

Inter- view

mit Markus
Petzl



Why does anyone found a „rebranding institute“? What’s special about a rebrander?

There are many excellent experts on branding. But it is a question of approach. A question of philosophy. The challenges that we face in the upcoming years in branding demand completely new ways of looking at things. When it comes to positioning, agencies are very quick to create a new outfit for you, which, depending on taste, may be pretty or not. But it doesn’t necessarily have much to do with branding.

A brand architect, however, looks at the substance of a brand to find out what was decisive for success in the past. But what about the business of tomorrow? It takes other skills to evaluate new possibilities and new markets. In these areas conventional branding tools have a blind spot. These days branding and positioning have to do with opening up new areas of possibility. With new contexts that are relevant for making a profit. You can get used to a new design. You can evoke the success of the past. But you have to make the

success of tomorrow possible. This is where we set to work.

How do you do this?

Above all: with the customer. In our work we use management skills that are closely related to the ones developed at the MIT in Boston. These tools can make new potential visible and perceptible. We design them together with the core customer team. We work with great care, but also with a very clear sense of purpose.

Can you explain this in more detail?

We help the brand to identify and understand its role on the market. From very different perspectives. This very often leads to both liberating and also painful insights. With this background we work together on creating the best possible future for the brand – what it could become. We open new possibilities, so to speak. At the same time we consolidate the customer’s belief that they can create the market. On this basis we redefine and sharpen the (new) position of the brand. We usually find around 30% room for improvement.

Don’t others do that too?

The difference in comparison to conventional branding methods is that we work with the core team to take them forward and are in fact really able to move them forward. Others promise that too, of course. They put their customers in a warm car with a full tank and drive them past some scenery, as if in a film. The crux is that it seems as if you are moving forward, but eventually you get out of the car at the same place you got in. From my time in branding I know that creative agencies very often get their positioning idea in their minds after the first two meetings. And then they try to package this „unique idea“ as best as possible. Looking back at this it is not exactly groundbreaking. As a client what you get is actually the consultant’s view of the world as your new position. Sometimes it is not too bad. But alarming if it is just a trend. Very popular right now are „lifestyle of health and sustainability“ or „back to craftsmanship“. So you go to a consultant to become more differentiated on the market and get exactly what everybody else on the market is about to get.

Are clients not put off by the term rebranding?

The marketer of a leading Austrian building centre put it succinctly: „You’re right. Write it down. That will scare everyone off who don’t take it seriously anyway.“

Are you the only ones who take this approach?

Of course we are children of our time. When we formed our company last year, there was a strong feeling of a need for renewal.

Jack Trout told me recently that his new book will be called „Re-Positioning.“ And the this year’s main topics at the World Economic Forum in Davos are Rethink, Redesign and Rebuild. Because of that I knew that we were not wide of the mark. And that’s the core idea. We have to rethink the way we work with brands. And above all how we start creating real experiences again - not just nice emotions.

We also need to find new branding techniques. After all it was us brand experts who played a role in beautifying the bubbles of the past.

Does that mean that brand consulting is becoming more sustainable?

Not exactly. Rebranding does not necessarily have anything to do with sustainability. If done in an honest way sustainability can be an aspect of the whole. At it’s core what we do is about developing a new, strong, long-term position for a brand. And to make profit by doing so. There is nothing romantic about it. We are working for companies. And the purpose of a company is to undertake something for clients, even after the economic crisis. And to make good money by doing so.

What is essential for that?

Above all, to create a process of letting go within the company. To move from the old to the new. You have to imagine it like the transition into a new period of life. This is a very respectful process of release into the new. The philosopher Heidegger once said that there is the person you became over the years and then there is the person you could be in the future. To become this person you have to walk towards

yourself. And that’s exactly what we help brands to do.

Does that mean that brands have to do everything differently?

Only if the old business model is still at the core. This is not only a matter for brand experts, but also for strategists. Generally strategy and brand have to be linked closer together in future. Our work is to look deeply into the existing substance of a company, in other words, to understand how the brand became what it is now. However this is also where the decisive turning point is. The old is the breeding ground for the new, but it is not the new in itself. The seeds come from the outside. In art this is called „to be kissed by the muse.“ Our real mission is to induce such situations, ideally by working closely with a highly motivated core team. The new position is born within the company and we help it on its way.

Is this simple?

No. Anything that promises success is connected to effort. In general people don’t want to change. When I get up in the morning I am secretly

looking forward to returning to this position in the evening. In the meantime, on a good day, the „active human“ takes over. With brands there is a similar rhythm. Change above all means effort. Old habits have to be left behind. A good rebranding project changes a company by 20-30% in a period of 2-3 years. Everything else would not be serious. Change also means learning. And understanding. And applying. This happens step-by-step. So Rebranding is a deeply corporate process. And success only comes with effort.

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