

LOGO TRANSFORMATION: STAYING RELEVANT IN CHANGING TIMES

When collective thinking and behaviors change, businesses and brands change, and as a result, logos tend to follow, says Nicole Briggs, associate trademark consultant, Interbrand New York.

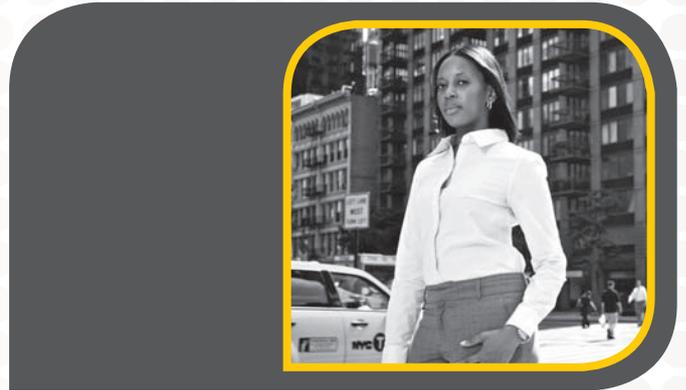
Evolving styles, technology, business models, and product offerings eventually push most brands to refresh - or even reinvent - their logos to stay relevant. When done right, a logo change can successfully differentiate a brand, give it an updated look and feel, signal a new direction or shift consumer perception in a positive way. It sounds easy enough, but knowing when, how, and to what extent a logo should be altered is trickier than you'd think.

Most of us know what a logo is, but not everyone knows why logos are so important. Advertisers, psychologists, neurological researchers and savvy business people, however, know that the human mind processes, stores and recalls symbols or visual cues more easily than sounds or words. By developing a logo that elicits a positive response, and making the right connections between that symbol and certain products, companies can capture the attention of consumers, build loyalty and market to people all over the world.

On the most basic level, a logo identifies a company or product through the use of a symbol, mark or signature, but it is also the face of a brand, embodies its attributes, and functions as a vital communicative tool. A logo that 'works' is usually simple, easy to interpret and subtly conveys multiple layers of information. It allows us to instantly grasp what a brand stands for, what it offers us and whether or not it is relevant to us.

The symbolism of a logo can be powerful and universally appealing, which is why skillfully designed logos often resonate with people of all ages, nationalities, languages and cultures. In fact, for many companies, it's an indication of success when a brand is simply recognized by its logo. As a result of extensive marketing, Nike, for example, has become a dominant fixture in its category and can stand on its own with just a symbol, which nearly everyone recognizes. McDonald's is another classic example of a brand that is instantly recognized around the world by its famous golden arches. Sometimes a logo - which distills the essence of a company into its simplest form - identifies a company so well, the company name doesn't even have to be mentioned.

Though an iconic logo may lend personality to a brand, function perfectly well as an identifier, promote public recognition and offer differentiation, even the best logos sometimes need to be adjusted. When times are changing, companies feel the pressure to keep up with new trends, boost sales and set themselves apart from (and ahead of) the competition. When a company's marker no longer seems to fit the business market, an aspect of the design seems out-of-date or no longer represents



the company, or when a company is beginning a new era, it may be time for a logo transformation.

Gap: Lesson learned

While often a good idea, introducing a new logo is not without risks. Gap found this out the hard way when the brand launched a new logo in 2010, enraging faithful customers. The new logo was retracted within the week it was released after displeased customers took to social media to voice their opinions about the change. Marka Hensen, president of Gap North America, defended the logo on The Huffington Post, stating that the move was intended to bring Gap into the modern age. This example underscores the importance of customer feedback when considering a logo change of any kind, and also brings the old 'if it ain't broken don't fix it' idiom to mind.

Gap's problems in recent years run deeper than their logo and, if anything, their classic identity is an aspect of their brand that people are attached to and respond to favorably, as the 2010 brouhaha illustrated. When considering a logo refresh, brands need to, first, consider whether an update will really address any problems facing the company. Second, they need to test logo alterations prior to launch to get a sense of how a proposed change might be received by the public. After gathering feedback from as broad a sample group as possible, common themes should be acknowledged and refinements made accordingly. This is an essential step in the logo changing process, an important preventative measure and the only way to ensure that consumers will accept the transformation.

eBay: Evolving the category

Diving into the digital age with a major redesign and aggressive plans to incorporate daily deals and upgraded search and shipping options this year, eBay's new logo isn't just a cosmetic refresh, it signals a whole new direction for the company. eBay's upgraded image and services reflect some fundamental changes

to eBay's business model as well as the changing tastes and shopping habits of younger, mobile-savvy users. Clearly, the category is evolving, and eBay is evolving along with it.

In a relatively short time, technology has revolutionized the way we shop. Aware of eBay's prominent place in the world of online shopping, David Wenig, president of eBay, intends for eBay to be at the center of this revolution, making online shopping more intuitive, convenient and relevant to today's marketplace. eBay's recent makeover shows that the company understands how the needs of customers are changing and, in response, they are transforming the way consumers will interact with brand. And eBay's cleaner, leaner new logo implies an easy, uncomplicated experience which perfectly supports the company's current goals. It also shows that change doesn't have to be extreme to be effective.

Microsoft: Announcing a new era

At a time when Microsoft is reimagining its most popular products, there couldn't be a more appropriate moment for the company to reimagine its identity, especially since Microsoft's logo hasn't changed in 25 years. Set to roll out its new Windows 8 operating system along with new Office and phone software this autumn, Microsoft's new logo visually marks the beginning of a new era.

Drawing upon its heritage as well as signature fonts and colors, the new design resembles the existing logo for Windows, which remains its most important product. Integrating different product offerings into one cohesive identity, with each square of color representing a key facet of the company's diverse portfolio of products, Microsoft is hoping the refreshed logo will unify its branding as well as customers' experience of the company.

Distinguishing itself from the gray palette of rival, Apple, Microsoft was smart to add a dash of color and step into this new era with a friendlier face. Microsoft is also planning to give the brand more exposure at this pivotal time, opening up 32 temporary pop-up storefronts in malls across the U.S. and in a few locations in Canada. Far behind Apple on the retail front, Microsoft also plans to open more brick-and-mortar stores to expand the presence and popularity of its brand. Like eBay, Microsoft's new logo aligns with the company's vision of a new beginning. Strategic timing, as Microsoft and eBay demonstrate, can determine the success of a logo as much as the design itself.

Starbucks: Signaling a strategic business move

Starbucks, which doesn't want to be known for selling just coffee anymore, announced it was dropping the words 'Starbucks Coffee' from its famous and ubiquitous green logo. In its place will be only the Starbucks 'Siren', which will be featured more prominently. Retaining its distinctive features and still clearly recognizable to consumers, the new, simple use of the logo is a natural evolution in keeping with category leaders mentioned previously, like Nike and McDonald's, whose iconic symbols represent the brand as much, if not more than, their names. Additionally, dropping the words for a purely visual representation should help Starbucks transcend its American heritage and enter new global markets.

With business aims for product and geographic expansion, Starbucks' decision was clearly a strategic one. Avoiding the pitfalls of other rebranding efforts, like Gap's, Starbucks' was also careful to explain why they made the change and communicated this to consumers. '...it's such a smart move for Starbucks to contextualize and explain, not just drop the logo with a flashy campaign,' asserts Interbrand's Craig Stout. 'Perhaps it was done in response to the lessons learned by Gap after its aborted brand evolution, where there was little or no communication of the rationale for the change. But unlike the Gap fiasco, this rebrand is elegant, visually intelligent and far from an overreach. The freed Siren makes sense and is well designed - in stark contrast to the visual abomination of the logo created for Gap.'

A logo transformation doesn't have to mean - and usually shouldn't mean - starting from scratch. It's important for a new logo to maintain some original design elements and reflect core brand attributes, which will preserve authenticity, keep the brand recognizable, and keep brand loyalists loyal while also opening up the possibility for attracting new customers. A logo update should also correspond to the real needs and aims of a company, as well as signals coming from consumers. Jumping on a cultural bandwagon or imitating other popular brands in an effort to stay current are not sound approaches to a successful logo refresh.

As Starbucks, eBay and Microsoft demonstrate so well, a logo transformation must be well-planned, tested, and strategically executed, preferably in alignment with new business goals, new product launches, or the look and feel of a new era. Since brands are living entities, it is necessary that they change and evolve, but how and when they change and evolve makes all the difference.

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