

Sama

Changing perceptions – Creating Saudi Arabia's first low-cost airline





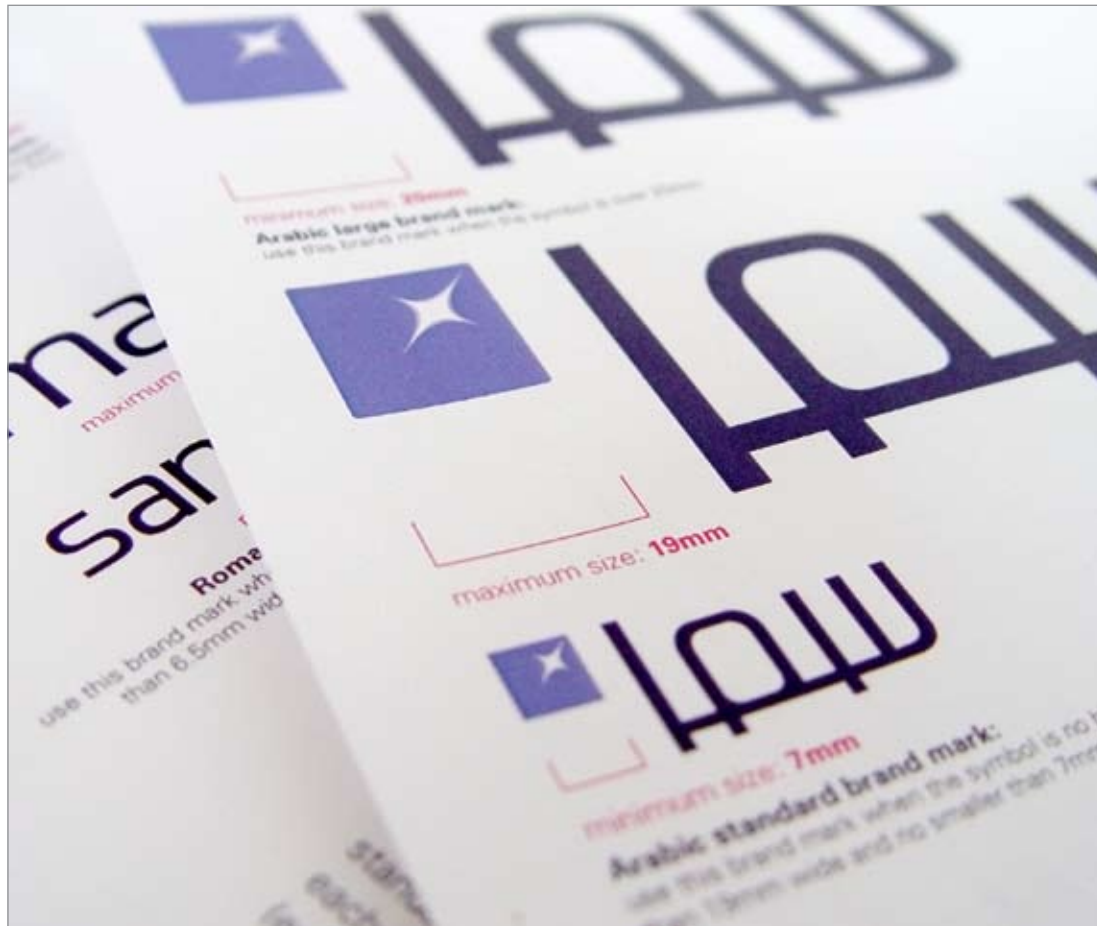
Our challenge

In a region renowned for its wealth, the creation of the first low-cost airline presented an unusual challenge. Not surprisingly, as a culture unfamiliar with the concept of low-cost air travel the idea was met with some skepticism, the consensus being that cost cutting would mean compromising on both service quality and, more importantly, safety. The first challenge would be to create a brand that could change perceptions, challenge convention and clearly demonstrate that low-cost doesn't mean poor quality.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Middle East, but with 95% of the land being desert, poor rail and road infrastructure,

and the high cost of domestic flights, long distance travel within the kingdom has always been an arduous and expensive task. The opportunity for this new low-cost airline would be to 'open up the skies' and truly make the country more accessible.

Our client, Prince Bandar bin Khalid al Faisal was adamant that we should create a truly Arabian brand, not simply a Western brand translated into Arabic. Our challenge was to understand the unique culture and aspirations of a country that is seen by many in the West as a closed, inhospitable and unknown place. To succeed we needed to look to the future and challenge the traditional approach of the national carriers.



Our approach

When developing any new brand it is essential to gain a full and in-depth understanding of the company, its market and its target audience. In this case it was particularly crucial considering the skeptical and unfamiliar market in which we were dealing. We began by conducting extensive research, encompassing management and key stakeholder interviews, focus groups, workshops and market analysis. From this we created the positioning and strategic direction of the brand. We then developed and tested several naming options before choosing 'Sama', which simply translates as 'the sky' but has deeper connotations of 'to be elevated', 'the almighty' and 'optimism'.

The symbol, a star or spark of light set against the deep-blue Arabian sky, represents the optimistic and contemporary service the airline will deliver. This was supported by a palette of cool, refreshing blues and the dynamic pixelated pattern – a modern take on the traditional geometric patterns so prevalent in Arabic culture. We developed and managed the implementation of every aspect of the new airline's identity, from the marketing communications, web site and staff uniforms, through to the aircraft livery and interiors – where we introduced leather seating, that not only offers cooling contrast to the desert heat, but also adds a level of quality and sophistication not often seen in low-cost travel.



The result

Sama launched at the end of 2006 as Saudi Arabia's first low cost airline, with an inspirational identity that embodies the essence and spirit of the service without compromising standards in any way.

As Sudeep Singh Ghai, Chief Commercial Officer of Sama says "The pixels suggest modernity, the colours capture the deep blue of Arabian skies and the star represents the airline soaring over the desert landscape. Be have done a fantastic job in creating a brand identity that brings to life this new airline in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia"

Sama was recently highly commended in the 'Best New Brand Launch' category at the 2008 Gulf Marketing Review Effectiveness in Marketing Awards.

The success of the brand was eloquently expressed by Andrew Cowen, Sama's Managing Director, "We are seeing lots of flights with 100% load factors and this is in no small measure down to the brand which continues to receive strongly positive unsolicited feedback wherever I go."