

WHITE PAPER

Change is Coming. Plan for It.

by **Jamey Boiter**



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“A brand is a living entity—and it is enriched or undermined cumulatively over time, the product of a thousand small gestures.” – Michæl Eisner, CEO, Disney

As your brand grows and evolves, changes will be called for at various points. Even ubiquitous brands like Southwest Airlines, Starbucks, and John Deere have evolved, matured, and changed over time. How successfully changes occur is all about planning. As brand strategists and practitioners, BOLTGROUP has been involved in many brand updates and refreshes—from radical remakes to subtle evolutions over time.

A couple of truths prevail, no matter if you are creating a brand for the first time, refreshing or remaking a brand, or simply building a brand out to the next level.

- 1. When done well, brand development is an intricate and costly endeavor.**
- 2. When done poorly, brand development is even more intricate and costly.**

The differentiating factor is careful planning, and then management of your plan.



Very often our team is invited in when there's a problem or a belief that some piece of a brand needs work. Packaging for instance. Far too often, we find that the "problem" is merely a symptom of the larger situation. The brand has been neglected. Multiple well-meaning influencers (internal and/or external) have degraded the brand over time, the brand has evolved organically and not been kept up, or the customer relationship with the brand has changed. Regardless, we so often find that the brand strategy and the business goals are no longer aligned, and this is causing stress on the brand and its assets.

Acknowledging the problem is the first step to effective change. Now you need patience, planning, and plenty of courage.

Start with the End in Mind

So often presidents, CEOs, and CMOs know change is needed, but do not begin with planning. Instead, they get drawn into the creative, wanting to move fast, and skip the critical foundation and strategy work required. They don't acknowledge the reality of what's entailed beyond the new strategy and creative and, therefore, don't plan for it.

The heavy lifting comes up front—how the new brand will be implemented and launched and the real costs involved

in doing this. Getting it right at the outset matters most. In today's marketplace, just allowing your new brand to appear with no explanation or announcement or orchestration can be disastrous. Just ask Gap and its \$100 million makeover mistake. That then had to be changed back! Or Yahoo! A ubiquitous brand that was ranked in the top 50 Best Global Brands by Interbrand as late as 2009, and is now not even in the top 100. A major part of the successful launch of a rebrand is managing expectations among your various constituents, before, during, and after the implementation of the brand. It cannot be overlooked or the brand will become fragmented, and all the coordination and effort put into the strategy and creative will immediately begin to unravel.

Be aware of all the parts to an implementation and launch strategy. It goes far beyond new letterhead, business cards, and a website. There are operational issues, including signage, campus wayfinding, vehicle graphics, packaging, and point of sale. Many years ago I worked on the design and implementation phase of a bank rebrand across the state of Georgia. Overnight, miraculously, banks changed names, signage, ATM surrounds, glass graphics, and even welcome mats. It was far from miraculous. It was months and months of meticulous planning, strategic positioning, expert orchestration, and a cloudless sky and full moon that night.

This is the perfect time to expand your thinking beyond the brand's visual / verbal identity system, and consider the extraordinary value you could create and bring to your company. Design and implement a full brand ecosystem, to maximize the future impact of your realigned brand through every touchpoint.

Get the Help You Need

Now that you're personally committed to making the changes required for your brand to be more relevant, you need the right team. A team with the knowledge, experience, and empathy to get the job done. Assembling a small internal team of stakeholders that broadly represent every part of your business will allow for focused feedback and exploration. Also hire professional strategists and practitioners to come in and help. Your business is an ongoing concern and a brand realignment can be a huge distraction to your internal resources. A good consultant will make sure that they own the process collaboratively. Once the foundational elements and strategy are developed and approved, and creative is underway, your internal team can slowly take more responsibility for implementation—if they have the experience and the time. If not, continue to lean on your outside partners

to ensure a successful implementation.

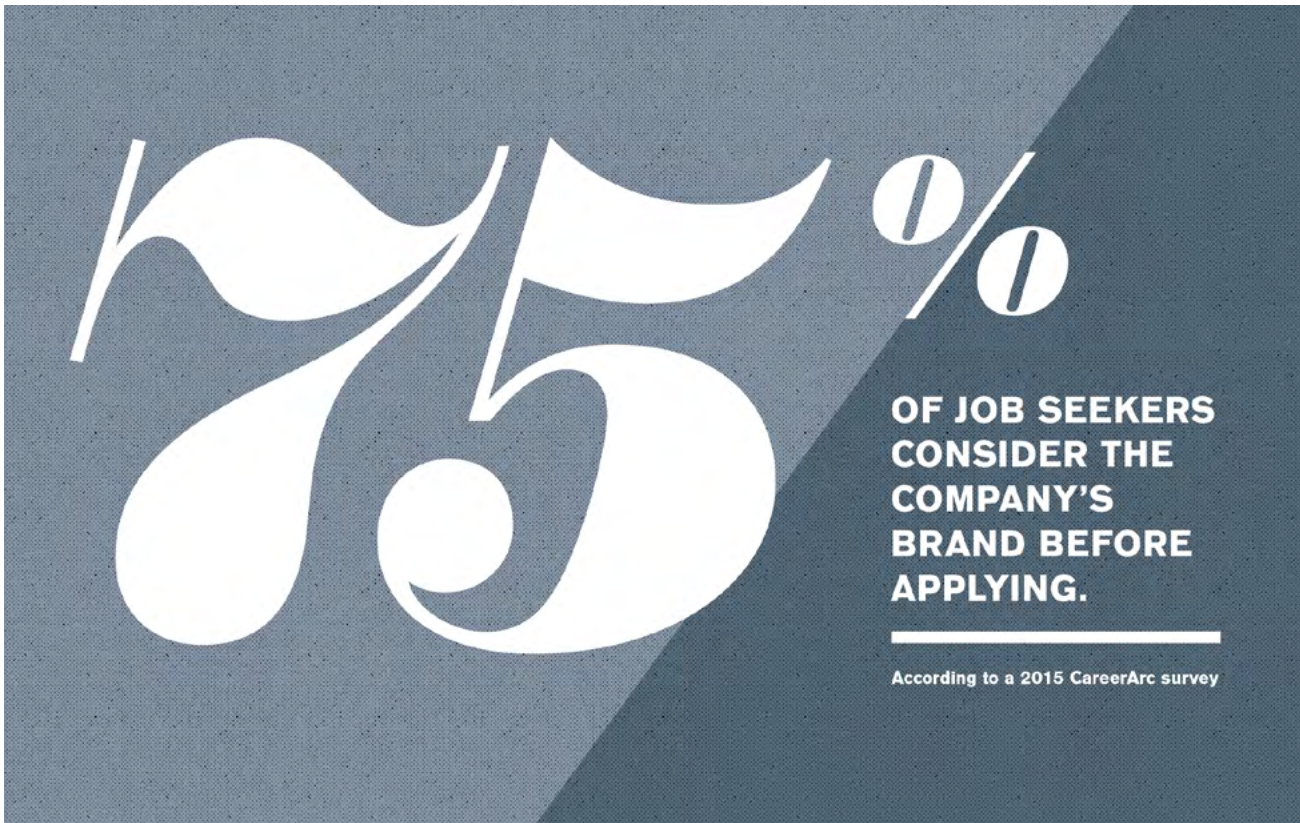
Put Your People First

Building a brand ecosystem must be done from the inside out. Your goal is to create a business environment that is constantly and consistently aligning and leveraging the brand's power to positively influence behavior. This absolutely starts with your own people. It is their brand. Design internal brand experiences that reflect the fidelity of the brand, and dynamically build sustainable value in that brand with your people. When they come to believe in the brand's purpose and promise, they promote its pillars with every transaction they have—both internally and externally. They become brand ambassadors. Simon Sinek said, "The employees must love the company before any customers ever will." According to a 2015 CareerArc survey, 75% percent of job seekers consider the company's brand before applying. Having people passionate about your business will reflect in your brand.

Get Your Story Straight

A change in brand strategy and identity can be upsetting to the market, and to your customers and employees if you don't explain why. Too often, you see a significant change in a brand's





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message or identity with no warning or explanation. This can lead to speculation and uncertainty about management practices, guiding principles, and stability. But a brand change is also a huge opportunity to celebrate your brand, unpack those compelling truths that separate you from your competition, and give your customers something new to be excited about. Be transparent. The best stories as to why a brand is in need of change are true stories. You realized that your brand was less relevant to your customers, or your products were changing, or you've merged. Celebrate the change with compelling storytelling that gives customers, employees, and markets clarity about what your brand stands for, why you're in business, and why change was necessary.

Be Agile

Very often companies resist change because they feel it's a massive undertaking. Layer upon layer of brand elements have been created over time that may not serve you well now, perhaps haven't for years, or the brand was never completely overhauled, just "refreshed" or "tweaked" to respond to market interruptions. You can only put lipstick on a pig for so long. But again, this is your opportunity to get rid of such unwanted baggage, and create a streamlined and agile brand, ready to

embrace your customers and respond gracefully to ever-occurring changes in the marketplace.

Be Deliberate

Do your customers know where your brand stands when it comes to environmental issues, sustainability, or human rights? Not to be overly political, your brand should stand for certain things, and your customers should know what they are. Be forthright in your positioning and your value propositions when creating change. Often brands are perceived to be out of touch or irrelevant simply because they aren't communicating their true position. Be intentional with your brand associations with other organizations or charities that your brand supports. You don't have to be overt to be transparent. Consider your brand a vehicle to promote community well-being, service, and dedication to a belief—being careful not to be boastful.

Be Proud

Your brand should be one of your greatest company assets. It is the one thing you have that can and should differentiate you from the competition. It should be unique, ownable, desirable, believable, defensible, and sustainable. Taking the time during a refresh or change to ensure that your brand owns a "space" in the marketplace is imperative to minimizing major revisions in the future. How do your employees feel about your brand? Do they take pride in their workspace? Have you created an environment that's reflective of the brand's promise? Do you provide materials and products they can proudly display? The customer experience is a two-way street. Remember your employees can and should be your proudest brand ambassadors. Make this change be about them as well. Value your customers, both internally and externally. Make this change be about them as well. Value your customers,

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both internally and externally, and your customers will value your brand!

Embrace the Change

Lastly, embrace the change your brand is about to go through. Use it as an opportunity to unify your divisions, departments, facilities, and associates. Be thorough in your conviction and follow-through. The implementation phase can ensure that you emerge from the change with more than a new suit of clothes. Planning will guarantee that you reposition and reset your foundation to be evident in every touchpoint of your brand. Make certain that your visual and verbal identity system is adaptable to the future needs of your organization and your customer. Make sure your brand architecture is set for growth and expansion. Search out latent opportunities that change will naturally uncover. Take your customer's experience to new levels with every brand interaction they have. Take your customer's experience journey with your



MEET JAMEY

As BOLTGROUP's brand principal for over 25 years, Jamey Boiter leads all brand strategy, design, and experience teams. He has been a featured speaker at national conferences and college campuses, a writer on the subject of brand strategy, design, and experience, and a featured blogger for Fast Company. An award-winning designer and strategist, Jamey has served on both the Executive Advisory Board for the Charlotte Chapter of AIGA, and the Advisory Board for CPCC Advertising + Design.