

Five Ways to Rebrand When You've Changed Your Strategy

Introduction:

Nonprofits are quickly drawing their attention to the importance of *brand*. Branding is developing a clear identity for your audience: the better you can say who you, what you do and – a particularly important point for nonprofits – your value, the easier you will gain supporters for your work.

Currently, the OLC is reevaluating and updating its brand and strategy by looking at new and innovative ways to stay relevant and better address the growing and complex skills needs of Ontarians in the 21st century.

In this context, using a roundtable discussion, the OLC assembled a team of professionals from a variety of different fields – marketing, web design, branding, etc. - with experience in rebranding and asked “When it comes to rebranding, what works?” An open-ended discussion followed based largely on the need to rebrand when an organization’s strategy has changed. From this discussion, five main themes emerged.

1) Communication and transparency are key – both internally and externally.

It’s one thing to come up with a new logo, a new tagline, *and* a new strategy. But if at the end of the day, if neither your staff nor stakeholders can tell you *why* you’ve rebranded, then your efforts were fruitless.

Key Insights:

- Be transparent – don’t leave anything up for interpretation. Brief your staff on every detail of your new brand and ensure they understand it. Hold meetings with your staff often to keep them informed, involved and to clear the air of any questions or concerns.
- Identify your core audiences (both internally and externally) and create key messaging targeted at each of these specific groups.
- Ensure certain staff members are appointed as internal points of contact for specific branding issues. Ensure your staff directs any inquiries to these contacts.
- Begin the transition to your new brand early by slowly phasing it in. Internally, your staff should be familiar and well-rounded in your new brand so when it comes time to launch, there are no extreme changes to adapt. Externally, you want to ensure that by launch time the new brand fits in line with what you’ve been communicating.

2) Use ‘Web 3.0’ to your company’s advantage.

What exactly is Web 3.0? It’s the new direction of the internet. Gone are the days of static webpages with static information, and in are the days of creating spaces for your stakeholders to communicate, to share ideas, documents, and opinions.

Key Insights:

- Building online communities (i.e. forums) for your stakeholders is crucial. Creating places for your stakeholders to communicate not only allows them to take part with your organization; it

builds credibility for your organization and gives your stakeholders a reason to return to your website.

- Chances are if you're rebranding you're either redoing or updating your website. Keep your online information relevant and up-to-date with current information about your organization, and with what is going on in your field.

3) **Keep your long term vision in mind.**

You want to be relevant in the next 25, 45, 60 years. Keep this in mind when rebranding. Don't go for something that will only suit your needs for a short timeframe. Make sure to align your organization's brand around your vision.

Key Insights:

- No matter what you want your new brand to embody, make sure it represents where your organization will be in the *future*.
- Sell your strategies and outcomes first - not the logo. The design elements will be adopted by your stakeholders over time. Your strategy is what truly matters.
- Hold your organization accountable. Don't make promises you can't keep. If your new strategy says you are going to do something, make sure that your stakeholders see you keeping your word.

4) **Stay firm on your new brand.**

You've done your homework. You've thought outside the box. Now you're worried about how your new brand will be perceived. The key is not to back down if people react negatively to your new brand. Stay firm. There is a reason why you chose your new brand, so don't be afraid to show it off.

Key Insights:

- Before launching your new brand, identify where you may hit walls. Identify and target concerns and issues from each group. Take those concerns and make them positive by illustrating how the new brand actually *helps* them.
- No matter what, there will be negative feedback from your new brand, it's inevitable. Instead of addressing the different issues people have with your new brand, continue to restate *why* you rebranded. Firmness on your new brand will prove your organization's confidence in it. Don't be a jellyfish - have a backbone, but remain flexible enough to bend slightly where necessary.
- Prove your new brand's relevancy. Put your rebranding efforts into context by illustrating other similar organizations who have successfully gone through the rebranding process.

5) **Messaging should be clear and tailored to your different stakeholders.**

Each stakeholder is unique and has different needs. Ensure your messaging reflects that.

Key Insights:

- Hold a brainstorming session with your staff to ensure you have covered all of your stakeholders and potential questions they may have.
- Keep your branding messages as clear and as simple as possible. Prepare PowerPoint presentations or FAQ sheets for your stakeholders for them to relay your new brand to their staff. Your stakeholders' questions should all be answered in these documents.

- View your stakeholders as individuals, not as a conglomerate. If you need to communicate something to members, communicate it *only* to members. Not all of your stakeholders require that every message be sent to them.
- Talk *with* your stakeholders, not *at* your stakeholders. Bring your stakeholders along your branding journey, don't just state the outcome once it's finished. Keep them involved. Personal phone calls and visits speak volumes to your stakeholders. Don't let them find out from the media about your rebranding efforts, or it could create major backlash.

Our thanks go out to our participants for their contribution:

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