

7 Keys to Success in Manufacturer Rebranding

Steve Blue, CEO, Miller Ingenuity



No matter your reason for embarking upon a business rebranding effort of a company, product name, logo, phrase, design scheme or other such asset, which can be mixed and many, one thing is certain: execute poorly and suffer extreme consequences. There is simply no rebranding effort where the stakes are not extraordinarily high and the margin for error is slim at best. This history has been proven repeatedly amid a litany of rebrand debacles that didn't heed just a few fundamental principles.

With this in mind, globally regarded business growth authority Steve Blue, CEO of Miller Ingenuity, a 60-year old company that successfully implemented a corporate rebranding effort, offers these 7 best-practice keys for effectively executing a rebranding initiative:

Key #1: Get clear on what a brand is.

A brand is not just your logo. A brand is the sum total of the messages, interactions, and experiences a customer has with your product, services, and people. To a customer, a brand is the promise of an experience and the customer's experience of that promise delivered. It's a valuable asset to nurture over time.

Measure the branding work you do against these criteria:

- Discover and express the Brand Story only you can tell.

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Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

- Be telegraphic and focused in meaning.
- Balance functional benefits and emotional reward
- Create visible, tangible, and felt associations in the design.
- Provide a platform for current and future services.
- Assure current clients and invite prospects to learn about you.

Key #2: Maintain control of the rebranding process.

Use a third party guide because it is easy for a re-naming effort to deteriorate into likes/dislikes or what your spouse thinks. To rebrand yourself or your business properly, first set strategic objectives and criteria. Ground your brand in a strategy that recognizes not only the brand's origins but also its ultimate destination in the current and future marketplace. As part of the process, you must also research your competition to identify gaps, opportunities, and positions of competitive advantage.

Keep an open mind. Small ideas can get bigger and seemingly big ideas can diminish over time. Also, be sure to identify those equities that should not change.

Key #3: Understand that a brand has two owners: the marketer owns 50 percent; the customer owns 100 percent.

Yes, that's 150 percent in total. The marketer produces products, services, and the marketing messages about them. Your customer experiences the brand, and in the digital age, they are in ultimate control of their messages they receive. Therefore, check in with customers and, at the very least, include those internal players who have the most customer contact. It's best to include all the key stakeholders, including those internal people who deliver your brand's experience (from the front and back office through to line workers and customer service). Involve them in defining the brand. When you ask for, listen to, and acknowledge multiple contributions, people feel they have been heard and are less likely to criticize the end result. The worst thing you can do is to decide all branding issues at the top level and dictate it to customers and your troops who must deliver the brand experience. You risk a loss of relevancy and buy-in.

Key #4: Your logo, tagline, typography and design should tell a single-minded story.

Every brand is heroic in some way. Its look, feel, and message should tell one story. Think about what your brand fights for and against what odds. Consider what is at stake for customers in terms of their problems and how you solve those for them. Similarly, your brand may seize opportunities for customers — in story terms, you may help them attain a longed for "object of desire" such as a new lines of business. Heroes have are creative about how they help and do it faster than anyone else does. Of course, the people who make your brand heroic can be found within your organization; be sure to give them due credit. By becoming a hero to your customers, you, in turn, make heroes out of them. That's truly adding value.

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Key #5: Never forget that a brand should always remain fluid.

Some will warn you that changing your brand is a major risk. If it fails, it can be expensive and disruptive. Note Coca Cola's experience with "New Coke." However, if you do not violate a brand's established equities and values, you can still add flexibility into a brand that allows it not to lose relevance. For example, Tide Detergent is built on consumer's trust that it gets clothes clean — yet the brand has found multiple fresh expressions of that proposition over the years, even adding benefits to fend off competitors. Therefore, create a brand positioning that is broad enough to be as relevant today as yesterday and flexible enough to be relevant in the future.

Remember that every brand is in transition and needs to remain flexible — think of your brand as a buoy solidly anchored to the ocean floor, but able to weave and bob with the oncoming waves. External factors are continually demanding that you re-assess your brand — no brand can avoid them. For examples, presently unpredictable domestic and global economies are bouncing between boom and bust. You have to ask yourself if your brand is resilient and can survive under any economic cycle. The exploding digital age has turned most selling and buying processes upside down. Therefore, customers or consumers are armed with more information but at the same time are bombarded with more choices.

With so much noise — and that noise getting noisier by the minute — you need to consider whether your brand stands out and is engaging or whether it is a static billboard that is passed over as the world goes flying past.

Key #6: Never stop supporting and promoting your brand

Successful brands are a living presence in the marketplace with a tangible relationship with its customers. It's easy to support a brand in boom times, but much tougher in down times. However, study after study has shown that brands that are consistently supported during a down cycle, gain greater sales and share when the economy turns up — over those who cut support activities.

In a world of accelerating change, it's smart to take a snapshot of your brand regularly over time to maintain its relevancy and meaning. You need to ensure you are participating with, at the very least, a professional website and social media presence.

Key #7: Be a Brand Champion and Groom Your Brand Ambassadors

Continue to engage your employees in the branding process by developing an internal campaign that builds up to the launch of the new brand. Introduce it first with a company-wide celebration and posters, t-shirts, buttons and other giveaways touting the new brand and proposition. Make sure the announcement is big, loud, and fun. Ensure the new logo on the building, the website, stationery and your

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uniforms all change with the announcement. Don't allow the old logo to linger anywhere.

Having gone through the discipline of crafting or refreshing your brand, appoint a key leader, typically in Marketing, to be a Brand Champion. Set up brand guidelines and procedures to make sure the identity you have carefully created presents a consistent image and message in marketing communications from business cards to digital media, in sales presentations, in signage, at events and trade shows — wherever the customer will engage with your brand.

In summary, executing a rebrand must be extraordinarily strategic, not violate the company's cultural roots, be relevant and consistently supported, and place the customer benefit front and center at all times. It's all about them.

With more than three decades of management, executive, consulting and speaking experience in markets all over the world, Miller Ingenuity [CEO Steve Blue](#) [1] is a globally regarded business growth authority who has transformed companies into industry giants and enthralled audiences with his dynamic keynotes. In his upcoming book, "Outdo, Outsmart... Outlast: A Practical Guide to Managed, Measured and Meaningful Growth," he reveals why seeking growth and surviving growth are equally perilous, and require different sets of plans to weather the storms. Follow Steve [@MillerIngenuity](#) [2].

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[1] <http://www.StevenBlue.com>

[2] <https://twitter.com/MillerIngenuity>