking and behaving like him. He is always telling stories about his wonderful Rapport Ambassadors and the annual Service Excellence Awards are recognition, celebration and reward for the most outstanding examples of service.
- **Principle 4:** Greg personalises the Rapport brand experience for clients and guests. This makes them feel important, valued and good about themselves. It comes from empowering his Rapport Ambassadors to take control of situations that are 'out of the ordinary' and trusting them to do the right thing. This personalisation is powerful and extremely difficult for competitors to replicate.
- **Principle 5:** Greg invests continuously to grow consistently. He knows that the minute he stops investing will be the minute Rapport stops growing. This is what drives him on to win new contracts and prestigious awards for service and excellence in workplace engagement whilst still growing the Rapport brand at more than 20% per annum.



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Graham Jerome-Ball, Director of Global Branding at Informa plc, is securing his brand's future with Greenfisher as his creative partner.

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