

The new London 2012 mascots, unveiled in May 2010, represented the work of 18 long months and the involvement of 40 focus groups, and were the subject of much excitement and anticipation. However, immediately after their unveiling, they were met with strong criticism, mirroring the type of response voiced when the London 2012 logo was unveiled in 2007 at a cost of £400,000.

The Mascots Unveiled

The names of the two mascot characters – Wenlock and Mandeville – doubtless invoke a great sense of British history and are clearly an inspired and relevant choice. Fabled to be made from the ‘last drops of steel’ leftover from the construction of the final steel girder of the Olympic stadium, the concept seems to be a positive and historic one, that also aims to help young people relate to the Games.

How the Mascots were Conceived

Wenlock is named after the small Shropshire town of Much Wenlock, within which a local sports event of 1890 so inspired Baron Pierre de Coubertin that he went on to establish the modern Olympic Games. Mandeville owes its name, similarly, to the Buckinghamshire town where the Paralympic movement was founded (neurosurgeon Sir Ludwig Guttman devised disabled sports games as a method of rehabilitation for soldiers wounded in WWII these were later to become the official Paralympic Games).

LOCOG tasked popular children’s author Michael Morpurgo to conceive a tale of how the two

characters were conceived. He created an imaginative tale of how the characters were created from the last drops of steel left over when the final steel girder for the Olympic stadium was completed at a factory in Bolton. The story is told in an animated film and a book and – if the characters prove popular – a cartoon series.

Additionally, in homage to London’s taxis, each has a yellow light on top of its head, with an initial in the middle.



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Verdict of the Branding Experts

Unfortunately, some branding experts were quicker to vent their criticism and frustration with the design, labelling the mascots ‘a calamity’ and levelling accusations that thousands of pounds had been squandered on poor designs. Stephen Bayley, a prominent (and sharp tongued) critic voiced his concerns: “What is it about these Games which seems to drive the organisers into the embrace of this kind of patronising, cretinous infantilism? Why can’t we have something that makes us sing with pride, instead of these appalling computerised

Smurfs for the iPhone generation? If the Games are going to be remembered by their art then we can declare them a calamitous failure already.”

He went on to label the designs “a puerile mess, an artistic flop and a commercial scandal”. Similarly, Aaron Shields, a Partner at BrandInstinct, regards the mascots as a disappointment that will be alien to children.

In Defence of the Mascots

Lord Coe, chairman of LOCOG was quick to come to the defence of the hopefully loveable one-eyed Wenlock and Mandeville. “We’ve created our mascots for children. By linking young people to the values of sport, Wenlock and Mandeville will help inspire kids to strive to be the best they can be”. He also commented that: “We did a lot of research and the kids weren’t attracted to a human or a furry animal...They just wanted a good story”.

The thoughts of the two branding experts quoted in this case study are of course not representative of the views of the entire branding community!-it would be interesting for the reader of this case study to contact branding and advertising agencies independently to gain an idea of a general consensus of thought toward the mascots.

Computer Generated Smurfs for the iPhone Generation?

The root of criticisms by brand experts might lie in the concept of exactly whom the mascots are designed for, and whether the actual design represents the needs of this target group. Aaron

Shields believes that the mascots are about “as accessible as the 2012 logo, which tells you everything you need to know”, and that they will not be able to stir the national pride that mascots of an event like this should muster. His most notable criticism is rooted in the fact that “These mascots have been designed by a bunch of guys who wanted to create something really special, but they have ended up piling on too many layers of meaning...They are really just there to entertain the kids – people don’t want to invest a lot of time trying to figure out what they are supposed to mean.”

Over to the Real Critics

The only really valuable critics, of course, are the children that the mascots were designed for, and the general public who will make the choice of whether to buy them and invest in memorabilia that carry their image. Will the mascots be Olympic champions or sadly fail to make the podium? The success or failure of Wenlock and Mandeville to generate the projected £15m profit target will give us our answer!

START THE DISCUSSION

- Do you like a) the names and b) the design of the mascots?
- What age children are these mascots likely to be aimed at?
- Given that all ages will be interested in buying mascots and branded Olympics goods, do you think concentrating on the needs of children only was the right thing to do?
- What is branding and why is it important to the Olympics and Paralympics?

- Discuss the specific approaches to branding, and what makes a brand design a success.
- Review previous Olympic mascots to understand how they were designed, and why specific design choices were made.
- Aleksander the meerkat is probably the most popular mascot of recent times. Discuss, in terms of branding theory, reasons for his success. What might the Olympics mascot developers learn from this type of success?

FIND OUT MORE

Watch [the official video of the London 2012](#)

[Olympics mascots](#) to find out more about them.

<http://www.london2012.com/mascots>

CREDITS

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