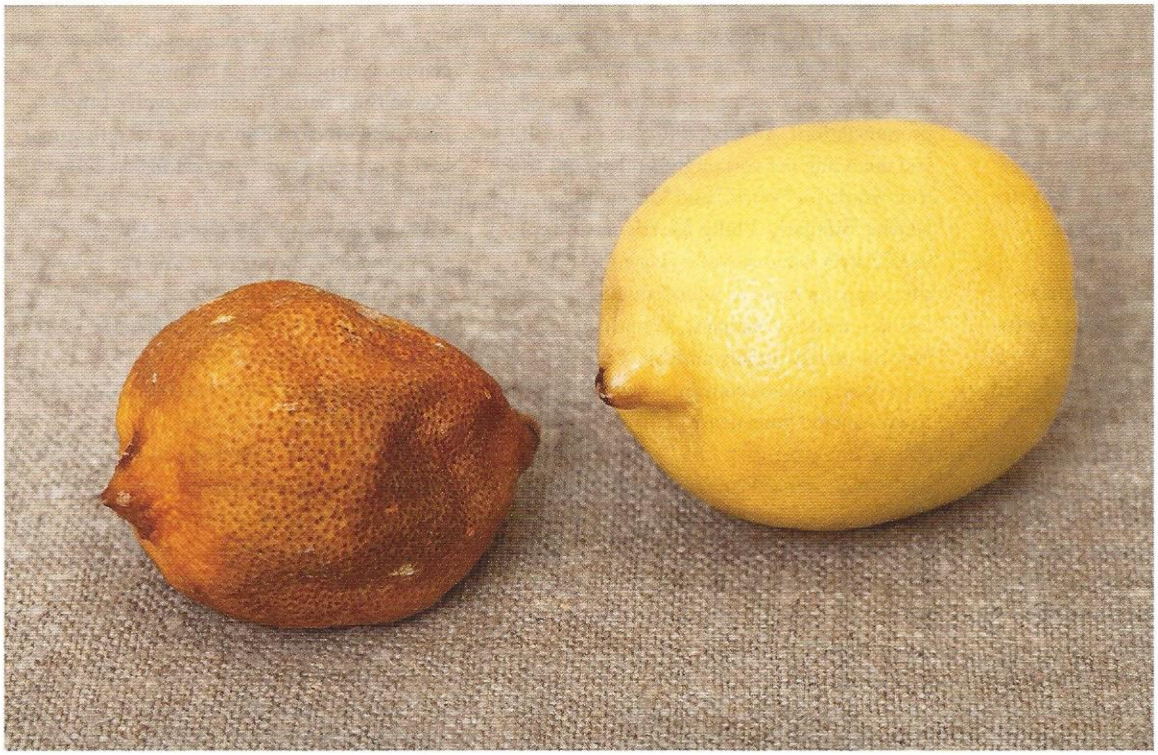

REBRANDING MISTAKES AND MARVELS

FIVE LESSONS LEARNED FROM THOSE WHO GOT IT RIGHT … AND WRONG

BY STEVEN BLUE

Lesson 1: Don't fix what's not broken

Coca-Cola learned not to tamper with a beloved brand in 1985 when it decided to re-stage its iconic brand with New Coke. The public was outraged and let Coca-Cola know they didn't want a "new" Coke. They wanted their old Coke, literally a quintessential icon in American popular culture. Coke responded within a few months and brought back Coca-Cola Classic. Coca-Cola Classic sales rebounded. Although New Coke remained on the shelves, it eventually faded from stores. Some commentators felt the move to New Coke was a marketing gimmick to regenerate interest and sales in the brand after sales erosion due to the Pepsi Challenge taste test campaign. Don Keough, company president, responded to the charge saying, "We're not that dumb, and we're not that smart."

Lesson 2: Expansion may require a bigger umbrella

International Harvester changed its name to Navistar International in 1986 when it sold its farm equipment business and entered the truck, diesel engine and bus markets. Although the name is made up, it broadened the brand and has strong connotations of movement and direction. As a 2013 company report stated, "Navistar was selected as a name with a strong sound, a resonance to Harvester, and a connection to its root words 'navigate' and 'star.' It does all of those things and has since become the name of the holding company over multiple Navistar divisions, International Trucks and MaxxForce Diesel engines."

Lesson 3: Respect your heritage but don't let it get in the way of making your brand relevant and compelling

Miller Felpax, a railway industry manufacturer, has been family owned since its inception more than 60 years ago. The founding products were innovative for their time but the full name didn't have the same meaning as it once did. The family changed one word that encapsulates the aspects of its culture, operating philosophy, and service to customers: "Ingenuity." At the same time, this name placed the company smack in the middle of the position owners wanted to occupy in its current and future customers' minds: an ingenuous company. The new Miller Ingenuity logo strongly asserts that it is a company that invents solutions to customers' problems, develops products with expert engineering and knocks itself out to deliver to customer expectations. The classic locomotive is a symbol of the company's heritage—the forward thrust of the image and the typeface figuratively leans into the future—it's all about forward motion.

Lesson 4: Names have to be understandable, accessible or at least intuitive in meaning

In the beginning it was unclear why Jeff Bezos would name a bookseller website "Amazon." The story is told that he named it after the river, of course, because of its size. An early logo consisted of a large "A" shape with a river-like line running down the middle of it. And the tagline was: "Earth's biggest bookstore." Bezos's ambitions were as large as the company name, and he eventually developed a business model that would include far more than books. The name Amazon continues to fit this e-commerce giant, doesn't it? No wonder there's a smile on the box.

Other names can be just plain difficult to figure out. When Kraft split off its snack division in 2012, they named it Mondelēz. The name has been criticized on two counts. It's hard to pronounce—what *is* the correct pronunciation? And, what does it mean? If you are a linguist you might understand the root words for "world" and "delicious." Maybe. Similarly, Philip Morris renamed itself Altria when it was trying to position the company more as a food marketer and less as a tobacco company. What's an "Altria"? Not intuitively understandable. One thing is clear: customers or consumers will not work to understand your name.

Lesson 5: Avoid initials

Unless you are a big player with an enormous marketing budget (e.g., IBM, GE, SAP, etc.), avoid brand names that are merely initials. If your initials are well established in the market, still ensure your tagline delivers a branded proposition or benefit. Consider the case of SAP, which is dominant in the enterprise market and complements its small and midsized business targets with the lines: "The Best Run Companies Run SAP" and "Run Better." Of course, GE has the marketing muscle and marketplace presence to make big claims. Neither of these brands have restaged their names but have evolved their brands' taglines multiple times to reflect marketing objectives and market needs. PPB

With more than three decades of management, executive, consulting and speaking experience in markets all over the world, Miller Ingenuity CEO Steve Blue (www.StevenLBlue.com) is a globally regarded business growth authority who has transformed companies into industry giants and enthralled audiences with his keynotes. In his upcoming book, *Outdo, Outsmart... Outlast: A Practical Guide to Managed, Measured and Meaningful Growth*, he reveals why seeking growth and surviving growth are equally perilous, and require different sets of plans to weather the storms. Follow SteveBlue@MillerIngenuity.

SEVEN STEPS TO GET IT RIGHT

1. Get clear on what a brand is. A brand is not just your logo. A brand is the sum total of the messages, interactions and experiences a customer has with your product, services and people. To a customer, a brand is the promise of an experience and the customer's experience of that promise delivered. It's a valuable asset to nurture over time.

2. Maintain control of the rebranding process. Use a third party guide because it is easy for a re-naming effort to deteriorate into likes/dislikes or what your spouse thinks. Ground your brand in a strategy that recognizes not only the brand's origins but also its ultimate destination in the current and future marketplace. Keep an open mind. Small ideas can get bigger and seemingly big ideas can diminish over time. Also identify those equities that cannot change.

3: Understand that a brand has two owners: the marketer owns 50 percent, the customer owns 100 percent. Yes, that's 150 percent in total. The marketer produces messages, products and services. Your customers experience the brand, and in the digital age, they are in ultimate control of the messages they receive. Check in with customers and, at the very least, include those internal players who have the most customer contact. The worst thing you can do is to decide all branding issues at the top level and dictate them to customers and your troops who must deliver the brand experience. You risk a loss of relevancy and buy-in.

4: Your logo, tagline, typography and design should tell a single-minded story. Every brand is heroic in some way. Its look, feel and message should tell one story. Think about what your brand fights for and against what odds. Consider what is at stake for customers in terms of their problems and how you solve them. By becoming a hero to your customers, you, in turn, make them heroes. That's truly adding value.

5: Never forget that a brand should always remain fluid. Some will warn you that changing your brand is a major risk. If it fails, it can be expensive and disruptive. However, if you do not violate a brand's established equities and values, you can still add flexibility into a brand that allows it not to lose relevance. For example, Tide detergent is built on consumer trust that it gets clothes clean—yet the brand has found multiple fresh expressions of that proposition over the years, even adding benefits to fend off competitors. Therefore, create a brand positioning that is broad enough to be as relevant today as yesterday and flexible enough to be relevant in the future.

6: Never stop supporting and promoting your brand. Successful brands are a living presence in the marketplace with a tangible relationship with its customers. It's easy to support a brand in boom times, but much tougher in down times. However, study after study has shown that brands that are consistently supported during a down cycle and gain greater sales and share when the economy turns up–over those who cut support activities.

7: Be a brand champion. Having gone through the discipline of crafting or refreshing your brand, appoint a key leader, typically in marketing, to be a brand champion. Set up brand guidelines and procedures to make sure the identity you have carefully created presents a consistent image and message in marketing communications from business cards to digital media, in sales presentations, in signage, at events and trade shows—wherever the customer will engage with your brand. *—SB*