

WHY
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A BRAND?

It's a ton of work to redefine, refresh or update your brand.

You tease out and carefully define the attributes. You do a lot of soul-searching, refining, editing and rethinking. Eventually, your team agrees on a direction and you start developing a fresh identity that reflects who you truly are and who you aspire to be.

After months of work, you reveal the new name and logo. Buzz! Excitement! Controversy! Awareness!

You carefully memorialize the core ideas that generated the new brand in a style guide. And who reads it? The marketing team.

You roll out all the new goodies — identity system, packaging, website, signage, advertising, mailings. And who sees them? The customer.

So far, so good.

THE MISSING PIECE

While the marketing team and the customer are crucial to the success of your rebranding, there is another key constituency to consider. The vast majority of your company's employees, who will be tasked with breathing life into the brand on a daily basis, often receive only the most cursory introduction to the thinking behind the change.

They might notice a new mission statement taped to the wall — next to the required safety notice and a memo about next Tuesday's mandatory group insurance meeting. If they're really lucky, there's an unveiling of the new brand just for employees.

But unless there's a concerted, long-term effort to consistently reinforce the values behind the change, the ideas fade. After a surprisingly short time, day-to-day considerations take over and become the focus for 95% of your employees. The status quo wins.



Josh Freeman is founder, president and creative director of FreeAssociates, helping companies create complete brand communication systems—from the research, goal-setting, and planning stages through the design and development of highly effective marketing tools. The firm's work in B2B services, consumer products, non-profit, real estate, and event marketing has been recognized both nationally and internationally. He lives in Los Angeles, where he serves on the Advisory Board of AIGA LA.

The damage to your new brand is subtle, but insidious. Slow erosion of the ideals and values that led to its creation undermine its impact. Before long, what you're left with is a great idea that is seriously underperforming. Half a brand.

THE MARKETING MYTH

How is it that a company can work so hard on its brand identity and somehow end up in essentially the same place it started?

The culprit is a commonly held myth that branding is just about marketing – so the only people who really need to understand it are the ad agency, the logo designers, the web developers and the social media folks.

But your brand is so much bigger than that – and the commitment has to go much deeper than just marketing. Your brand is not your logo. It's not your website or your packaging. It's the entire emotional relationship your customers have with your product or service. And that's a function of every single interaction with every person, every touch-point, every communication connected with your company.

THE BOTTOM LINE

So how can you maximize the impact of your new brand, instead of undermining it?

First, recognize that your employees are just as important an audience as your customers. Make sure you bring them along in the process, keep them connected, and help them understand the new brand so they can both live it themselves and share it with your customers — through their initial interactions, through creativity in building your products, through clarity in the way they provide support.

Let your brand development team help you communicate your values internally, in ways that generate emotional impact and visceral understanding. Create tools for your employees that show the brand in action and reinforce the values you want to see expressed. Make sure they get why the brand is defined the way it is. Empower your employees. Reward a sense of ownership. Treat your employees as the vital brand ambassadors they really are.

In the end, the solution to one of the most common and costly branding blunders is surprisingly simple. Resist the temptation to focus only on your marketing team and your customer. Remember your employees. Do that consistently, and your big investment will reap a serious return.

Creating brand ambassadors

We help facilitate the powerful cultural shifts and insights that can be fostered by a rebranding, and introduce new, updated communication tools that explain and inspire.

There are as many ways to do that as there are companies, because the methods need to reflect the physical setup (office/factory/stores/branches/remote workers), the culture, the management style and the timing.

Here's just one less-than-conventional tool we created to do this for Logistics, providers of practice support for international law firms.

Logistics employees work inside large firms, providing the support that enables those clients to focus and thrive. Their brand is based on service, on having their customer's back —and we introduced the idea of the challenge coin to embody these values.

If you don't know about challenge coins, you're in for a treat. When you finish here, head on over the brilliant podcast 99 Percent Invisible and listen to [Episode 156: Coin Check](#) to find out how these fascinating and powerful conveyers of values work.

This clearly special, custom-designed coin is a physical token of appreciation that lets the recipient know they are seen. It's given by both managers and peers to employees who go out of their way to help, and it reinforces the culture that underlies Logistics' brand.

The challenge coin enables its recipients to carry their ideals with them in their pocket, and to acknowledge others by giving them a coin and paying it forward. That creates an ongoing awareness of, and appreciation for, the company's most important brand value: Service.

