

ILLUSTRATION: RON RENNELLS

# Changing Your Brand and Image Means Changing Everything

COMPUTER CAR, WHICH RECENTLY BECAME VALERA GLOBAL, LEARNED THAT REBRANDING A COMPANY IS A LOT MORE THAN CHANGING A NAME. THE MOVE POSITIONS THE COMPANY FOR THE ROAD SHOW AND EVENT NICHES.

By Camella Lobo

## WHAT IS REBRANDING?

Rebranding is the process by which a product or service developed with one brand, company, or product line affiliation is marketed or distributed with a different identity. This involves radical changes to the brand's logo, brand name, image, marketing strategy, and advertising themes.

(Source: Encyclopedia.com)

**T**wenty years ago, the name Computer Car may have been considered cutting edge. But by today's standards, it sounds dated and wasn't signifying the corporate image the Long Island, N.Y. transportation company was trying to convey to its high profile executive clientele. "People were turned off by it," says Naomi Glaser, co-founder and vice president of the company.

That's when she decided that a change was due and enlisted the help of the O Group, a high luxury marketing firm run by Orit. That's right, she simply goes by her first name, a moniker that reflects her philosophy of corporate identity. "Your name has to be simple enough to remember but still has to convey who you are and what you do," she says. Although Glaser has known Orit for more than a decade, it wasn't until last year that she decided it was finally time for a change.

"All of a sudden, the name Computer Car meant nothing anymore," says Orit. "From the beginning, you have to realize what your name means and what it will mean into the

## THE DOS AND DON'TS OF CORPORATE REBRANDING

**DO:** Be consistent in your brand name and image.

**DON'T:** Flip-flop from one day to the next. The most important part of your brand is the name and the image it represents. It's important for a brand to have three defining traits — clarity: your brand should be unique, like DNA; consistency: be consistent in every way; and communication: this is the emotion that is relayed to the end user that defines the vision and mission of your brand. Without those, you have no brand.

**DO:** Pick a marketing firm with a passion and enthusiasm for what you do. If you are planning on going with a specific company, do your homework and investigate. Meet the owner and other key people you will be working with and make sure they are excited.

**DON'T:** Try to change your brand on your own.

**DO:** Trademark your logo, name, and mark immediately.

**DON'T:** Choose a logo that doesn't reflect your company's objectives. For example, if you are a luxury brand, choose a simple, elegant logo, not one with a busy design and array of bright colors.

**DO:** Go all the way. You can't just change your name. If you are going to rebrand, you have to change everything. This includes collateral, business cards, your service, and your employees. It's a huge undertaking.

**DON'T:** Rebrand just for the sake of rebranding. No one will know that you did it, or care.

(Source: Orit, owner, The O Group) ▶

future.”

Through much tough debate and long persuasive meetings with her partners — Bob Mackasek, David Eckstein, Dolores Battelli, and Rod Barfield — the group was all on board and the real work began. After a long, hard year of working very closely with Orit and the rest of the O Group, Computer Car unveiled its new face, Valera Global, in June.

LCT recently spoke with Glaser, Mackasek, and Orit to get the inside scoop on what it really takes to change a company’s name and image and be successful in doing so.

**What were some of the issues that led to the rebranding of Computer Car into Valera Global?**

**BOB:** The major reason was that our company’s name was in a class of service other than what we actually were. It no longer reflected the image of the service we were offering.

**NAOMI:** This new step allows us to reposition ourselves and strategically focus on entering the roadshow market. We’re strengthening our global network as well. We wanted to move into the events market and add value to our existing service.

**What were some of the hesitations you had when thinking about rebranding Computer Car?**

**BOB:** We were concerned with a loss of image with our existing clientele.

**NAOMI:** I had to be willing to give up the emotional tie that came with our old name.

**BOB:** We were also anticipating the expenses involved.

**ORIT:** You have to understand, it’s a global change. Everything from the letterhead and license plate frames to business cards and the branding inside of the vehicles. Everything has to change.

There are really two levels to letting go of the old brand. The first is the emotional attachment that comes with the company name and everything associated with it. You have to really just move on. The second issue is thinking about how you are going to swallow that bigger pill.

**NAOMI:** It’s so difficult when you realize you have to give up personal control over the identity and packaging of your entire company to another party.

**What were/are some of the positive factors about going through the process?**

**NAOMI:** This whole thing really has been an invigoration for the company. There’s an underlying excitement among management. There is a definite buzz among the chauffeurs as well. It can be invigorating for a company to do this. There’s a real

excitement to change.

**BOB:** However, the invigoration mostly takes place with those who are working on the rebranding project. There’s anxiety with those who don’t know what’s going on, like the chauffeurs and the other employees. If I had to do it again, I think I’d be more open with my employees about what we were going through. A lot of our chauffeurs were skeptical and thought we were selling the company.

**What were some of the first steps in the process?**

**NAOMI:** About a year ago all of the partners were all over the place. There was a lot of misinterpretation involved. The first step was roping in the four partners.

**ORIT:** It was not easy. When you own something between four partners, it becomes a lot to do. The O Group really helped guide the client and say, “It’s going to be okay.” We know it’s hard to trust another company with this responsibility but once everyone was on board with the idea, it was okay.


**NAOMI:** Entrepreneurs generally are very controlling people, but we really came together to make this happen.

**BOB:** The hardest part was actually making the decision to do it. Selecting the name and the logo and

**\* A HISTORY OF REBRANDING SUCCESSES AND FAILURES**



**SUCCESS: Cingular Becomes AT&T and rides on tails of iPhone**  
The public barely acknowledged AT&T’s resurrection in place of Cingular wireless earlier this year. The company is now the exclusive provider of service for the Apple iPhone, a gadget that had people lined up in front of stores in the days leading up to its release in June 2007. This move is predicted to automatically revive the wireless brand. If the phone is as successful as expected, AT&T will reap the benefits for a very long time.



**FAILURE: Coke Tries Coke II**  
In 1985, Coca-Cola decided to reinvent its signature flavor by introducing Coke II, or New Coke. In response, the public resented the change in the formula and sales dipped. The controversy revealed that although the public liked the new flavor, they were emotionally attached to the former original brand. Less than six months later, Coke II was gone but the company was changed forever by the blunder.



**SUCCESS: Court TV updates its image**  
The network recently underwent a face lift to its on-air and advertising collateral that gives the station a fresh and bold new look. The new campaign is a much-needed update to the network’s identity, which provides a more exciting image to the public.



**FAILURE: Tommy Hilfiger ditches logo for cutting-edge styles**  
In an attempt to compete with the likes of fashion houses like Gucci and Prada, Hilfiger focused on eccentric designs rather than the classic logo based clothing that made his brand famous. Sales dropped and the designer admits that he made a huge mistake.



**FROM THE BEGINNING YOU HAVE TO REALIZE WHAT YOUR NAME MEANS AND WHAT IT WILL MEAN INTO THE FUTURE. —ORIT**



everything else involved was also very difficult. You cannot anticipate how many other things are involved in this whole process.

**ORIT:** When going through this type of change, you have to make sure the company you are working with is full service, meaning — they will be there to change everything that needs to be changed.

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**How did Computer Car decide on the name Valera?**

**BOB:** Market recognition, like I said, was a major concern. Orit made a good point. She said, “Your clients already know who you are and they will continue to know who you are. You should be concerned with your new clients.”

**ORIT:** That’s true. Rebranding enables you to remarket and reinvent your existing services to your existing

clients as well. It’s a chance to reintroduce what you can offer them.

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**How did the name and logo come about?**

**NAOMI:** We had to select something recognizable.

**BOB:** The O Group came up with three pages of selections. We wanted a name that meant nothing and had no connotations. We wanted to create a specific image in the clients’ mind, something that they could pronounce easily.

**ORIT:** We do this a lot. It’s very difficult because there’s so much involved — checking URLs, making absolutely sure no one is using the name. We wanted something that spoke to the customer about what it is we do.

**NAOMI:** You have to practice it and you have to be comfortable saying it.

**BOB:** And we didn’t want the word “car service” or “limousine.” We wanted to be unique and different.

**ORIT:** We really focused on the luxury of the brand. We consider the name Valera to signify a luxury brand. The name, logo, and icon all had to reek of luxury.

**BOB:** That was a really important point made in the O Group’s initial presentation to us. They really turned

us on to the idea of pure luxury.

**ORIT:** The most important part of branding is that you have to own your brand and you have to believe in it. What I mean is, Valera uses pink airport signs and everyone knows that. We took that color and went to town with it. Now we use it sparingly, but purposefully.

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**What do you think a marketing firm like the O Group can achieve that Computer Car could not have achieved on its own?**

**BOB:** The O Group has done a number of things that has made our task much more manageable. It’s a full-service firm. I mean, if I had to deal with printers, copywriters, and photographers, I don’t know what I would do. We’ve dealt with the same team the entire time and there’s no way we could have coordinated everything that is involved in this process as well as they have.

When you have multiple partners involved, it’s pretty much impossible to get everyone to agree. They have organized that for us. It would have taken a lot longer. Their guidance made it easier for us to become unified.

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**How did your employees react to the change?**

## \* REBRANDING THROUGH DIVERSIFYING

Town Car International changes its image and breaks into a new market

**RUSS COOKE**, president of Town Car International, told LCT, “Since joining forces with Joe Cirruzzo of A Elegant/ELS, we are improving our service levels to meet the needs of corporate clients in the NY market.” He says the result is a more upscale offering.

“The new service is slightly higher in price,” says Cooke. “It’s definitely an up-sell and we expect it to increase our per-ride revenue but still remain in the low cost play. Our focus is on providing flawless and impeccable service, using certified chauffeurs who are trained to meet the needs of a more demanding clientele,” he says.

“We are not increasing the boundaries of the black car market. That is not what we’re about,” says Cooke. Instead, Town Car International has been diversified with the new separate TCI Worldwide brand it has created for itself in order to serve the corporate clients outside of the New York market. Town Car International says it continues to offer exceptional service in the “premium” black car market, which Cooke refers to as a “hybrid space” that New York clients have always embraced. Cooke believes the TCI Worldwide network will help the company intensify the move upstream.

“TCI Worldwide is another tier of the company that will serve primarily markets outside of New York City.” Generally, the areas surrounding New York City, like Boston and Washington D.C., are the places where the market for a premium black car type of service ends. This is what Cooke says opens up a window of opportunity for the new TCI Worldwide network. He thinks shedding the company’s former image as that of a black car service will be easier to do in markets where luxury transportation cannot be confused with the latter.

“There is a huge opportunity for a company that recognizes the need for ground transportation that appeals to the culture of corporate clients in both comfort and price,” says Cooke. “There needs to be a delicate balance of the two service models and there is no room for error. That said, we will continue to strive to be ‘corporate America’s ground transportation solution.’”



**BOB:** Initially they were nervous. The unknown creates fear and anxiety. We had focus groups to allay fear and rumors. Before they knew what we were going to be called, we told them the new brand will help us grow into luxury road show accounts. We tried really hard to keep them informed without revealing the big secret.

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**How did you reveal Valera to your employees?**

**BOB:** We created a luxury atmosphere event over two days for our 300 employees with a presentation, piano player, very festive decorations, and food. People were able to mingle and socialize and talk about the new image and what it means.

We stressed how important they are to that image, because after all, they are Valera. It's really about them. It was a very celebratory and lighthearted event.

**ORIT:** We wanted them to see how much effort was put into all of this and walk out the door with pride, and with their heads held high.

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Orit (top) says a luxury brand's image should reek of luxury. Naomi Glaser also wanted to select an image that was recognizable.

**What do you think has been the hardest part about the rebranding process?**

**BOB:** I thought this process would be big... but it was HUGE. From regulatory issues, banking issues, down to picking out the colors, vendors, and trademark filings, there's just so much involved.

**NAOMI:** The next challenge we face is maintaining the excitement and make sure it's propelled into the future.

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**Would you recommend that other companies do what Valera has done?**

**BOB:** Yes, but you can't do this on your own.

**NAOMI:** And if you use a firm, you have to agree to give over control in the beginning and stick to it.

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**What do you think the rebranding will ultimately do for Valera?**

**BOB:** I think it's going to give us entry into markets that have otherwise shied away from Computer Car. It will open doors that we couldn't have gone through before.

**NAOMI:** Sometimes you just need something to jar you, to change your perception. **LCT**

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