

Creating a New Brand

Launching a new brand is a good way to notify the world that you've solved some problems.

By Bryan J. Rader / *UpStream Network*

One of my first tasks after joining a new company – Access Media 3, a multifamily broadband provider – was to develop a new brand. The company lacked a reputation for quality of service, client care or disciplined operations. Although it had recently improved, customer perceptions were strong, and memories of prior mistakes hadn't faded.

I heard from many people in my early days here. "Don't just put lipstick on a pig," some said. "Make real change, and then rebrand," said others. Yet they didn't realize how much change had already occurred. We had elevated quality of service. We were doing same-day appointments. Call center volume had dropped by 30 percent; service tickets had been cut in half year over year.

However, market perceptions lagged operating realities. Thus, rebranding was a key part of the relaunch strategy. I saw it right away. Many associates lacked pride in the current brand, and property owners viewed us as they did many other service providers. We needed to fix that.

We searched for a communications plan that included a brand to give the industry a way to rethink who we were and what we were about, so we hired a boutique branding agency from Chicago to assist us with this process. We told these experts we wanted to start anew. This was a "control-alt-delete" moment, a re-entry process. We weren't really renaming the existing company; we were actually launching a new platform.

IT TAKES TIME

They quickly got it and went off to work. When I sat down in their conference room a week or two into the project, I thought I would be looking at sample logos, designs, colors, names. But there was nothing in their presentation other than an outline.

"It doesn't work that quickly," they said. "First we need to understand your customers and your competitors and identify your market position." They explained that this would help build a "mood board," a "brand pyramid," a "SWAT analysis" and ultimately the new brand and logo.

So we went out in the field. We visited many properties and talked to on-site personnel. In one meeting, an agency team

member asked a property manager, "If Large Cable attended a party you were throwing, who would they be?" The property manager quickly smiled and said, "The one who RSVPs that they're coming to the party and then never shows up!"

Another regional manager said, "Oh, they would show up. They would drink all the beer and never get anything done!"

Throughout the research process, we had many conversations like this about our competitors and about ourselves. It helped build the right mood storyboard for the MDU industry and where the opportunities were.

This led to our goal of identifying who we wanted to be. What should the essence of our brand be? High tech? High touch? Approachable? Affordable?

Our agency experts guarded us against using outdated words, phrases or imagery that didn't fit where we were headed. They pointed out characteristics of others in the industry that they liked or thought weren't effective.

Ultimately, we found the right brand and logo design, which fit our go-forward strategy and communicated the right image to our team, our clients and even our competitors. I knew we had it right when I showed the new brand to a condo board president on my phone in a meeting. "That," he said, "is a company I would do business with." I smiled. "You already do."

The final step was to present the new brand to the entire organization and engage everyone in the process. We did this with an exciting "brand reveal" party filled with music, fun team photo ops, T-shirts, new brand swag and a celebration of the future.

Launching brands is nothing new (see Altice, XFINITY and Spectrum). But it is one of the most important parts of a strategy, as my branding agency pointed out, and can be a key component of future success. I'm confident in our new brand as we continue to "up" our game and "stream" ahead. ❖

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