

# THE ULTIMATE REBRANDING STRATEGY GUIDE



It was a cold January morning at IHOP headquarters. A group of creative directors sat around a conference table.



“Our bread-and-butter is pancakes. There’s no way we could switch to burgers. That would just be bananas.”

“Ellis, I think it’s bologna too. But if we don’t do this, we’ll be toast. Waffle House will consume the market. They’ll totally devour us.”



And, like that, IHOP became IHOB — from International House of Pancakes to International House of Burgers in one of the more public rebranding efforts we’ve seen.

There are two things you should know about the IHOB debacle:

- 1 While the IHOB rebranding actually happened, the scenario I started this article with is completely fabricated, puns and all.
- 2 IHOB became IHOP again, but through the rebranding drew a significant amount of attention to their burger offerings — exactly like they wanted.

### So — what does your company have in common with IHOP?

Whether they’re old, new, pancake passionate, or waffle wild, all brands either have considered rebranding or will consider it.

But why?

In short — to relate to their customers in a more effective way and generate more sales. And here’s the thing:

Rebranding doesn’t have to be guesswork, and I’m about to explain how you can make yours successful.

# WHAT IS A REBRAND?

A rebrand is a reimagining of a product, company, or product line's outward-facing elements.

As an example, here are the elements we'll examine when rebranding for one of our clients:

- » Social media presence
- » Website
- » App
- » Bio
- » Picture
- » Packaging
- » Copy
- » And a whole lot more



In general, we look at anything the customer sees. We're looking for two things:

- 1 Consistency across all branding
- 2 Effective messaging to customers

Pretty vague, right? There's a reason for that.

Rebranding is an umbrella term. It can mean anything from a simple brand repositioning or refresh (think Google's logo over the years) to a complete brand overhaul.

There's a wide range of options in there. So, we need to dive a little deeper to define the different types of rebrand (and so we can give you a checklist to decide whether your company should perform a rebrand).

# WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF REBRAND?

Rebranding can take place at different levels throughout a company.

Here are some examples of the different levels of rebranding:

- » Outward-facing (logo, street signs, website homepage, etc.)
- » Product lines (products related to one another)
- » Product-specific (one particular product)



## HOW COCA COLA DOES REBRANDING

Let's see how rebranding has worked at Coca Cola — a company that has performed a rebrand on each level.

### Outward-Facing

We know the iconic script of the Coca Cola logo that we've all come to know and love. That hasn't really changed throughout the years, but it has undergone some refreshing (pun intended). [Here's a side by side for you.](#)

### Product Line

Coca Cola has undergone a product line rebrand recently with its Diet Coke brand. [You can see the new cans and flavors here.](#) This is more of an overhaul.

### Product-Specific

Finally, the most famous rebranding effort in Coca Cola's history is the flop of New Coke. That was a product-specific rebrand.

We can talk more about reasons these types of rebrands fail, but generally, I want you to have an example of each level at which a business can rebrand.

# HOW TO PERFORM A REBRAND

At each level, or even cumulatively, a company can rebrand in two ways:



## 1 BRAND OVERHAUL

A brand overhaul will likely be a response to an outside event or perception. Loss of market share, for instance.

We will talk more about the reason a company might rebrand in a moment, but for now, the important thing to remember about a brand overhaul is that you are dealing with every part of the brand and completely changing what you're saying to the target audience.

Let me give you an example of an overhaul rebrand we went through with one of our clients when we first started working with him.

We went [from this website](#) to [this website](#).

This is the visual manifestation of a rebrand that positioned Jerry as the preeminent writing teacher online. We've been through many brand refreshes since then, but the initial overhaul is where the heavy lifting took place.



## 2 BRAND REPOSITIONING

A brand repositioning is usually an internal decision to update a brand's visual identity or status in the market. Some call this a brand refresh.

The best brands are constantly updating to make sure that they resonate with their target audience.

They're also constantly testing to see what works and what doesn't.

### BRAND REPOSITIONING EXAMPLES

Again, Jerry is a good example of this.

We're constantly testing opt-ins and headlines to see what his readers respond to best. Take the [August 2015 snapshot](#), for instance, and [compare to 2018's](#).

The headline is the same, but the opt-in and picture are different, and the website feels more current. Just trying some new things...

It's also cool to see how these refreshes develop over time. Take Apple's iTunes logo, for example.

### ANOTHER NOTE ABOUT BRAND REPOSITIONING

It's likely that you have an emotional or nostalgic response to each logo based on a time in your life when you were using the product or brand.

That nostalgia is invaluable to a brand.

It engenders loyalty; it can create new merchandising opportunities; and, it can save your butt if your brand breaches the public's trust (even through a failed rebrand!).

Think back to all the times a brand has ditched an new logo for an old one.

#### Failed Rebranding Examples

» [New Coke \(78 Days\)](#)

» [JCPenney \(~1 year\)](#)

» [Gap Logo \(6 Days\)](#)

» [Tropicana \(~1 month\)](#)



# REBRANDING CHECKLIST

Are you thinking about a rebrand for your own company?

Here's a checklist you can work through to increase the likelihood of a positive rebrand.



## 1

### WHY AM I REBRANDING?

Let's get technical for a minute.

There was a study done of 166 rebrands done in the early 2000s, and the researchers did us a huge favor by narrowing the reasons why companies rebrand to four main categories.

#### 1/ MERGER

Think of the rebranding of William Morris Agency to WME, when William Morris merged with Endeavor in 2009. Not a dramatic change for William Morris (WMA to WME), but still a stellar example of a successful rebrand after merger.

#### 2/ CHANGE IN STRATEGY/CORE VALUES

This actually marks the rebrand of JC Penney in 2012. It didn't work (probably because they didn't ask or answer the questions here particularly well), but it stands out as an example of a change in strategy rebrand.

#### 3/ OUTDATED IMAGE

You know this one already. We've run over several examples of this, from Jerry Jenkins to Google. It can be a simple refresh or a complete overhaul that keeps the brand ahead of the times (or catches the brand up-to-date).

### 3/ OUTDATED IMAGE

Generally, when I think of Major Crisis rebrands, I don't think of visual elements. I think about the repositioning of the brand.

Right now, there are a ton of these examples:

- » **Uber:** In response to multiple PR scandals
- » **Facebook:** In response to hacking scandal
- » **Wells Fargo:** In response to fraud

If you check the box on one of these categories, keep moving down the list.

## 2

### DO THE PROS OF REBRANDING OUTWEIGH THE LOSS IN BRAND EQUITY?

This is an important question.

What if consumers love your brand already?

What if you've stumbled upon an iconic logo that withstands the test of time?

If this is the case, it may not be worth it to do a full-scale rebrand simply because of an outdated logo. Maybe, you just need some slight logo tweaks instead.

Google has mastered this, as has Apple. Their brand refreshes seem to somehow capitalize on customer nostalgia and propel the brand into the future as well.

## 3

### WHAT IS MY MISSION, AND DOES THE REBRAND FIT THE MISSION?

I believe this is why a lot of rebrands fail.

Instead of rebranding to be consistent with the mission the company has espoused over years (especially when the brand has wandered), companies try the "put lipstick on the pig" approach.

Radio Shack's rebrand in the 2000s is a prime example of what not to do. (More on this later.)

If your mission is no longer resonating with the marketplace, start there. Don't start with a rebrand to try and retrofit your mission to changing societal or economic realities.



## 4 CAN I LEVERAGE MY CURRENT BRAND WITH THE REBRAND?

The answer here is likely “yes!” But it might take some creativity.

When we rebranded Jerry’s site, for instance, we took the name of his paid product — “The Christian Writers Guild” — and rebranded it to be more universal — “The Jerry Jenkins Writers Guild.”

It was new enough to attract people who may not have been drawn in by the initial name, but it wasn’t so far away from the original that people who had been a part of the Christian Writer’s Guild wouldn’t want to join.

In your rebrand, find common threads that speak to your target customer, and use those to knit your rebranding effort to the past.

## 5 WHO IS MY AUDIENCE?

This question is paramount.

You’ve heard in sales that your product is worth what people are willing to pay for it. Similarly in branding, your brand is what people say it is. So, embrace your audience’s interpretation of your brand.

To do this, you have to explore who your audience is and what they are expecting to hear from you.

When we do this for our brands, we do an empathy map.

The empathy map leads you to think about what your audience says, thinks, hears, and does — and not only about your brand, but also as they go about their everyday lives. By identifying these facets of everyday life, you’re able to create an avatar of a target customer.

Now, back to RadioShack’s ill-advised rebranding effort:

If they had focused more on who their audience actually was and explored why they shopped at RadioShack, instead of trying to get younger folks to shop at RadioShack, their efforts might have been more productive.

# Do You Need a Rebrand?

Now, you know about rebranding strategies. You know whether or not you should go through a rebrand, too.

What did you find? Are you considering a rebrand for your company?

If so, we are happy to help. Get in touch with us below, and we can get you moving in the right direction!

**GET IN TOUCH**

