

Rebranding: Easier if you just hold hands

LONDON, UK: John Wynne* on evolutionary, revolutionary and potentially disastrous rebranding exercises.



During a recession there is a natural consumer demand to understand "what exactly am I paying for?" This creates more scrutiny into what a brand stands for and whether the outcome is worth it, not only financially but also emotionally. Brand Managers have to take a good look at whether their communication of brand values is working as well as it could or whether they need to take the (potentially disastrous?) step of rebranding, be it evolutionary or revolutionary.

Rebranding as such, is never a disastrous exercise. However, choosing the wrong agency to do the job for you is. Bad judgement criteria as to why and how the exercise is undertaken is by far the largest pitfall made by clients.

Any agency worth their salt should be able to establish whether the equities within the brand are worth tampering with before they even put pen to paper, and that should only be done knowing the client has the same ideals, concerns and knowledge.

Rebranding is a journey

Rebranding is a journey that should be taken together, with complete intellectual transparency and mutual understanding along the way. Otherwise it becomes 'design narcissism' - design that is self-centred and ultimately fails to address the issue it was supposed to.

The output of a collaborative and well-thought through rebrand should not only make the brand owners feel more focused and in tune with what the brand represents, but they should also feel uplifted and mentally rewarded. It's about client empowerment as much as an outward facing solution for a brand.

Often, the reasons for a rebrand are founded on the need for personal recognition, on either the client or the agency side. A fresh-faced, eager brand manager is determined to create a significant growth in sales during their heady six month reign. An agency with an overzealous ego is determined to shake the category by the scruff of its neck and fill that space

on the awards shelf. As soon as someone takes on the challenge for any reason other than to enhance the articulation of a brand's core DNA in some form or another, then the exercise will prove fruitless.

Specialising in brands that operate within an FMCG environment creates additional complexities.

It must stand out

The speed at which the brand is 'judged' by the consumer happens literally in seconds and during this fragment of time, the brand's presentation must communicate uniqueness and relevance and must entice aesthetically, as well as tell you what it actually does.

It must stand out, but talk the language of the sector, often with little or no other marketing support to help paint the bigger picture. Here a specific hierarchy of messages comes into play, often varying according to the product category and always leading with brand recognition.

For example, a pack of Anadin will lead with brand recognition - yellow box, large word Anadin, followed rapidly by format; soluble, caplet etc. Dove shower gel will also lead with brand recognition - the Dove logo, followed by the collection name 'Summer Glow', 'Supreme' etc, then its particular fragrance and benefits. The pack has to tell consumers all these things in rapid succession and do it in a way that is ownable and also tells the consumer something about the brand's values.

In this frenetic environment, it is all too easy to resort to visual clichés in order to shorthand the communication. Naturally it's madness to confuse the consumer with generic symbolism that bears no resemblance to the message. Brand communication should use the brand DNA as the lens through which to communicate the product benefits, functional benefits and emotional benefits - in fact all the benefits that are available to the consumer.

For instance, we have worked with Simple Skincare for over twenty years now and everything about the communications on their packaging is filtered through the Simple 'Kind to Skin' brand DNA. The pack colour, tone of voice, copy and format all revolve around the 'Kind to Skin' proposition. The instantaneous take-out when walking past a Simple product is 'kindness'.

The deeper the understanding, the better

It obviously helps a great deal when an agency is able to build a really deep understanding of a brand over a period of time, as is the case here. In the situation of coming to a brand fresh with no prior relationship, there is still a necessity to spend a realistic amount of time trying to get under the skin of the brand - an often critically underestimated element of the process.

The beer fixture is an interesting area for brand designers, as the graphic communication is nearly all about the brand alone. The format often speaks for itself and alcohol levels are usually intrinsically linked to the brand. There are countless visual clichés on hand to add credibility and heritage, so the role of communicating a clear and distinctive message is a challenge.

With our recent work on Foster's lager, we had to move the presentation away from tactically led messaging to a more brand-centric execution. An immersion into what Foster's stands for with consumers and brand owners was essential, and allowed us to be single-minded in the final execution.

Foster's has always been a relaxed, unpretentious brand but had lost some of the value that made it distinctive and desirably Aussie. Consumers were choosing Foster's by default rather than actively seeking it out. At BrandMe, our job was to re-establish what Foster's should say about itself and also give the drinker credible justification for their choice.

Explode the brand onion

By exploding the brand onion and examining every piece, the team could see there were core values that over the years had been taken for granted and no longer communicated - values which were no longer relevant or ownable and new values

that had evolved and needed articulating.

We had to find a way to communicate this through a consistent and well-defined visual branding vehicle, but also to look at the various ways this could be supported, with motivational messaging on key consumer touch points. For instance, few consumers know that Foster's lager originated in 1888, and that the Foster brothers (yes they were real people) pioneered the use of a chilling process in the lager dispense.

The new Foster's identity was created around a joint vision between BrandMe and Heineken UK to articulate a true brand presentation rather than just a 500ml can badge you can sew on a polo shirt. The new roundel expresses a corporate philosophy of sunny optimism and honesty within a category usually desperate to add layer upon layer of spurious brewing heritage and generic "premiumness".

"A breath of fresh air" was a key consumer comment in post-design research and for us strikes at the very heart of what we wanted to achieve. And in terms of quantifiable results post-redesign? Well, not only is it now not physically possible for consumers to get to this product any quicker at the fixture, but it is now 37% quicker to find than the average lager, according to the 2010 Packmaster report.

Foster's is a big brand, with a big personality, just like the people and the place it originates from.

By imparting that upbeat positivity through a more desirable and engaging piece of brand design, consumers see these values as positive and relevant and will want to buy into it.

And we designers can sleep at night knowing that this ticks the box for a 'successful rebranding exercise'.

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