

# How to Avoid the Five Biggest Re-Branding Mistakes

*By Ed King and Steven Winokur, President, Turning Point Strategies*

Many organizations attempt to institute new company-wide brand strategy campaigns (philosophy, mission, purpose, etc.), oftentimes without success. These organizations attempt to advertise their way to a new brand. However, the savvier, more successful organizations take an extra step: *they try to build the brand internally before unveiling it externally.* Unfortunately, this attempt often falls short because the company finds it can’t live up to the promises it was making to the outside world.

## *The Good News*

The good news is that there *are* things that you, as the Marketing Manager/CEO/President can do internally to affect the external success of your new brand strategy.

## *Is A Catchy Slogan Enough?*

In the 1970’s, Ford Motor Company, reacting to the quality influx of foreign cars into the U.S., created the slogan, “Quality is Job One” in order to reassure American car-buying prospects. However, consumers needed more than just a catchy slogan – they wanted actual change. Once quality training programs were instituted and assembly line workers got involved with new product design, the brand started to resonate internally. *The Ford employees became brand ambassadors* and the change made a difference---it started to show up externally with increased market share.



## *The Big Question*

How can an organization build a compelling, unique, winning brand in the marketplace while having all members of the team buy-in to the strategy, completely and passionately?

*It’s a simple answer: involve them in the process.* When asking your employees to become brand ambassadors for the company, they are on a “need to know” basis:

- They need to know why.
- They need to know when.
- They need to have a say.
- They need to have direction.
- They need to see passion.
- They need to be reminded.

Overall, employees need to understand that the status quo is a scarier proposition than change. Yes, human beings are inherently afraid of change; that’s why it is so important to let your employees know that in this instance, change is a good thing...especially when the current direction of your brand is detrimental to the future of the company.

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### *Getting A New Brand strategy Buy-in Is A Sales Process*

Instead of selling your products or services to a prospect, a skill at which you excel, you have to turn inward and sell the new concept—the brand strategy—to an employee. As Neil Rackham says in *Spin Selling*, the most successful way to sell is to *get the prospect to recite to you* the benefit he or she would gain from using your product or service. When the benefit comes out of their mouth, the prospect buys into it---if you *tell* them what they would get, they won't buy it.

It's a startling similar process when selling a new brand strategy to employees. If you dictate "this is how it will be...act accordingly," you risk alienating much of your workforce. Conversely, if you lay out the situation, gather employee input about problems and potential solutions from the start, when a new brand direction is proposed, you—and they—have a much better chance of succeeding.

### *Avoiding The Big Five*

When making the decision to build a new brand from the inside out, there are five critical mistakes that many companies make:

1. Failure to build a brand planning team
2. Failure to analyze and alter internal processes and procedures
3. Failure to build the excitement and roll out with passion
4. Failure to gain participation from each department
5. Failure to tirelessly measure for consistency and completeness

### *Failure to Build a Brand Planning Team*

When building a new strategy, the first task is to choose a Brand Planning Team. Branding is far too important, and far too complicated, to be relegated to any one individual. A team should be chosen that represents different opinions, levels, skill sets and perspectives throughout the company. For example, if your company has eight divisions, choose at least one person from each division; be sure to choose a variety of front-line employees, such as customer service representatives; nobody is closer to the customers than they are. Ideally, the assembled team should cover all the bases throughout the company, and should be no more than 15 people. For example, in addition to the aforementioned, be sure to include:

- Include at least one salesperson
- The CEO and/or visionary of the company is an absolute must-have
- Include the senior marketing person
- Be sure Operations is represented
- Ditto Human Resources

It's important to maintain an atmosphere of encouragement so all employees feel comfortable expressing their opinion. Everyone—including the CEO—should be on a level playing field and should get equal time presenting their suggestions. The CEO should not be dictating direction using the "because I said so" method.

Next, choose someone to keep the process on track. Make this person the *project manager*. They will be responsible for facilitating survey responses, gathering feedback, and keeping everyone on schedule. This person should be detail-oriented and will probably not become the strategic lead in the process. If you are using an outside firm to help with the re-brand, this person will be their point of contact.

A *strategic lead* should also be chosen. This person will lead and facilitate brainstorming sessions. Note: if you are using an outside firm or consultant, they will fill this role. This person should be a good communicator, creative, passionate and very knowledgeable about the industry. They will fill in the "idea gaps" when needed.

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A *head of research* should be assigned. This person (with the help of other team members) will conduct competitive and industry analysis and uncover societal trends. They may also be responsible for conducting interviews with prospects, customers and employees to get a handle on the current perception of the brand.

Everyone on the team will be responsible for gathering ideas, thoughts, concerns and praise from their respective departments or work groups. This should be done through a combination of brainstorming meetings and surveys.

Another possibility is to include a customer. In some instances, a customer (or a small group of customers) may be willing to participate in the process. You will have to compensate them for their time (perhaps by giving your service to them free for a year), but their outside perspective can be invaluable in the re-branding process. Do be cautious about only including a customer that you know and could trust with this confidential information; they would not participate in all of the exercises, but would be brought in during select meetings.

In the brand building process, it's vital to communicate with employees. Explain to them that you have heard and digested the information from each and every one of them. Keep them up to date on the timeline and what they can expect during the rest of the process. Continue to gain their input and ideas. Reassure them that this re-brand is in their best interest, as well as the best interest of the company. Ultimately, it will make for a better working environment and happier customers.

Once the new brand message is built, it's time to take a look at the internal workings of the company before announcing it to all employees.

#### Failure to Analyze and Alter Internal Processes and Procedures

Branding is not a marketing function. Rather, it is a set of guiding principle for a business. It is impossible to institute a new brand strategy without revisiting the way the business functions.

In way of an example, we worked with a document management company whose new brand revolved around "information security." Unlike most of their competition, the company's new message did not revolve around speed of the process. Most of their competition used efficiency (i.e. "We can process more documents than the next guy") as their main sales tactic.

For our client, we positioned them as having "unparalleled focus on security and accuracy." Previous to the re-brand, their data-input specialists were rewarded on how many keystrokes they made per hour. After the re-brand, they were rewarded on how few errors were made. This idea helped tie in business operations with the new brand position.

Some questions to ask when analyzing internal processes and procedures:

- Has the marketing department focused on bringing in the greatest number of leads? Should it focus on more qualified, targeted leads instead?
- Is the sales force rewarded by a measure of bottom-line sales? Should it be rewarded through profitable sales instead?
- Do operations focus on churning out the highest quantity of product? Should it focus on zero defects instead?
- Does HR hire based on previous experience? Should it develop a hiring procedure that puts more focus on hiring the right personality, rather than on skill set?
- Does R&D focus on improving the current "widget?" Should it focus on more radical, innovative products for the market?
- Is there a vehicle in place to measure customer and employee satisfaction?

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All internal procedures and processes should be assessed and a plan put in place to alter these functions. Ultimately, the behind-the-scenes operations need to support the new brand strategy. It may mean instituting large-scale initiatives such as creating new positions or departments, or it may be something as simple as dusting the window sills. Yes, really!

#### Failure to Build the Excitement and Roll Out With Passion

As the time for rolling out the new brand grows near, you should set the stage for success. Many employees will be scared and unsure about the impending change. Do your best to assuage those fears by using a *teaser campaign*.

A simple teaser campaign could be built by using posters around the building, sending a series of emails or postcards, or putting an announcement in your company newsletter touting the “New Widget, Inc. Coming Soon!” These tactics let employees know that you are thinking about them during the process and they also create a “buzz” around the office.

When the time comes to unveil the new brand to employees, do so in first class fashion. We recommend saving a small percentage of your re-brand budget for an internal launch event — maybe it’s a catered affair at a local hot spot. But be sure to make it a significant celebration so employees feel that this is a significant change.

If the re-brand includes a new logo, have a multimedia presentation reaching a crescendo of an animation of the new logo. If the change is more strategic in nature, we might recommend bringing in a motivational speaker who incorporates the change into his or her speech.

When it comes to explaining the new brand strategy, the CEO should give an impassioned speech about the core essence of the new brand. This will become the mantra for every employee at every level. The CEO should also explain: why the change was made, what it means for the company as a whole, and that the change is a good thing for customers and employees alike. It is important for employees to know that this new brand is not lip service...it’s a philosophy to live by...it’s a reason to come to work every day.



The CEO should recognize the entire Brand Planning Team and the contributions from all employees in shaping the new brand.

Have each employee leave with a small gift, further reinforcing their participation and commitment; something that will reinforce the new logo and positioning.

#### Failure to Gain Participation from Each Department

Because the original Brand Planning Team had a vested interest in building the new strategy, they will have the necessary passion to motivate their fellow associates. Their job will be to lead each of their departments in creating ideas to support the new brand. This is done *before, during and after* the roll out of the new brand.

Arm each of these people with the tools necessary to sell the new brand to the employees on a grass roots level. It’s one thing when a CEO explains it, but it’s another thing when a co-worker explains it...and is excited about it.

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Assemble a document that explains (in simple, non-corporate wording):

- The current issues that the company has (losing ground to competitors, etc.)
- The current perception of the company's brand and how it stacks up against competitors
- The current way things are done and how it contributes to these issues
- The proposed solution and why it's a better way for employees and customers
- The proposed changes it means for each department
- The proposed timeline of events

Each team leader should possess this document and any support research or findings. Each member of the team should be well versed on the new brand and why the new strategy is being implemented. They should also know how to pitch it to their associates. We recommend that each member of the team be trained on how to convincingly sell an idea to someone. That may mean that each member joins a public speaking organization, such as Toastmasters, during the re-brand process to hone their skills; or perhaps it might work better to bring in a public speaking expert to train them at your location.

It will be the job of the Brand Planning Team (now more like the Brand Ambassador Team) to answer any questions the employees have and assuage any fears that may linger. They will conduct brainstorming sessions with their departments to determine ideas to support the new brand and ways to institute changes.

Failure to Tirelessly Measure for Consistency and Completeness Studies suggest that when employees understand the big picture and their role in the company, they are happier, work harder and stay longer. This means fewer turnovers, which means less new employee training, which means a better bottom line. It also means happier, more loyal customers. The most successful companies are consistent and complete in their day-to-day operations – *internally and externally.*

*LensCrafters has a simple, yet powerful brand message... "We will be the best at helping the world see better." A mantra like that transcends business and becomes a rallying point for employees. They created the "Give the Gift of Sight" program, which is designed to recycle old glasses and distribute them to needy people around the world who cannot afford glasses. Volunteers also visit local nursing homes and shelters helping out those that cannot come into the stores. Additionally, at nearly every corporate meeting, a story is told about how an associate went above and beyond the call of duty to "help someone see better." This is living the brand...big time.*

Of course it's important to measure customer satisfaction through surveys and interviews with customers and past customers. What's also important, however, is maintaining your brand internally. Is your brand message maintaining its consistency from department to department...employee to employee...day to day?

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We call this maintaining “Brand Integrity.” It’s one thing to unveil a new brand and have everyone excited about it, initially. It’s another to maintain the fire day after day. Business has a “lulling” effect on people. Old patterns and mundane habits have a way of creeping back into the workplace.

Everyone needs a reminder now and then. That’s why it’s important to have Brand Ambassadors chosen throughout the company. They are responsible for motivating employees, reminding them of the new brand behaviors and watching out for brand “leaks.”

From the top-down, it’s vital that everyone feel that they have a vested interest in building and maintaining the new brand. Create excitement, gain buy-in and you’ll be well on your way to a compelling new brand in the marketplace.

This content may be reprinted with the following signature:

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### *Consensus – The Mighty Grey Area*

*When we say that employees must get involved in the process, that doesn’t mean that every single employee must agree on the new brand direction.*

*We worked with a client that had acquired many companies and therefore, had a lot of disparate service offerings. While it was important to the company to keep some of those lesser-used services for a few key clients, it was not part of the future focused-brand strategy of the company. The employees that worked for that division were not excited about the direction.*

*In this case, we did our best to involve those employees in the higher-level, philosophical wording of the strategy. This way, they were involved in the process and had a core reason to come to work every day.*

*The job of the Brand Planning Team is to build the best possible position for the company, not to come up with a position that everyone agrees with. Compromise is not the best strategy. It’s important for one person (ideally the strategic leader of the team) to sell the best possible brand position to the rest of the team and get them excited about it.*