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## What's in a name? Powerhouse drops the m-word from its title



By [Linda Morris](#)

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The word “museum” has been dropped from the Powerhouse Museum’s title in all external publicity under a \$1.5 million-plus rebranding campaign and revamp of its visual identity.

The shortening of its title on advertising banners and online is an attempt to reposition one of Australia’s oldest cultural museums as it prepares to operate across three sites: Parramatta, Castle Hill and Ultimo.



All exhibitions are to bear the single title Powerhouse. *CREDIT: DOMINIC LORRIMER*

Management says the change in all communication materials is standard practice across iconic international museums including The Met, short for

New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the V&A, or London's Victoria and Albert Museum.

But critics say the rebrand is an expensive waste of taxpayers' dollars and proof that the museum now sees itself as an arts centre and presentation venue, not an institution committed to presenting, interpreting and conserving its priceless collection.

Museum consultant and former Powerhouse trustee Kylie Winkworth said the word museum had been defenestrated from the organisation and building, "along with the membership program, family audiences and troublesome volunteers".

Melbourne design team Studio Ongarato was commissioned at a cost of \$764,000 to develop the new visual identity for the Powerhouse. The museum says the contract included the development of a conceptual and strategic approach, detailed development of communications material, digital assets and signage, and wayfinding systems.



The winning design: An artist's impression of the new Powerhouse extension along Harris Street.*CREDIT:*

Separately, digital agency Paper Giant has been engaged, at a cost of \$800,000, to conceptualise, design and build a new website "that will provide global access to the digitised Powerhouse Collection and is a digital platform to

showcase the practice of the museum, its exhibitions, programs, content and archives”.

To inform the development of these projects, a museum spokesperson said an internal research project was undertaken to review the history of the visual identity and naming of the museum, which was established in 1879.

“This work was important to ensure continuity and that the history of the museum was carried forward through the renewal,” they said. “The publicly used name of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences has changed five times over the last 143 years. The one name that has stuck in the public’s imagination, the name that we are known by, is Powerhouse.”

The museum is now to be known across its three sites as Powerhouse Castle Hill, Powerhouse Parramatta and Powerhouse Ultimo.

In the official staff style guide, a copy of which has been seen by this masthead, all references to the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) have been retired from internal communications and external publicity. Staff have been instructed to refer to “MAAS” only in legal documents or in official government correspondence. Any references to museum are to be written in lowercase.

The museum’s new visual identity is expected to be launched after the March NSW election to coincide with the opening of the \$40 million-plus Castle Hill Discovery Centre and follows the naming of the winning architects’ team that will undertake a \$500 million redevelopment of its Ultimo site.

The museum’s 1988-built arched atrium extension to the heritage-listed buildings of the Ultimo Power Station and the old post office, known as the Wran Building, is to be demolished under such plans and its entrance switched from Harris Street to the Goods Line fronting Haymarket. Construction is expected to start in December, closing the Ultimo site to the public for two years.

The shift in language follows the federal government’s rebuke of the Bureau of Meteorology for its rebranding attempt. Australia’s national weather agency [had asked the media not to refer to it as “BoM” but rather the “Bureau”](#) following a \$220,000 brand refresh.

Winkworth said the contortions in language and semantics go back to management’s failure to develop a compelling concept and brand for its

Parramatta development, [which a parliamentary inquiry described as more entertainment centre than museum.](#)

“It won’t be called a museum because it won’t actually be a museum.”

A museum spokesperson said: “The Powerhouse remains as it always will a museum of applied arts and sciences, a museum committed to engaging communities and audiences with its extraordinary collections.”