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Cast-Offs and Cleaning Services – The Ultimate Re-Branding Challenges.

Floor scrubbing services and second hand clothing shops are not normally the kind of branches that one thinks could be re-branded to be made sexy, exciting and fashionable. But there are several companies in London doing just that, with surprising results.

Oxfam is one of the UK's biggest fundraisers working to fight poverty in the third world, and has a chain of well established charity shops selling second hand clothing, books and household items. In a bold move to change their image, raise money and reach more customers, they recently brought in fashion guru Jane Shepherdson (ex-creative director of TopShop) as a creative consultant to re-brand their fashion image. Since then, the shops have a sassy new slogan "beating poverty with style" and Oxfam have opened several new fashion boutiques. As Shepherdson says, "These boutiques are about creating a great shopping experience. Oxfam has always been a place where stylish people hunt for interesting items to create their look, the boutiques are set to make that even easier."

Not only have they redone the boutiques so they are built with reclaimed flooring, run on "ecotricity" and have low energy fittings, but they have a clever new naming and marketing strategy for the clothes. What were once simply a chaotic mix of donated second hand cast-offs, the clothes have been uplifted and upgraded into new types of more fashionable sounding and enticing products aimed at a discerning customer:

- 1) **Loved for Longer:** these are well-known designer fashion labels donated to the shop.
- 2) **Reinvented:** unique pieces restyled out of existing stock by young designers and fashion students. (One of the first charity organisations to do this was Triad which sell Innovative and edgy fashion made from recycled clothes).
- 3) **Made with Love:** made by volunteers from donated stock

Alongside these second-hand goods they also have a selection of new fashionable Fair Trade garments and "**Good Fashion Sense**", clothes made from organic, recycled or alternative fibres. Furthermore Oxfam have a special "**Vintage Advantage**" section of special donated second hand clothes that you can buy on-line via their website.

Another interesting and unique idea they have had is to link up with big high street clothing retailer Marks and Spencer (M&S) in a scheme called "M&S and Oxfam Clothes Exchange". If you donate an item of M&S labelled clothing to Oxfam you get a voucher that entitles you to 5 pounds off your next purchase at an M&S store (when you spend more than 35 pounds). The scheme raised nearly 250,000 pounds in the first month for Oxfam and brought many new customers to the shops.

If donated second hand clothes can be re-branded to be environmentally friendly, chic and fashionable, then surely it is possible to change the image of cleaning ladies too. In a bid to cash in on a growing green market, cleaning companies are using clever advertising tactics to attract customers. Eco cleaning company Homebirds have been dropping information attached to old fashioned clothing pegs through doors in trendy residential districts such as Notting Hill. Not just eco, they call themselves Ethical – paying more than the average wage, and even providing English lessons for the cleaners where necessary. Rival company Puur have their ladies riding round on lovely old-fashioned bicycles with wooden carrier boxes on the front filled with flowers and cleaning equipment. They call themselves London's first "eco-home cleaning and interior support company". Fancy titles aside they also promise to turn your home into a sanctuary, and as well as environmentally friendly cleaning, offer air purification and flower services.

From clever re-branding of second-hand clothes to scrubbing, London's shops and services are having to get more and more creative and canny in order to keep up with the needs and demands of a very demanding urban consumer.

www.oxfam.org.uk/shop/

www.traid.com (fashionable clothing made from donated clothing)

www.ecoexpresscleaning.co.uk/

www.home-birds.co.uk