Rebranded

From a CEO's perspective, there are just two kinds of rebranding (the fashionable name for identity change)—*have to* and *want to*. The most common *have to*s are spin-outs and mergers, for which, strategy-wise, naming is a no-brainer: Something new is being created, and old names clearly won't work. The interesting question, then, is not strategic but executional: How well does this new name, and mark, help to implement leadership intentions for the new entity?

I'll take a look at how five leaders addressed a *have to* challenge and then examine ten *want to* cases, for which the rebranding was a leadership initiative. Since my last review of corporate brand changes looked specifically at 2002, here I'll discuss some of the more noteworthy change efforts since that year.

Spin-Outs

For managers who must leave the comfort zone of a superbrand like DuPont, courage helps. On Jan. 1, 2003, a variety of DuPont units (makers of Lycra, Teflon, Stainmaster, and other brands) became Invista, a freestanding subsidiary. At $6.3 billion in annual revenues, it was "the world's largest integrated fibers and intermediates company." Consultants Enterprise IG helped with the serviceable, non-limiting name "Invista" and designed a symbol (dubbed "the rings of innovation") for "the excitement and expressiveness a symbol could add to the brand." Still, it takes courage, a leap of confidence to truly become something new and unknown. President Steve McCracken was determined to cut the DuPont cord quickly, to permit "a distinct, independent corporate identity, a vital new company with renewed determination and clarity."

It worked. Sixteen months later, Invista was acquired by Koch Industries, absorbing two Koch units to become the surviving brand. And DuPont would become merely its history.

A more conservative strategy is to hang on to the comfort brand as long as you can. Mike Fraizer, chairman and CEO of Genworth Financial, licensed the GE brand for five years and chose the slogan "Built on GE heritage" to convey the GE blessing upon this new insurance company (derived from GE Mortgage insurance and other parts of GE Financial), in preparation for its May 2004 IPO. His identity consultants, Klamath Communications, cleverly extended the GE association even beyond this five-year limit via the "Gen" in Genworth, and for distinctiveness added a clean and spiky compass symbol. (Granted, it looks dangerous, too—resembling a nettle or a sea mine—yet I think it's quite beautiful and a net asset.)

"Assurant" results from the quiet withdrawal of a major European company from a U.S. market. Starting in the late 1970s, the Belgian/Dutch banking

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and Reborn

A look at new corporate logos—and how well they achieve their purpose.

By Tony Spaeth

and insurance group Fortis (or its predecessors) had acquired American businesses. As it happens, in 1997 several acquisitions in credit-related insurance, who marketed to banking competitors of Fortis, were combined under the new name "Assurant Group," a name created for distancing purposes as well as for marketing advantage. Then, last year, Fortis decided to withdraw from the U.S. insurance market to focus on Europe. These and all other U.S. insurance businesses would be combined and sold, in what would be the second-largest IPO of 2004 (the largest having been Genworth, above). For this new company, CEO-designate J. Kerry Clayton had to find a new name.

A professional namer's first question should always be, "What names do you already own?" In "Assurant," Clayton owned an ideal peg for the new entity. It merely needed to be redesigned, to better represent the integration of all the units, give them a fresh start, and incidentally clarify to the units previously branded "Fortis" that they weren't being taken over by the units previously branded "Assurant Group."

Inspired by Clayton's vision of weaving their interrelated capabilities into a new fabric, designers at Carbone Smolan Agency wove a stunningly fresh circle mark, globe-like but not a cliché, and combined it with a clean, simple wordmark. Clayton sums up: "Assurant was a natural choice for our 'new' public company name and a great fit with our specialty-insurance business focus. Combined with our weave-symbol logo, it does a great job of representing who we are and what we bring to the market."

I think it was the best new corporate logo of 2004. My fellow jurors, in the first Center for Business Design "Re-Brand 100" competition, agreed; for its elegance and confidence, we recognized Assurant with a Best of Show award.

Mergers

MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS can set up a second kind of *have to* rebrand situation. When companies combine, there are three naming options: You can pick one of the partner names to survive, usually the acquirer; you can combine them; or you can create something new.

COMBINATION NAMES LIKE Yellow Roadway are often (too often?) the easy way out, agreed to by CEOs and their lawyers in the heat of an acquisition negotiation. When Yellow, originally a taxi company, acquired Roadway in 2003, "Yellow Roadway" was good enough for chairman and CEO Bill Zollars. The identity firm Interbrand was engaged, but merely to design a logo (and given only three weeks to do so).

To a trucking-industry insider, this combination of words says "$6 billion combination of two strong trucking brands." So to Zollars, who envisioned a passive holding company with these two independent operating brands and no particular synergy, it was a perfectly logical name. To outsiders, though, the name's a head-scratcher: "Am I supposed

"Am I supposed to know what yellow road they are talking about? I see they're in Kansas—is it Dorothy's road?"

The symbol, a box containing a highly abstracted "y" and "r" in their predecessors' logo colors, is clever and with abstract appeal, but a head-scratcher too. As a symbol of unification, it belies the holding-company posture while perpetuating reference to the predecessor companies. Instead of signaling an enduring new presence, it seems to memorialize the occasion of a merger. Lesson: It takes more than three weeks to think these things through.

THE THIRD MERGER-NAMING STRATEGY, as I said, is to create something new. In March 2004, Belgium's Interbrew, already Europe's power brewer with brands like Beck's, Stella Artois, and Canada's Labatt, acquired Brazil's AmBev and its Brahma brand to become, in gallons, the world leader. (In dollars, Anheuser-Busch retains the edge.) To brand the world's largest brewing company, Interbrew CEO John Brock chose the "something new" path and allocated months—not weeks—to think through naming and design. His goals: Generate employee excitement, express a passion for the business, and create something bold, modern, and unique.

Brock's internal task force quickly settled on the constructed name "InBev" as both functional and logical. Design was assigned to McGarry Bowen, a New York advertising agency without evident (claimed) identity credentials. While it's distinctive, the new mark tries too hard (I count four unrelated design ideas in it). By comparison, both the Interbrew (with its vigilant bird) and AmBev logos were stronger in stature and quality impression. Lesson two: Good execution requires appropriate sourcing, as well as adequate time.

Bigger, Faster, Stronger

YOU'RE SUCCESSFUL. BUSINESS IS GOOD, and there is yet a world of opportunity to conquer. But complacency has set in. Your people aren't as excited about growth and change as you are, and your customers and investors see your past more clearly than your future. Clearly, it's time to rebrand.

ORIGINALLY IT WAS CARDINAL DISTRIBUTION, a food distributor, but it grew faster in drug and medical supplies distribution, so in 1994, founder Bob Walter added "Health" to the name. But he kept his cardinal's head.

Ten years later, growth had been explosive. Cardinal had made some forty acquisitions, including such brands as Allegiance, Pyxis and R.P. Scherer. But Walter was frustrated, because the Cardinal Health corporate image had not also grown in scope and stature. Cardinal was now "the largest provider of health care products and services in the world," with fifty thousand employees in twenty-two countries; but who knew? Perhaps the bird-head imagery, friendly but less than global in stature, was part of the problem. Acquired companies were reluctant to feature the bird, too, which didn't help in signaling strength and coherence, so growth was actually fragmenting the brand. Despite his pride of authorship, Walter was smart enough to recognize the identity problem, and he found his way to a leading identity firm to fix it.

The "wingspan" symbol that Enterprise IG designed was a brilliant fix, abstracting "cardinal" with a flash of red that speaks to speed, innovation, and unity of purpose. According to Anne Bouchenoire, VP of global branding, employees responded to the new brand with "amazing acceptance and energy" and managers increasingly "think, behave, and act like one company." In short, founder Walter has successfully transformed the corporate culture he originally created.

KOREA'S NUMBER-ONE tire company had quietly grown to number nine in the world. President and CEO Cho Choong-hwan was determined to be quiet no more, and to seek global consumer awareness and respect for the technology, innovation, and passion to win that he calls "proactive tireship."

Like Cardinal Health, Hankook Tires evokes wings to help explain its new symbol—"A tire tread has been geometrically altered to suggest wings, flying, aerodynamics and speed," puffs the news release. I don't see the wings, but Hankook certainly looks a lot faster. British designer Neville Brody provided a logo that does indeed transform Hankook, from two-tired cartoon to contender.

mark. "Today we are bringing our look up to speed with our capabilities." Designers everywhere hated to see the great Paul Rand's 1961 shield go away, but clearly it was part of the image problem that Eskew identifies. Rand's bow-tied package evoked the UPS that delivered our grandmothers' department-store purchases. Today, UPS wants to be known for financing and managing corporate logistics; indeed, it won't even accept packages with strings, which tend to snag the automated sorting systems.

When you change the logo on 88,000 trucks, 70,000 retail locations, and a million uniform badges, you change the way the world looks. The designers at FutureBrand met this challenge with a trendy 3-D shield that gives UPS more weight, and a hint of a swoosh that adds speed. Like it or not, it was a confident and effective rebranding.

We the public, the customers, usually assume we're the priority "audience" for logo changes. But often the employee audience is at least as important, if not more so; in a sense, the mantra "the customer comes first," addressed to employees, helps prove that it is ultimately the employee that creates the customer. For UPS, it was vital to break down the employee silos separating the "small package" and the "non-package" units of the new UPS—the expanded supply-chain, financial, and consulting units. According to Larry Bloomenkranz, the company's vice president of global brand management (writing in *Design Management Journal*), the rebranding of UPS "has been a powerful catalyst for internal integration. It provided a tangible action to support our internal mantra, One Company. One Vision. One Brand. And it has literally changed behavior, inspiring multiple business units to work as a team that is aligned like never before." So the next time you see a logo change, look for the CEO seeking to change the corporate culture.

Sharper, Clearer

Sometimes the goal is not to expand but to sharpen, to more tightly focus a diffused brand image, and as the Bausch & Lomb case illustrates, to consolidate employee energies as well as brand assets.

In this case, "focus" says it all. In 2002, Ron Zarrella came from General Motors (he was GM's top marketing officer, then North American head) to lead Bausch & Lomb, bringing with him GM's respect for brand identity. Facing a confusing portfolio of homegrown and acquired vision-care brands, he quickly ordered a broad identity review focused on, "What is our business direction?" With consultant FutureBrand's help, Zarrella's team narrowed the portfolio from "hundreds" to perhaps twenty sub-brands, each representing a technology platform. Each would be more strongly associated with the corporate brand, which would add their strengths (including pharmacological and surgical associations) to its vision-care base (essentially contact lenses) to command a more tightly focused common positioning: "the eye health company."

The new logo, suggesting the path of light through a lens, conceptually supports this positioning while increasing graphic impact and shelf presence, to say nothing of mind presence. It's a clear example too of the use of identity, by a new chairman and CEO, to assert a new sense of disciplined strategic purpose.

"It took five years to transform ourselves from a conglomerate into an advanced medical-technology business. It will take another five to ten years to really get it right," CEO Christopher O'Donnell told me, three months after the July 2003 rebranding of Smith & Nephew. "Creation of a stronger identity and a more cohesive brand was an essential first step in moving into this new era."

Over several years, Sir Christopher had stripped this "medical conglomerate" down to focus on three medical-devices businesses, and he wanted to coalesce them more clearly in a common brand. In addition, he noted, "we had a feeling that our external presentation had not kept pace with our progress. What brought this home to me was the news that our slogan, 'First choice in medical devices,' which worked well with employees, seemed arrogant to customers." This triggered an extensive brand review, assisted by the London office of consultants Wolff Olins.

Guided by a new brand vision statement, "To be the best in helping people regain their lives by repairing and healing the human body" and the personality goal "Responsive, Confident, Energetic, Honest and Personable," Wolff Olins designed an lively orange brandmark with an "energy burst" symbol that one can also read, appropriately, as a happily healthy person.

It was named, in 1865, "Badische Anilin & Soda Fabrik"—quickly truncated, understandably, to its initials. Today, BASF is famous for its unusually long but oddly effective ad slogan, "We don't make a lot of the products you buy. We make a lot of the products you buy better"—or, essentially, "We don't get no respect!" The slogan succeeded in building awareness but neither the understanding nor the respect that BASF—as the world's largest chemical company—feels it should command.

Determined to correct this anonymity, CEO Jürgen Hambrecht committed to the proud, pre-emptive identity tag "The Chemical Company," explaining to a *New York Times* reporter, "We know the public image of chemicals and chemistry has been deteriorating. . . . Well, chemicals are essential to life, we know how to work with them, and we have got to fight back." The identity tag, in English, will be used worldwide.

To Hambrecht, the addition of the abstract two-squares symbol, designed by Interbrand, appears to be of secondary importance to the new slogan (though of more lasting impact). As a logo, its functional purpose is, quite simply, to add distinctiveness. Its communicative purpose is equally simple, to command attention and, in 2004, to signal change: "Take a fresh look; we are changing."

Beyond this, there is no need to look for meaning in the two squares. But if you insist, BASF has explanations at hand. To Hambrecht, the big and little square signify a lock and key, the customer's need ("the product you buy"), and the BASF solution.

Born Again

In the final group are four companies seeking (for better or worse) a fresh start, a reborn image.

In 2002, a badly timed foray into wholesale banking produced a whopping £984 million loss and a change of leadership for Abbey National, the United Kingdom's fifth-largest bank. A new CEO, Luqman Arnold, refocused on the retail consumer, promising to "turn banking on its head" by radically simplifying accounts and services. To help make this happen, he retained Wolff Olins to redesign the brand, for the reported fee of £500,000. The resulting September 2003 identity change was intended both to inspire and to signal "this radical transformation in how we think about customers, talk with them and do business with them."

The designers provided a wispy, fuzzy brandmark to be rendered in white (or gray) or any one of four other colors. This friendlier but literally self-effacing logo is so unorthodox that it can only be considered to be courageous. (One shareholder wrote, "You have done the most magnificent job of camouflage since the Second World War. . . . I know we want to be different but we do not want to be different in the sense that we are invisible.") It's hard to know, however, over time how well the new mark would have worked; a year after the change, Spain's Banco Santander acquired Abbey and, a few months later, revealed another new logo, incorporating Santander's flame symbol.

Fourteen years ago, British Telecom transformed its brand by adding the odd but friendly piper (actually said to represent one figure listening and one piping—thus, communication!). As I noted then in these pages, there was general derision, exemplified by the London newspaper headline, "Look what those naughty faeries have done to BT!" But BT stayed the course. Cost of implementation was said to be £60 million, to be spread over three years, and the piper soon became a familiar presence on U.K. streetcorners.

In 2004, however, a new management team under CEO Ben Verwaayen linked the piper to the outdated perception of BT as simply "a fixed-line telephone company" when, preferably, "a broader world of communications" should be evoked. (Plausible—my guess, however, is that the greater motivator was long-festering piperphobia.) Perhaps more importantly, Verwaayen had set out new strategic priorities and associated behavioral values that would in turn, he believed, drive the needed change of image.

An identity change would provide the launch event that he needed for this internal initiative.

With all this at stake, amazingly, no need was seen for consultants or designers. BT took off the shelf an already twice-used globe, designed earlier by Wolff Olins for another venture but rejected, and used subsequently for "BT Openworld."

BT calls the new symbol its "Connected World," though to me, it looks anything but. Try as I may, I can't see this globe as an improvement. In form and shape, it is just a cut-up circle, a poor broken thing, unlikely to enhance the appearance of items on which it is applied. I too thought the piper a bit daft, but I miss him.

In 1990, American Family Life Assurance Co. decided to feature "AFLAC," the nickname insiders were, unsurprisingly, already using. So the logo with the little blue family appeared. But to outsiders, as a name AFLAC is odd-sounding and awkward. This made it hard to build awareness, not to say respect. So: Change the name, or tough it out?

AFLAC sweated this issue for a decade. Then in 2000, ad agency Kaplan Thaler said, "We can make it work" and developed a series of outrageously funny commercials in which an intrusive white duck answers "AFLAC" to the question "What was that insurance . . . ?" In three years, brand awareness grew from 12 percent to 90 percent. "We hit a home run," says AFLAC advertising/branding VP Al Johnson.

Name awareness, however, is just the starting point to persuasion. By 2004, sales gains were slowing. CEO Dan Amos concluded that having secured awareness, it was time to move on to information—and persuasion. Advised by FutureBrand consultants, Amos also saw that a logo change could provide a useful trigger event for this change in advertising strategy. (The old logo, too, was an embarrassment; essentially undesigned, it spoke poorly of AFLAC quality, and degraded materials on which it appeared.)

FutureBrand designed a simple Aflac wordmark overlaid by the duck, whose impertinent intrusion triggers advertising recall and thus enables Aflac advertising to move on to more sales-driven campaign ideas. The new mark is a pronounced improvement, with or without the duck (whose value will diminish along with our recall, a duck that must know it is ultimately expendable). Note too that in text, as in the logo, AFLAC has been changed to Aflac, to help us accept it as a name rather than an acronym whose derivation is long forgotten.

I couldn't ask for a better closing case than Unilever, a logo change as notable for its strategic significance as for its human appeal.

Until now Unilever, like Procter & Gamble and other consumer-product giants, viewed its corporate brand essentially as none of the consumer's business—a view no longer sustainable in this Internet era of transparency and institutional responsibility. "The world we operate in is changing," says the Unilever rebranding announcement. "Consumers are demanding more and more from the companies behind the brands. . . . Standing visibly as Unilever behind our products will enable us to take the next step in transparency and accountability."

Unilever chairmen Antony Burgmans and Niall FitzGerald added, "The current logo has been reliable and distinguished . . . but not as open and friendly as it could be, not enough to enable us to put it onto the packs of everything we make." It's a reasonable guess, too, that the old mark's Twin Towers resemblance was an unspoken contributing motive.

At the same time, Burgmans and FitzGerald articulated new statements of corporate purpose (to build "great brands that help people feel good, look good and get more out of life") and of underlying mission ("to add vitality to life"). These ideas drove Wolff Olins' redesign of the brandmark.

The new logo combines a scripted Unilever wordmark with a lively speckled "U" symbol. Up close, the symbol becomes a treasure hunt—bird, palm tree, teacup, shirt—in all, twenty-five icons that sing about the diversity of Unilever's brands and their benefits. Together, with grace and humor, they express the corporation's "Vitality" mission.

Unilever—along with the spin-outs Invista, Genworth, and Assurant and the rebrandings of Cardinal Health, Bausch & Lomb, and Smith & Nephew, in particular—shows once again that brilliantly executed rebranding can revive, refresh and renew corporate spirits—as close as we can get, perhaps, to corporate rebirth. ♦