



# 6 Signs Your Company Needs to Rebrand

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Brands can and should evolve as the market changes. But be sure you are rebranding for the right reasons.

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To rebrand or not to rebrand, that is the question. With all apologies to *Hamlet*, brand strategists like myself hear this question quite often from entrepreneurs and marketing leaders.

**The most efficient way to make lean, mean and smart marketing moves is to first articulate a strong brand strategy, then use it to inform the messaging, visual identity and offering mix.** When organizations work backwards – crafting marketing, messages and visuals before hashing out brand strategy – this often results in wasted time, money and energy.

Savvy entrepreneurs diligently craft a strong brand strategy to build a firm foundation *before* they embark on marketing and other customer-acquisition tactics. And, as the company grows, equally savvy marketing executives evolve that brand. But how do they know when it's time to rebrand?

**To get to the right answer, we must understand that brand is more than just colors and logos.** Brand is the core and essence of the business and is conveyed in three essential ways.

### 1. VISUALLY

How the business looks. Logo, colors, fonts, design, imagery.

### 2. VERBALLY

How the business sounds. Company name, messaging, website copy, voice.

### 3. EXPERIENTIALLY

How the business acts. Policies, customer service, hiring.

Rebranding can mean overhauling the organization's visual look and feel, or simply updating verbal messaging to adapt to different competitors, a new market or customer feedback. It means making a new promise to the target audience and repositioning that promise in every customer touch point. Attention is often given only to logo redesign because it is the most apparent, but rebranding can touch any of the visual, verbal or experiential brand aspects.

To make an informed decision about rebranding, we must consider that a business can rebrand in one area without tackling a massive overhaul of the others. The company may be able to shift the messaging and core value proposition, for example, without changing its design. Or it may be able to put better policies and practices in place to walk its current talk without changing its logo. Understanding the reason for wanting to rebrand will help a business settle on strategic timing.

## Here are six good reasons to rebrand a business:

### 1 The target audience has changed (or expanded).

Your existing brand messaging, design and packaging may have been perfect for small business owners, but they're less relevant to the large enterprises that now comprise your ideal clientele. Or, perhaps you have expanded your offerings to include different genders, age groups or affinities. The NFL has attempted to rebrand itself and appeal to more women as 46 percent of its audience is female, up 18.7 percent over the last decade. This has led to targeted messaging, advertising and PR/ community outreach (due to negative scandals, such as domestic violence) to appeal to this new, important audience.

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## 2 The main benefits or value proposition has changed.

You may have launched your business to initially provide A, B and C for people, but over the years, the business shifted to provide different benefits based on market trends or customer feedback. eBay initially started out offering online auctions for previously-owned goods but has refined its brand look and advertising messaging to focus on offering new unique items or designer merchandise. Salesforce.com built its brand solely around customer relationship management (CRM) but now offers a broad ecosystem of strategic business products and services. The brand messaging has evolved to support that new promise. Amazon's brand started out as an online bookseller; now, the company's messaging and advertising promotes more than just books, and its expanded offerings make the brand synonymous with speed and convenience for your life.

## 3 The offerings or price points have changed.

This is not about expanding the product or service line under a consistent brand umbrella (same market, same benefits, same promise). This is more akin to a computer equipment seller deciding to add strategic technical consulting services, or a retailer going upmarket. With a shift in what you sell comes a shift in the value you offer and potentially, the customer to whom you offer it. You can go two ways: Either rebrand your company or spin-off a completely new brand.

Years ago, my client Talent Technology offered a suite of disconnected recruitment and hiring technology tools used to source and recruit candidates. The company was well-known by IT and HR analysts as a point solution supplier but stayed off the radar of top executives. In 2010, Talent Technology decided to knit everything together into a more robust, strategic and integrated solution – and this required up-leveling their brand to engage C-level executives in more strategic conversations around efficiency, talent management, productivity and operational ROI. They rebranded with revamped messaging and design to attract this new audience – even changing their name to Talemetry – and are now positioned as a high-performance recruitment marketing solution. Their rebranding was so successful, that in 2017 they were recognized by independent analyst firm #HRWins as one of the top HR companies to watch.

Option two is to spin off an entirely new brand. Arthur Andersen, the formerly prestigious accounting firm, did this back in the day by spinning off their management consulting services into its own brand, Andersen Consulting (now Accenture), so it could focus on its core accounting services. GAP is another example. Instead of trying to serve every possible audience with one brand – which would have left people confused about their core identity – GAP launched different brands to target different people with different buying drivers: The core brand of casual clothing for young people, a higher-end brand to a slightly older, business casual demographic (Banana Republic) and a lower-end, trendy brand for very inexpensive casual wear (Old Navy).

## 4 The competitive landscape has changed.

When you launched, perhaps no one else was doing the same thing or serving that particular market. But as competition changes, the brand must adapt. Are your competitors offering something fundamentally different or telling a different story? Has the industry become commoditized and now everyone looks, acts and talks the same? Maybe you need to zig when they zag. Southwest Airlines saw an opportunity to break out of the monotonous airline industry landscape and changed the way travelers look at the flight experience. Jet Blue and Virgin America soon followed, upping the ante while adding their own unique flair and value propositions. Dunkin' Donuts built its brand as a simple donut shop but has expended its menu and made its brand design and messaging more upscale to compete with Starbucks and Panera.

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## 5 The customers' behaviors or needs have changed.

Have the needs of your core customer shifted? Are they looking for different things as time goes by? Perhaps you still want to serve the same market but your brand needs to evolve to keep up with it. J Crew has created a different brand conversation and value proposition within its market by adding new lines such as bridal, evening wear and more accessories because these are what its customers now demand. On the other hand, Talbots' retail brand lost its way for a while when it didn't keep up with its core customers' changing needs and instead tried to rebrand as something they are not in order to appeal to younger women. The retailer's attempts to be hip and cool did not work, but it recently found its way again, re-branding to better serve the changing tastes and needs of its core middle-aged female shopper.

## 6 The times have changed.

Does the logo and design style created long ago now look dated and behind-the-times – and not in an intentionally cool, retro kind of way? Are you using outdated terminology in your messaging or marketing materials? If the company is still referencing “Web 2.0” as something innovative, it's time to revamp brand messaging. Even if your company has adopted a timeless look and feel, everything needs to be refreshed and updated at some point, as many top brands have done over the years. If your brand was specifically designed to be “cutting edge, modern and fresh” you will definitely need to rebrand as trends and styles change and the “new” becomes “passé.”

**Brands can and should evolve.** A design refresh or messaging update – even a name change – can be a great way to generate excitement and increase visibility, but be careful. Don't change design or core messaging every other month. While you might be sick of your current brand, you may not have given your customers enough time to embrace and remember it, let alone experience it. Additionally, frequent rebrands will make your company seem confused and disjointed.

Visual rebranding is exciting for companies, but can inadvertently reveal emotional attachments that customers have to the brandmark. You may recall a few years ago when GAP revealed a “new” logo that caused a furor, prompting the company to immediately return to its previous one. Heed this rebranding cautionary tale. The company may have been using a new logo to try and solve more fundamental issues at that time such as poor merchandising decisions, random pricing strategies, and unclear competitive positioning against upstarts like H&M.

Rebranding in any form can be an expensive proposition so make sure you are doing so for the right reasons. A new logo or edgy messaging will never solve fundamental business issues so look hard at the health of your company before you rebrand, and make sure its coming from a place of strength. **Effective branding must start from the inside out.**



Maria Ross, the founder of brand consultancy Red Slice, believes cash flow, creativity and compassion are not mutually exclusive. She advises entrepreneurs and fast-growth business on building irresistible brand stories and messaging to better connect with customers and accelerate sales. Maria has authored multiple books, including *Branding Basics for Small Business* and her newest, *The Empathy Edge*. Maria understands the power of empathy on the brand and personal levels: In 2008, shortly after launching her business, she suffered a ruptured brain aneurysm that almost killed her and inspired her memoir, *Rebooting My Brain*. She has spoken to audiences ranging from *The New York Times* to BlogHer and has appeared in numerous media outlets, including MSNBC, ABCNews.com, Forbes.com, Entrepreneur, and NPR. Maria contributes regularly to Entrepreneur.com and Huffington Post. Maria lives in the San Francisco Bay Area but serves clients all over the world.

**If you are looking to rebrand or revamp messaging to stand out in the market, accelerate sales and re-energize your employees and customers, let's talk. Email me at [maria@red-slice.com](mailto:maria@red-slice.com) and we'll set up a call to discuss your goals.**

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