

Re-BRANDING

Think Hilton, and what comes to mind. In the ever-competitive world of hospitality, another marketplace where Millennials are forcing every brand to rethink their offerings, the Hilton name still carries a lot of cache. Think Hilton, and you think quality, consistency and familiarity.

When it came time to evaluate ways to further strengthen its Embassy Suites and Hampton brands, the global marketing team at Hilton Worldwide sought ways to incorporate the mark of Hilton's excellence into the equation. The decision was a simple, but effective stroke of genius – just integrate the Hilton name into the brands. So, with the stroke of a marketer's brush, the new "Embassy Suites by Hilton" and "Hampton by Hilton" names and logos are being rolled out across the world.

How and why to reshape your image

After reviewing historical data from its DoubleTree by Hilton rebranding effort in 2011, and conducting proprietary market research, findings showed that the "by Hilton" association results in increased expectations around service, guest rooms, comfort, locations and awareness of the brand's association with the Hilton portfolio. As part of its renewed business strategy, Hilton also rebranded other segments across its 12-brand portfolio, including Canopy by Hilton and Curio – A Collection by Hilton.

Jim Holthouser, executive VP of global brands, says the rebranding campaign of DoubleTree showed marked improvements across key metrics, such as average daily rate (ADR), occupancy and revenue per available room (RevPar).

In the end, Hilton's rebranding initiative, like so many other brands that take the leap, centers on reinforcing the consumer experience. In Hilton's case, consumers now can confidently associate the Embassy Suites and Hampton brands with the quality and consistency of Hilton Worldwide. This includes increasing consumer familiarity of brand attributes such as opportunities to earn/redeem points and benefits with Hilton HHonors, its award-winning guest-loyalty program.

Maryann Stump, VP, strategy director at branding agency CBX, says a rebranding doesn't have to be something new. In fact, many great rebrands are about bringing new meaning to what they've been saying all along.

"The most important aspect is a strong commitment," Stump says. "It's not about having loads of money. It's about a willingness to make some tough choices. Brands are about trust. Consumers deal with enough change in their lives, so they don't want their favorite brands to change for no apparent reason. Change for the sake of change can fracture consumers' trust in a brand."

The steps to rebranding center on some very basic questions, the likes of which vary from brand to brand, but all carry the same premise: What is the business goal you must achieve? What has changed since your last brand refresh? How is your consumer different? Are there new competitors? Are they playing the game in new ways? What trends and cultural shifts are impacting your brand today?

The key is in the timing and methodology of your approach. "These are not mutually exclusive," Stump says. "Method, speed and total commitment should all work together. Small goals yield small results. Only big goals will deliver big results. Big goals can't be reached without a clear roadmap."

Change is good

If your brand is doing the same things it did on the day you launched, you're stagnant. Don't let anybody fool you – change is important. From a few minor adjustments here and there, to a complete overhaul, change is good. One of the most crucial aspects for companies to understand with respect to rebranding or refreshing a heritage brand is

"Rebranding requires discipline and rigor, but also the energy and excitement to tell the organization's new story. Getting this right is as much art as it is science."

– Brian Elkins, Senior Brand Strategy Consultant, Heart + Mind Strategies

that, intended or not, you're signaling to your marketplace that something of significance about the business is changing.

"Too often, rebranding is undertaken as simply a means to garner attention or underpin a short-term campaign, which can lead to an uptick in engagement in the near term, but will be un-sustained and create risk by disappointing internal and external audiences," says Brian Elkins, senior brand strategy consultant for Heart + Mind Strategies, a research-based brand and communications consultancy that has worked with brands such as Western Union, Paychex, Royal Cup Coffee, Wynn Resorts, and Constellation Brands, among others.

Identifying and defining the catalyst for your change is crucial. Some, but not all of these catalysts may include new leadership or ownership structure, a new or evolved value proposition or positioning, new or enhanced products, experiences, channels or ways for audiences and customers to engage with the brand. And, as often is the case, updating the

articulation of the brand to better align with a combination of these factors.

"A successful rebranding campaign requires a coordinated effort across the organization so that the new brand is delivered at every touch point, from senior management to frontline employees and product/service experience," Elkins says. "Rebranding requires discipline and rigor, but also the energy and excitement to tell the organization's new story. Getting this right is as much art as it is science. The brands that get it right put their customers and authenticity at the center of their approach."

In a world where everything is changing and the value proposition to today's customer is constantly evolving, rebranding often is the right move. With technology, nothing is stagnant, which means you have to stay current by examining your core values and consistent strategic branding initiatives.

"Rebranding starts with awareness," says Chris Rosica, president of Rosica Communications and co-founder of Interact Marketing. "You need to take a good, hard look in the mirror and be realistic about how your brand presents itself to your key audiences – whether consumers, shareholders, partners, individuals, the media and anyone else with whom your brand interacts."

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos once said that "branding is what people say about you when you leave the room." That said, it's best you make sure you know what that is and address it as you redefine your brand. "Ask yourself if how you define yourself will be relevant two or three years down the line or even beyond," Rosica says. "A successful rebranding campaign is based on the same principles as a branding campaign: be authentic, be memorable and be consistent." ■





Your **5**-step approach to rebranding

Heart + Mind Strategies specializes in brand strategies (positioning, naming and portfolio architecture), and employee brand engagement and consumer insights/planning. Over the years, it has helped refine and refresh strategies by employing the following five-point checklist:

No. 1 Define

First and foremost, identify and clearly define the catalyst or reason for rebranding.

No. 2 Engage

Once the case has been made, it's crucial that leadership not only champions the process, but also plays an active role in building buy-in at every level of the organization. Everybody has something at stake with a successful (re)brand implementation.

No. 3 Measure, and then measure again

Establishing a benchmark through research and tracking (quarterly or bi-annually) against those metrics post-launch is paramount to sustaining a successful rebrand and providing further rationale for investment in the brand.

No. 4 Take stock

The excitement of a rebrand endangers the positive brand equity an organization has built over time. One of the most important activities, once measured, is to recognize existing equities to be brought forward and improved, while also identifying baggage you aim to diminish or leave behind.

No. 5 Ownership & accountability

Establish a brand governance system from the outset. Too often, rebrands lose steam without people and processes to act as brand stewards going forward. Building a cross-functional team not only reinforces engagement, but also helps ensure consistent implementation and sustained success.

