



REBRANDING: WHAT TO EXPECT THE FOUR CRITICAL STAGES



Thinking about rebranding?

Let's first define what "rebranding" is exactly. Rebranding is the process of creating a new name, core message and visual identity system for an existing brand with the **purpose of repositioning** the brand within the marketplace. Rebranding is usually done for one of a few reasons:

- **the brand is suffering from a negative image,**
- **the brand was never very strong and it needs to be strengthened,**
- **the brand is trying to attract a very different, new audience or**
- **the brand name is being confused with someone else.**

Sometimes people use the term "rebranding" when in reality, they really just want to "refresh" their brand.

A **brand refresh** typically involves updating the brand's graphic look and feel and sometimes key messages but it does not reinvent the fundamental DNA of the brand. Conversely, a **rebranding initiative** puts everything about the brand under the microscope for scrutiny and results in big changes.

REBRANDING

Deep Changes

- Complete renovation of DNA: name, personality, promise
- Revamped graphic look/feel
- Change in market positioning and core message to shift the brand's reputation
- Reimagine campaigns and touch points to mirror new brand strategy

VS.

RERESHING

Surface Changes

- Update graphic look/feel
- Maintain market positioning and core message
- Refresh campaigns and touch points to mirror new graphic look and feel

A close-up photograph showing a hand placing a light-colored wooden block with the word "BRANDING" carved into it on top of a stack of similar wooden blocks. The background is dark and out of focus.

Four Critical Stages

Most rebranding initiatives tend to follow a process that consists of four critical stages. Some stages will move faster than others, depending on how many people are involved and their level of decisiveness. Be prepared for each stage to take longer than you anticipate. And keep in mind that it is not unusual for a rebranding effort to take upwards of one year or longer depending on the complexity of the organization.



DISCOVERY



DECISION



DESIGN



DEPLOYMENT

STAGE 01.

Discovery— Who do you really want to be?

This first stage involves looking at your brand's current DNA and comparing it to what you need it to be moving forward. This stage is about **possibilities**. Discovery is an important stage because it involves strategic decision making which will guide the balance of the rebranding process. Typical strategic questions to answer:

- **Why do we exist/what is our true purpose?**
- **What are our guiding principles?**
- **What's our mission vs. our vision?**
- **What does our audience need and want, functionally and emotionally?**
- **Where can we lead relative to our competitors? How does this translate into our overall market positioning strategy?**
- **What are the emotional drivers of our brand?**
- **What should our brand promise be?**
- **What should our brand personality be? Tone of voice? Visual design style?**
- **What's our vision related to our customer's experience with the brand?**

When these strategic decisions are made, the brand strategy can then be written down into a Brand Guide or Brand Platform. Writing down the brand strategy is very important since it will:

- **Guide the next three phases and**
- **Act as the standard against which you will compare the new brand concepts, messages and design choices.**

By the end of this stage, there should be a feeling of "we're onto something good here." For an optimal outcome, this discovery step is best facilitated by a neutral, third party.

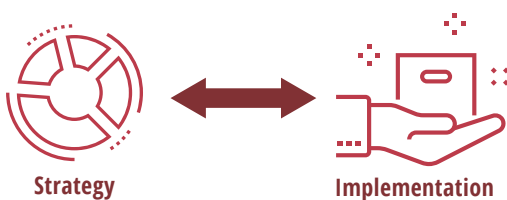
STAGE 02.

Decision— Reality check

This stage is about reaffirming commitment to move from strategy to implementation. Making the commitment to change and not look back. Translation, is your organization **financially** and **emotionally ready** to embrace the strategic thinking produced in the discovery phase?

For some stakeholders this will be a difficult time because they **feel vested in the existing brand**. It's important to acknowledge your brand's history, why it's time to change and what everyone expects will be the net results of rebranding. Some stakeholders may have unrealistic expectations that go unspoken, take the time to talk this through; an objective outside consultant can be an impartial facilitator.

COMMITMENT BRIDGES THE GAP



In this stage there's usually a presentation to leadership, such as a Board of Directors. Expect to talk specifics in terms of actual



dollars, manpower and **time** involved with rebranding. This is the time when you begin to **take an inventory** of all the assets and touch points that will be impacted by the rebrand, from signage, the website and printed materials to branded merchandise you may have stockpiled.

It is **not uncommon to get "cold feet"** during this stage because rebranding reality begins to set in. This stage ultimately is when you make that "go/no go" decision. Making the decision to halt a rebranding effort once it has begun has very negative consequences on staff and the marketing budget. To get a sense of time involved, see the last page.

STAGE 03.

Design— More than a logo

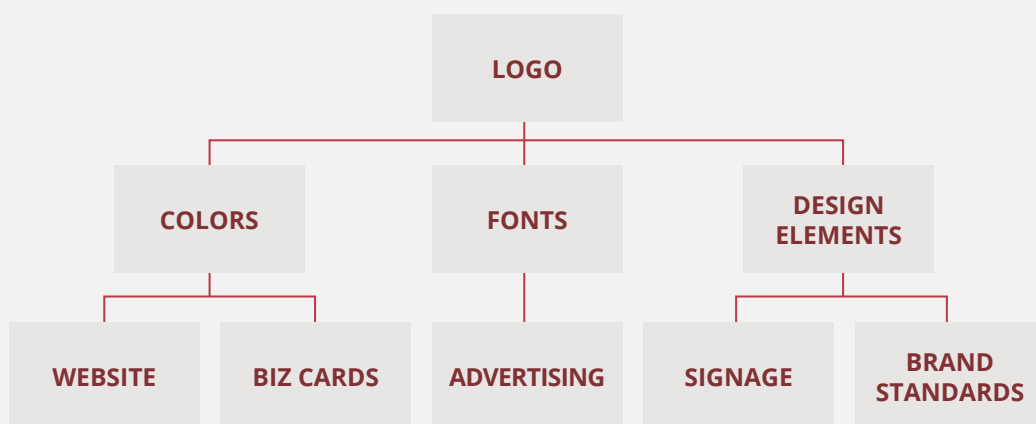
If you decide to proceed, this stage is the beginning of tactical implementation (a.k.a. getting it all done!). This stage, involves **two kinds of design work**. There is the design of the **customer experience** and internal processes and systems needed to make this all “on brand.” The other design work is the design of the **new identity**— name, visual identity system and the myriad of marketing touch points utilizing your brand.

Often there is more attention paid to the graphic design portion because it’s more tangible, familiar and seemingly fun. But there needs to be balance between the two types of design

efforts, otherwise you invest too much time in selecting colors and not enough time in creating the right customer experience.

As a practical matter, the **logo is a natural starting point** since the new graphic identity will have a **cascade effect** on everything else. Starting with the graphic identity also visually codifies your rebrand strategy and any misunderstanding about the new direction will often get corrected at this point. Keep in mind you are never designing “just” a logo, you are actually designing a graphic identity system with many elements beyond the logo.

Starting Point = Visual Identity



STAGE 04.

Deployment— Getting Ready for Relaunch

This last stage is usually the homestretch where you will be **sprinting to meet a relaunch date**. This stage requires a high level of attention to detail and craftsmanship. It's the stage that involves the production, printing, ordering, manufacturing, testing of the new and improved website and all of the other elements impacted by the rebrand.

It's also the stage where you finally get to relaunch the brand. Since you have multiple audiences to unveil to, plan to have at least **two unveilings**. It's always wise to **start with your employees** as your very first audience to see all the rebranded efforts. This employee unveiling event needs to be an "event" in order to have the necessary impact (see the sidebar story on the next page).

Once your employees have been addressed, then you can move onto relaunching to everyone else (i.e. public and/or your industry). In some cases you may have a special VIP audience that merits a "sneak preview" after employees. In these cases, you will have an additional relaunch event planned for them, after employees but before the general public.

Your last audience for relaunch will be your industry or general public. Planning your relaunch around a major event, like an industry tradeshow, will ensure you have an audience to witness the relaunch.

There may be a temptation to unveil the rebrand "as you go", as opposed to waiting to reveal everything all at once. Unveiling updated touch points "here and there" will only create brand confusion as the old and new occupy the same ecosystem simultaneously, don't do this. Wait until all of your rebranding efforts are complete before unveiling.

After the unveiling, there may be another **temptation to "use up" stuff** with the old logo on it— when possible, don't do this as it will dilute the impact of the new brand. Instead, bury the old brand and don't look back!

THE UNVEILING SEQUENCE



BRANDED FASHIONS KEY TO RELAUNCH



I once worked for a trade association with about 20 women on staff. One of the things I knew was a staff “pet peeve” was the lack of style of the association’s branded polo shirts. They were boxy and came in one size and one color. The staff was asked to wear these shirts for 3 days at the annual convention.

The rebranding effort was the perfect opportunity to get the staff into branded merchandise they would be proud to wear! So they were invited to view all of the merchandise samples and vote on their favorites items.

When it came time to relaunch, I held a “shopping day” in our conference room. Staff got to pick out the items they wanted to wear at the convention in the colors and styles that *they preferred*.

To add some excitement, we had a handful of the staff put on a “fashion show” to model all of the new branded wear. Now that got everyone’s attention! It was a fun event that generated excitement around the rebrand just before the big “unveiling” at the annual convention.

Time | What to Expect

As you begin to plan for a rebranding project it’s important to have realistic goals around the time and budget involved with this special endeavor. It is not uncommon for a rebranding effort take from 8-12 months from start to finish. Of course there are always exceptions but this is the norm.

