

Monotype

Change is the only constant:
How to decide when you
need a rebrand



It's safe to say we'd all prefer if decisions arrived with perfect clarity. Imagine it: An unmistakable signal that this is the right time, you've chosen the right direction, and you should go forth secure that everything will work out exactly as expected.

Of course, life rarely works that way.

The decision to update your brand is rife with uncertainty, especially in our fast-paced, ever-evolving, modern world. When is the right time? Is there a right time? Can you truly update for the future, or will you always feel two steps behind?

For better or worse, there are no universal answers to those questions. Each brand has its own set of challenges, goals, and customer expectations to meet.

But the good news is that with a thoughtful approach to your visual identity and a willingness to accept change as a constant, you can revitalize your brand and keep it fresh and in-step with an increasingly dynamic marketplace. This eBook will introduce some of the major factors to consider, and outline a way forward for brands looking to regain control of their destiny.

Standing on shifting sands

In the days before mobile, social, and even the web, updating a brand usually coincided with major inflection points. These could be external, such as the advent of television, or internal, such as the launch of a new product or a major scandal.

The point is, the moment was often obvious, and the pace of change was much slower and more predictable.

Those days are largely gone. New devices launch each year. Social media platforms add new features and storytelling experiences seemingly twice as often. And as those environments evolve and attract new users, the expectations of those users can change on the fly. For brands, it's a bewildering flurry of fads with no clear sense of what will stick and what won't. How do you find your center in all that noise?

Focus on the customer

Many companies make the mistake of evaluating their brand internally from their own perspective. That is, if they feel good about their brand, their brand is good. If other companies are using some new technology, they should too. This is an inside-out approach often built on assumptions and guesses.

Your brand does not belong to you, not anymore. Your brand is not about your perception, or your response. Instead, it belongs to your customers. They connect with it, share it, and make it their own. Focus on how they see you, feel about you, and respond to you.

If you aren't already doing so, you should be gauging your customers' response to your brand through surveys, social media, and other channels. Ask how they feel about your brand. What does your logo say to them? How would they evaluate your reputation? How strong is their brand loyalty? Ask what they feel your brand represents. Do their answers suggest that your brand may no longer be representative of who you are, or worse, who they want you to be?

Listening to your customers helps you break through the noise mentioned in the previous section. If you give them the chance, they'll tell you exactly where you need to improve. And the answers may surprise you.

Rebrand? Refresh? What's the difference?

The scale of your update and what you call it largely depends on your circumstances. If things are going well, you might focus on smaller adjustments and tweaks to your visual identity. If your brand is in the midst of a substantial change—if you're merging with another company or pivoting around a new product, for example—the scale of your update might be broader.

More specifically, we can break these down into two distinct approaches.

Brand Refresh: Literally a freshening up of your brand, as opposed to a wholesale reinvention. In this case, the fundamentals of your brand—such as your Net Promoter Score, social media engagement, email engagement, brand loyalty (however you measure it), and even product performance—may actually be strong.

However, individual components of your visual identity appear dated, or have proven difficult to use either internally or by your customers. Perhaps some of your colors, textures, and typography work well in print but fall short on your digital properties and need to be adjusted so they perform well across various media and modalities. These are areas you can update to keep your brand relevant, if not ahead of the game.

Successful brands refresh their visual identity all the time, maintaining an anchor in their classic branding but bringing new elements, new looks, and new excitement to their brand.

Southwest Airlines, for example, was already the world's largest low-cost carrier when they decided to refresh their brand. They kept their original color palette, but changed their typography and removed the airplane from their logo, replacing it with a heart containing all of their primary colors. Consistent with their new imagery, their messaging reminds passengers, "Without a heart, it's just a machine."

Rebrand: Think of this as a gut renovation. Perhaps you're reorienting around a new perspective, personality, message, or product line. Maybe you have a new public face or celebrity, or recently merged with or acquired a new company. You might be facing competition from a bold startup, or losing customer engagement as more companies enter your market.

As a company grows and diversifies, it's easy for the message to be fractured and inconsistent in places. This is why so many companies invest so much time in developing a standard elevator pitch. This is particularly important when substantial change is created by events such as mergers or large acquisitions that improve, expand, or extend the capabilities and value propositions of the company. The brand must continue to accurately reflect the quality of the new and improved company.

Holiday Inn is a good example of this kind of pivot. The chain was long thought of as low-end, cheap, and stolid. With many new brands entering the market, the 61-year-old company was showing its age. Holiday Inn decided to invest \$1 billion in a three-year project to refresh the brand completely. The new logo features a lively "H" hovering above the crisp new typography welcoming you to a Holiday Inn.

Many underperforming locations were closed and the rest refurbished to reflect the newly updated branding. To move Holiday Inn more firmly up into the midmarket, they introduced Holiday Inn Express as a sub-brand to occupy the quick-turn, low-cost needs of many rushed travelers.

Today, Holiday Inn keeps on winning JD Power Awards for being the top midscale full-service hotel chain.

Start simple, then get complicated

Embarking on a brand update can seem overwhelming, so it's helpful to begin by focusing on a few key areas without worrying about the full scope of your brand. These elements are the foundation, after all, so any changes you make will reverberate throughout your entire visual identity.

Logo

Seldom does a refresh completely change your logo. More often, the existing logo becomes the foundation of a new, updated look. You may change the look & feel, color palette, fonts, and more, but your logo should still remain immediately recognizable to long-term customers. Even if you decide to do a complete rebrand, your logo will usually connect customers to what they most liked about your brand all along, adding fresh new concepts to revive the brand.

Messaging

A brand refresh creates an excellent opportunity to update and improve your messaging. Vernacular and colloquialisms constantly evolve, so you'll need to examine their role in your existing messaging.

Especially when rebranding, new developments and improvements in your company should be clearly represented. You're managing your customers' perception of who and what you are, and how and why you've changed. Everything should be framed around the value you provide to your customers.

Design System – Color, Fonts, and More

Your design system includes all the components of your brand that give it life and personality—color, fonts, icons, imagery, sound, and the guidelines that demonstrate how each element should be used.

Design trends also evolve, often in a cyclical fashion. Does your design system reflect and represent who you are and what your brand aspires to be? Is your look consistent with what customers expect to see today? Remembering that brands evolve, keep a careful eye toward the future to allow flexibility for the adaptations and improvements that will inevitably follow.

As an example, your brand may use a sans serif font that, despite being somewhat modern in design, is slightly out of step with current trends. Switching to a similar but more contemporary sans serif is a simple way to update your design system and breathe new life into your brand.

Of course, modern design systems influence a wide range of touchpoints, so “simply” changing the font or color palette actually involves a meticulous process of research and implementation. You’ll want to make sure the font works well on all screen resolutions, for example, or that a new color shows equally true in print and on the web. But you have to start somewhere, so start simple.

Documentation

Ongoing consistency of all marketing and messaging entities going forward will depend upon information recorded in your style guide. Be sure to make this an exhaustive study of everything you develop and how to use each element in a manner that is acceptable and aligned exactly with your brand standards.

Question everything (well, some things)

Perhaps the biggest challenge of any brand update, whether it’s a minor refresh or a major overhaul, is staying true to your goals and vision. There will be a lot of decisions along the way, along with endless questions and a ton of second-guessing from all levels of your organization. This is a natural part of the process—after all, everyone wants to get it right—but it can throw progress off the rails and turn your customer-first approach inside out.

So: Have goals! Agree on goals. Get buy-in from goals. Check your decisions against those goals at every step of the way. Your goals must clearly reflect your commitment to solving the challenges and seizing opportunities that led you to update your brand in the first place.

You’ll use your goals as a yardstick to measure your results. Repeatedly and regularly ask questions and document your answers, keeping each of those answers in the context of the customer and their perceptions:

What are you setting out to accomplish strategically? List not only your objectives, the actual changes you plan to make, but also focus on what may be subjective. What do you want your customers and others to feel when they consume your content? How do you want them to respond?

- Does your branding revision faithfully reflect your current company identity, your brand voice, and your values?
- Do you feel that your revised brand will be well positioned to move your company into the future?
- Is your new logo, colors, typography, music, and revised content modern and relevant to today's market trends?
- How does your new look compare to your competition? To other adjacent companies in your industry?
- Is the appearance of your revised brand consistent across print, online, public displays, apps and your product packaging? In the case of rebranding, is the new appearance well connected to the best qualities of the past?
- Is your revised brand instantly recognizable?

Every organization will have different challenges, customer needs, and therefore a different set of goals—a different path for every set of circumstances. But agreement on a shared purpose is essential to success, whether you're just changing the font, or changing everything.

Where do you go from here?

After all that, what's the path forward? The most honest answer is that there is no one path. You have to find it for yourself. But there are landmarks along the way, which hopefully are a bit clearer now.

Perhaps the best place to begin is with a simple conversation. Talk to other brand stakeholders to get their perspective and offer yours. One of the most important aspects of any brand update is buy-in. You'll want everyone aligned and working toward the same purpose and outcome. So, start small, by listening.

From there, the path is yours and yours alone. But with an honest perspective on your visual identity and an eagerness to explore new directions, you can breathe new life into your brand and keep your customers engaged, loyal, and excited to see what's next.



Considering a rebrand?
Contact us today at info@monotype.com
to see how we can help.