



Rebranding

→ for the 21st Century

Updating your brand or logo or changing your name can show your customers that you are a progressive company

By Robert Mackasek

IN the limousine industry, we often throw around the terms “branding” and “rebranding” like they are common knowledge. Anyone would be able to spot some of the more iconic logos like the Coca-Cola brands and the “Golden Arches” of McDonald’s immediately. Most businesspeople probably understand the importance of having a brand: an image and a reputation for excellence in service; clean, late-model cars; outstanding customer service; and so on. Having a brand also includes using a specific color palette, maintaining a consistent “look” in your marketing materials, or having tagline that defines your business. When you rebrand, you are seeking to spread the word about a major change in your company—such as a new type of

service—or to clarify your company’s focus, which may not have been accurately conveyed with your original logo, name, or tagline. Like the familiar logos and taglines of the companies you encounter

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every day—all of which are tweaked regularly to reflect the climate of the company—rebranding shows that your company is ready to embrace the future.

Why Rebrand?

Rebranding can be as simple as a minor logo change or as complex as a name change or a refocus of the company's core message. Rebranding an established company is a large undertaking that companies embark on for many different reasons. Changes in company objectives, service offerings, and the decision to enter new markets are all reasons why you might consider the change. Some companies rebrand after a major merger, while others do it to shed an image or stereotype. For example, if you have "Town Car" in your company's name, but now you primarily run FlexFuel Suburbans, a name change would convey that you aren't limited to just sedan work. Refreshing the company's image to celebrate an anniversary or a milestone is also another good reason.

One year ago, my company, Valera Global, decided to invest



QuickChek changed its logo to reflect the fact that it now focuses on fresh and healthy food—hence the green leaf in the logo. The use of all green also re-emphasizes “garden,” “fresh,” and “natural.”

time and resources in a rebranding effort. We had recently expanded our services and entered new global markets. These factors, coupled with our desire to speak to our more upscale clients, all played a part in the decision to rebrand the company. In our case, our rebranding was not limited to a new logo or a refreshed website, but also a completely new name. Our rebranding efforts were a way to communicate to our customers that we had exciting things happening.

Look Inward

As a company, part of the rebranding effort involves thinking critically about why you wanted to change your image. For Valera Global, we were not changing our core values or the high standards we had under our previous moniker: Computer Car. However, we realized that the old name did not accurately reflect who we were as a company. The first step in rebranding is to ask critical questions that will help you decide what aspects of the company will be the focus of the rebranding initiative.

- **Why are you different?** Every company has a distinguishing set of traits. What are yours? Do you offer special services or have an excellent reputation for customer service? Do you

Tips on rebranding your company

- Recognize it takes time
- Ask the necessary questions of your staff, your clients, and yourself
- Look for a partner who will be direct, passionate, relationship driven, and understands your target market, your vision and believes in your product
- Limit the number of people involved
- Trademark your name, logo and mark immediately
- Reserve your domain site (if you are changing your name significantly)
- Market your new image both internally and externally—it takes a team to support the message
- Reassure your staff and clients that the basic values have not changed
- Recognize that re-branding is a continuous process

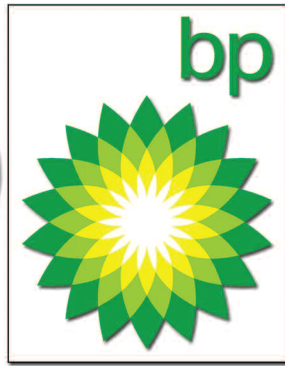
service a unique sector of the community or are you known for fulfilling difficult requests? Have you decided to re-organize your company to be more environmentally friendly? Any of these identifying traits can and should be reflected in your new brand, especially if your previous brand did not adequately express them. Rebranding is the perfect opportunity to show your customers what sets you apart from others in the industry.

- **What do you offer?** This is the time to think critically about your service offerings and define your company. Is it clear to your clients what your company does and what services you offer? Have you always wanted to add a niche? This is the time to do it. You can incorporate these additions into the new brand to help existing clients take notice and create interest from new clients. Once you have clearly defined your service or product offerings, a corporate image will start to emerge. Thinking critically about this vital information will help prevent a muddled brand image and steer you in a clear direction.
- **What will never change?** Remember, you have a great existing foundation and customer base. Whatever your company does best should still be an integral part of your new brand. Although changes are exciting, you do not want to alienate existing clients who will not associate the “new you” with the “old you.” Try to keep something similar in the brand design or find a way to help current clients associate with the new brand. Emphasizing the same great customer service you always offered or company objectives will keep those valued customers through the rebranding process.

Call in the Professionals

Once you have considered these questions and are ready to move forward, it is time to identify an advertising agency or other creative studio that can help to guide and execute the design process from start to finish. If you want professional results, don't be afraid to call the professionals for assistance. You may scoff at the cost, but it is well worth it if you've thought through your rebranding and want to showcase your company's new direction.

It is important to do your research to find an agency that believes in your brand and has experience conveying the new image you want to create. Find someone who has worked with



BP decided to update its logo to show that the company is energy, not just petroleum. The company also adopted the tagline “Beyond Petroleum,” which plays on the company’s initials for British Petroleum. The green, yellow, and white starburst symbolize dynamic energy in all its forms, according to the company’s website.

the transportation and limousine industries so he understands what you do thoroughly. Start at the trade shows—talking with other operators or vendors at the shows can help you identify a firm that will create your brand.

Also, think carefully about how many people you want to get involved in the project. Sometimes, a smaller team is more efficient than having the entire executive board assigned to the project—and, of course, it will be more costly with a larger team. The rebranding effort should challenge you, but it shouldn’t bankrupt you in the process. Smaller is fine so long as you have the right people who share the goal of what you wish to create.

Spread the News

The final step is to communicate the new identity to your existing clients. Be sure to keep current customers informed once you have made your changes with targeted outreach specifically addressing their possible concerns. This will help keep the relationship intact moving forward. The last thing you want to do is distance your existing customers or sever the relationship you have worked hard to obtain.

Our marketing and design team chose three ways to reach our customers: a direct-mail campaign, an e-mail blast, and announcements that chauffeurs distributed to existing clients, with brochures going to new clients. This allowed us the opportunity to explain our reasons for rebranding and keep the relationship we had already forged. It also gave our clients insight into our new services and the opportunity to ask questions.

In addition, keep your employees informed about the changes as you progress. This will not only create an automatic buy-in from them, but will assure that they are prepared to answer questions from clients. Make sure your employees know the reasons behind the rebranding and can answer any questions confidently and accurately.

Your employee’s enthusiasm and participation will also help create a smooth transition during the rebranding process and after. Whenever possible, help to create enthusiasm by providing employees with new branded materials, apparel, or updates on the new logo. We revealed our new brand to our employees over a two-day, luxury-themed event. I personally gave a presentation that

outlined the reasons behind the change. This internal event was conducted in an atmosphere that portrayed our new brand image. A piano player, festive decorations, and upscale food and drink gave our employees a hands-on experience of the new brand.

Don't Overlook the Obstacles

Don't underestimate the time and expense necessary to conduct a successful rebranding campaign. Rebranding is a long and arduous process that, if not properly executed, can risk distancing yourself from existing clients or losing some altogether. That's the wrong direction to take. Rebranding should always include your current customers as well as welcome your future ones. Successful companies already have strong connections with clients—connections you do not want to lose during the rebranding process. The goal is to create even stronger, longer lasting relationships with existing clients while opening doors to new or expanded client relationships.

It is also important to remember that your company is not simply changing its name, but also changing its image. Stationery, business cards, websites, apparel, and in-vehicle amenities will all require replacement. And don't forget to research trademarks and existing Web domain issues before you commit yourself too deeply to a certain outcome.

Reap the Rewards

Looking back a year later, the success we achieved as a result of our rebranding has only proven that the time and expense



As part of a multi-million-dollar refresh on the discount hotel's logo, Econo Lodge changed its brand to communicate "smart" and "value" instead of "mediocre" and "no frills." It targets the value-conscious traveler.

we put into it was well worth it. During the process, you will also be asked to make difficult decisions and invest a significant amount of your time to ensure accurate results. The key to approaching any major rebranding initiative is to strategize, remain focused, and employ professionals to facilitate the process. This is a vital opportunity to help your company move forward and reach out to new customers, while creating a renewed interest from your existing customers. By planning ahead and answering the tough questions, you will prevent rushed decisions and possible confusion in what your new brand says to your clients. **LD**



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