SPONSORED EDITORIAL

Q&A

Brand new firm

Q What 'brand considerations' must be taken into account when merging with or acquiring another firm? Scott Brown, digital services manager at Accesspoint, answers

A FACT: As firms grow, they evolve. Used correctly, company mergers or acquisitions can be a great way for ambitious firms to attract new audiences and generate exceptional profit. Mergers are complex transitions that focus on aligning equity in a business, shifting perceptions and migrating customers from one business to another. They require surgical precision, exceptional attention to detail and the full support of an entire business community. After all, when M&As fail, the result isn't just the loss of one company, but the potential death of two. Most firms devote most of their attention and resources to the financial, operational and logistical components of a merger or acquisition. Focusing on the implications of how the M&A will affect their brand is less tangible, often put on the back burner or simply neglected. It can be a costly mistake. If the brand is ignored or forgotten during the process, you will be forced to devote even more resources to cleaning up the mess after the fact.

An opportunity for a fresh start

Bringing together two organisations, workforces, cultures and product portfolios is challenging work. Firms are often afraid to disrupt the status quo, terrified that any change could be viewed negatively – taking a defensive posture and keeping their heads down and working as fast as they can to get back to business as usual. In doing so, they ignore the fact that in many situations change is welcomed. The reality is that you are in the perfect position to be bold and shake things up. It's a chance to rethink the name, identity, brand positioning and tone of voice. And while at first glance this can be a daunting task, it's an opportunity to revisit customer touch points, refine and redefine the customer experience, and drive bottom-line results.

Plan early and plan well

This seems intuitive, but it's often forgotten or left until it is too late. While a lot of research and diligence goes into the M&A process, little is directed at the brands. You shouldn't wait until the ink is dry to start thinking about your current brand and the new one you will be tied to. Instead, you should be creating a brand plan. Do your homework to develop a better understanding of the brand you're merging with and then develop your strategy emerging from the transition. Ask questions and get the facts. What are the market and clients' perception? What are the positive and negative equities and associations? This in turn will help determine whether you remove a logo, change a name or retire a product that has significant overlap in the combined portfolio. Most importantly, look to the brand horizon and keep in mind where you want to be years down the line. You can't move forward without having an idea of where you're going.

Refine and clearly communicate your message for each audience

You need clearly defined messaging for each of your audiences. Existing customers are concerned with how their experience with your brand will change, and are seeking reassurance. New prospects, however, are now open season for your new offering. Remember at all times to keep your brand messaging consistent to ensure a smooth transition throughout the process.

Additionally, make sure you don't forget your most important audience: your employees. Your employees can and should be your biggest brand advocates as they have the most invested in your success. They need to clearly understand how their role may be affected by these changes so they can continue to serve as a positive touchpoint for customers and be excited and motivated to work for the new combined entity. Successful branding works from the inside out. A brand is just as important as the location of your new offices or your new organisational chart. A brand continues to live long past the final handshake, in the hearts and minds of customers and employees alike. Law firms need to dedicate the attention and resources required to ensure their brand does not merely exist once the deal is done, but thrives in fresh, new and unexpected ways. While it's easy to get caught up in the numbers and financials of an M&A, the truth is that there's more to a successful M&A process than combining balance sheets. The most successful and famous company mergers on the market today achieved their goals because they didn't treat branding as an afterthought. If you're thinking of combining your assets with another company – don't be one of the 83% of mergers that fail. Remember, the companies that brand together, stand together. LPM