

RETAIL BRANDING

The New You

Small retailers see growth from rebranding

Branding and the use of recognizable trademarks and logos help consumers accurately identify the source of goods and services. They also protect a company's name and goodwill, which is critical to success in the retailing industry.

A brand is the combination of symbols, words or designs that differentiates one company's product from another. A brand is also the customer's perceived value and the company's major asset. Companies are valued more by their brands than their net tangible assets.

The corporate or brand identity of a company, regardless of its size, is the face the public sees and accepts for whatever it is. When planned well with superior visual elements, it allows the company to tell its audiences—customers, employees, shareholders—what it wants to say about itself and how it wants to be perceived. A good corporate identity will visually distinguish a company and its products and services from all others.

In creating a new brand, we must research every potential name to ensure that it isn't owned or trademarked by someone else. The process has to remain secretive, with only a few people involved on a need-to-know basis. If the name leaks out, a competitor could trademark it first.

A brand is made up of many elements:

- Position, or reason for being—what sets you apart for your customers.
- Name, the foundation of the brand.
- Trademark, your corporate symbol—the visible, easily recognizable face of your company.
- Trade dress, the combination of your nomenclature, symbols, typestyles, fonts and colors, which must be consistently used everywhere your name



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appears—including your letterhead, brochures, signs, advertising, package design, and Web site. All of these visual communications influence customers' perceptions before they decide to walk into your store.

Then why would a company—specifically, a small chain of retail stores—change its branding? Why would it want a new name and logo? What value do

they bring to a company that has been identified for years by another name and logo? Whether the retail chain is large or small, local or national, the reasons remain the same.

SUITE MOVE

Take the case of SuitePlay! (www.suiteplay.com), formerly known as Rec Room Furniture and Games, a small chain of stores headquartered in Naperville, IL.

The term "rec room" just didn't feel like a good match for the company any longer, as it had spent the past 15 years providing high-quality, customized entertainment furniture and game tables to families throughout the Chicago area, according to Rick Weber, chairman and CEO. It wanted a new name that would convey the depth and breadth of merchandise the company offers and better define who the company is.

Our branding firm came up with the name SuitePlay!, an intentional play on words, since the company offers products for people who like to "play" at home, while accessorizing the "suites" or spaces where they entertain.

Its playful new logo features a bright green pool ball and a slanted white pool cue inside, reminiscent of an exclamation mark, with the new name "suiteplay!". The company's new tagline "fun home furnishings" accentuates what makes it unique beyond its new name—gigantic new showrooms that feature products designed for entertaining spaces, with the widest selection of furniture, games and accessories in the U.S.

The SuitePlay! chain has replaced the "rec room" with what it calls "a toy store for adults." Its state-of-the-art entertainment suites feature high-end furni-

ture, home theatre seating, casino and arcade games, pool tables, poker and game tables, bars and bar stools, wine storage, juke boxes, neon signs, and authentic sports memorabilia.

The company continues to see a trend toward families spending more quality time at home with their loved ones and friends—and they are choosing to be more creative with their entertaining spaces, according to Judy Quye, SuitePlay! president and COO. She says their customers want exceptional-looking, high-quality entertaining furniture, games and accessories that reflect their personalities and interests—and SuitePlay! can provide a vast selection for customers to choose from.

FRAME-UP

Let's examine some other small retailers that either rebranded themselves or created a brand identity when they were initially launched.

FrameKing Express, based in Framingham, MA, wanted to grow its picture-framing business into a national chain, but its name could not be trademarked in many states. In addition, when FrameKing Express ran ads, rivals with similar names often ended up with some of the business.

We came up with a variety of names: FRAMEitALL, Framexpo, FullFrame, A-Frame, Artscape, but ultimately created CORNERS in reverse against a dark green rectangle (www.Corners-Framing.com), with the tagline "PICTURE FRAMING SUPER-STORE". The yellow and orange graphic over the top left corner resembles both the corner of a frame and the old-fashioned hinge that holds pictures in a photograph album.

The new name and logo solved the chain's problems, since they can be used coast-to-coast, and evoke the neighborhood feel of a local store and street corner.

FLOWER POWER

With a new chain of florists ready to launch in the Boston area, we created many possibilities for a new name: FloraCopia, florations, Flower Express,

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Bunches, and FloraMagic. However, we realized that none of these names had staying power. Ultimately, we chose the name KaBloom (www.KaBloom.com), because it has an "explosive" power to it and underscores the power in the name. We wanted to incorporate "The power of fresh flowers", which became the tag line. But that was only the beginning.

Choosing the right logo for KaBloom was a long, complex process requiring imagery that suggested a "friendly explosion." We realized that a standard typeface would be too formal to convey the sense of spontaneity and freshness that KaBloom was looking for. We created a fresh font that looks "hand-drawn" with the lettering in white, and the B capitalized so that it is easier to

read on a sign. The logo has a sharp purple background and a hand drawn yellow flower over the "om" that looks like both fireworks and a floral starburst of color. Yellow was picked, because it is a friendly, warm color, while the purple background provides a sharp contrast to yellow. We rejected green, the seemingly obvious choice for a florist, because it lacked explosiveness, especially when matched with yellow. Business is now "blooming" all over the Northeast.

CLEAN SWEEP

BrandEquity developed the name and brand identity for a new chain of dry cleaners in Massachusetts. After rejecting the name Neato, we chose Zoots (www.Zoots.com), which evolved from Zoots Suits, the stylized suits popular during the Thirties and Forties. We created a logo resembling a clothing tag trimmed by pinking shears to remind consumers that Zoots keeps their clothes clean.

Every interface with the customer has the Zoots brand mark on it and tagline "the cleaner cleaner", since Zoots uses environmentally friendly chemicals. Consistency is key with Zoots and every other brand we've created.

Branding is a key element to your merchandising system, whether it be for your individual product, your store, or your chain of stores. Your name and logo are the first impression of you that your customers have—and the impression you want them to remember.

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