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# HARNESSING THE POWER OF YOUR EVOLVING BRAND STORY:

## Updating Tech Brand Identity During Changing Times

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# HARNESSING THE POWER OF YOUR EVOLVING BRAND STORY: Updating Tech Brand Identity During Changing Times

However many years your tech company has marketed its services and/or products, it's likely its messaging and business model have evolved as markets have expanded and technology has continually matured. Tech marketers are called upon to keep branding on point and current while still referencing core missions and preserving brand identity. The answer lies in successful navigation along that fine line between brand language that is recognizably yours while generating genuine excitement around recent newness and potential growth.

Successful updates radiate trustworthiness, avoiding the perception that you're just jumping on some buzz-word bandwagon or fleeting-graphics trend. The world must know it's still YOU talking.

Your next-era messaging will be executed across all your brand vehicles, including your website, collateral materials, thought leadership publications, press releases, social media, and the brand presence at your offices or other location. Therefore, it's important to conceive a creative messaging strategy that's adaptable to, and clearly expressed in each of those vehicles.

This paper looks at the process of taking stock of your brand while extrapolating your core identity to be brought forward into the new narrative. It also provides examples from IPS's brand progression after our recent acquisition by Forward Industries (NASDAQ:FORD), and our foray with Forward into offering new services into even broader markets. In addition, it presents and analyzes some notable brand tweaks and outright shifts by some other familiar tech companies.

**Consider these top brands' stories that remain current, strong, familiar & compelling:**

[Apple](#) (**phones**)

[Google](#) (**search**)

[Nest](#) (**software**)

[Tesla](#) (**social**)

[Amazon](#) (**retail**)

Each of these winning brands are perceived as:

- on top of latest trends and technologies
- excellent at delivering the services and/or product(s) as advertised
- smart
- stable
- trustworthy

## WHAT'S PROMPTING THE UPDATE?

Get started by asking your team and other key staff to evaluate what's prompting the update: Where are we, and what strategic approach should we take? The answers (and the ensuing negotiations!) will eventually reveal a clear-cut project roadmap.

The need to update the brand may be either proactive or reactive. And while each tech brand story is unique, there are four fundamental reasons for rebranding.

### 1. Brand and/or core messaging are outdated

When graphics or slogans are tired or outdated, they don't speak to current trends.

#### Use Case: Dropbox

Dropbox was developed by MIT students and launched in 2007 as a file sharing tool. After ten years, they took on an epic rebranding effort.

Dropbox was becoming stagnant and had to transform messaging from 'gain access to where the work is stored' to 'collaborate where the work happens'. Dropbox's mission was now helping teams stay in sync rather than syncing up files.

Internal design teams worked with design company COLLINS and other external partners to develop a new colorful and fun identity. Changes to the logo were subtle, but the font is cleaner, and the icon was now less "boxy" and more a series of surfaces implying room for collaboration.



[Dropbox.design](#) explains:

*Our old logo was a blue box that implied, "Dropbox is a great place to store stuff." The new one is cleaner and simpler. And we've evolved it from a literal box, to a collection of surfaces to show that Dropbox is an open platform, and a place for creation.*

Dropbox is now poised to connect with a new generation of outside-the-box collaborative business teams.

## 2. Brand and Message are Ineffective

The message is not resonating with the brand's target audience. Sales and client retention are suffering as the audience either doesn't get it or doesn't care. Newer brands may have to rethink their abstract approach; established brands may hit a growth wall with their existing branding (such as in Dropbox's situation).

### Use Case: Instagram

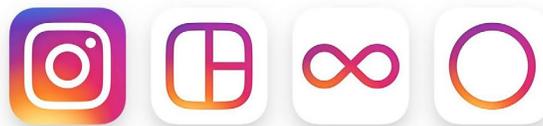
Instagram launched in 2010 as a photo and video sharing site. It had 1 million users after just two months. It owed some of its success to evolving from an iOS-only launch to a platform that could be used on multiple devices. It added functionality for messaging and multi-file posts. While acquired by Facebook in April 2012, Instagram did not make any overt changes to its interface or branding until May 2016.

The skeuomorphism camera-image logo did not effectively represent the true functionality of Instagram. Ian Spalter, Head of Design at Instagram, explained:

*"We realized we needed to move past a rendered camera to get a flexible, scalable glyph... The question then became, how far do we go? If you abstract too much, the glyph doesn't feel tied to the history and soul of Instagram. If you make it too literal, it's hard to justify changing from what we currently have."*



Unified icons were then created for Instagram's entire suite of products: Hyperlapse, Layout, and Boomerang:



The interface was refreshed by removing its color and noise, replacing them with a "simpler, more consistent design that helps people's photos and videos shine," according to Spalter.

Instagram is now a household word. It has 1 billion monthly active users and there are still those who do not yet have an IG Handle. This brand refresh should successfully reinforce that Instagram is for more than simply photo sharing.

### 3. Damage Control

Many great brands undergo serious PR crises - some dating back to years before the advent of social media and digital content.

#### Use Case: Tylenol

You may not remember the terrible [Tylenol package tampering crisis](#) responsible for the deaths of 7 people during the 1980's, but J& J's immediate response to it is probably the reason the brand remains a mainstay more than 30 years later. And it's still current news!

With today's rapid news cycle and viral information feeds, the risk of sustaining a damaging brand hit has escalated. Depending on the severity of the issue, brands may need to rework language and graphics to provide corrective spin to the issue at hand.



#### Use Case: Airbnb

Launched in 2008, Airbnb's original business model gave little opportunity to manage services in a way that would benefit both of their key stakeholders: the host consumers and the traveler consumers.

In 2011, a San Francisco Airbnb host's home was vandalized. Her blog said that property was damaged and her belongings were stolen. The blog went viral and Airbnb did not initially offer any damage restitution. The Washington Post reported that Airbnb's CEO and Co-founder Brian Chesky "felt paralyzed" over the situation, and that they had "really screwed up" and during the first four weeks of aftermath the story went viral.

Brian Chesky admitted in a blog that Airbnb went through a "crash course in crisis management." In addition to their existing program, they added a \$1 million Host Guarantee program against damages.

After crisis recovery, Airbnb repositioned their brand with their WELCOME HOME project. DesignStudio created a welcoming, 'homey' logo to represent belonging that features a symbol called a "Bélo." The apps and the website enhanced the Airbnb experience with new photography, typography and color. A digital platform allowed users to log in, where they would receive their own unique Bélo.



The new symbol was part of the extensive logo re-design (pictured right).

At brand launch, Airbnb users embraced the change. Over 80,000 people designed their own version of the [Bélo](#). While that option is no longer available to users, Airbnb's value has grown to about \$25 billion according to the Wall Street Journal.



## 4. You've undergone a change in corporate structure or status: brand messaging is no longer accurate

Often after a corporate change, such as a merger or acquisition, a brand's graphics do not communicate its updated status; the brand language no longer tells an accurate story. The rebranding roadmap depends on the new entity's strategy:

- **Absorb** one or more brands into an existing brand – update the existing brand for new functionality
- **Merge** brands into one new holistic brand – introduce the new brand
- **Create** a new brand umbrella for related brands – market both individual brands and the capabilities under the umbrella brand (read on)

### Use Case: IPS/Forward Industries

In January of 2018 our company IPS ([intelligentproduct.solutions](http://intelligentproduct.solutions)) was acquired by [Forward Industries](http://ForwardIndustries.com) (NASDAQ:FORD). Forward was known as a manufacturing source of high quality, cut and sewn soft cases for products distributed into multiple markets, with its largest blue-chip multinational client base in the medical/healthcare industry. Its portfolio also includes a range of premium hard protective cases for cameras, computers and other peripherals. The firm provides a 24/7 international logistics support, product distribution and quality assurance services. Over the past 35 years, the international client base reflects the very high reputation for quality of the company. In business 10 years, IPS was well known and highly regarded in full service product design/development, with a heavy emphasis on connected products and a loyal, repeat customer base. While continuing to operate independently, the acquisition brought two highly complementary services offerings together with virtually no overlap, presenting myriad opportunities for a joint services offering into both companies' existing customer bases. The strategy retains the original company look and feel for each, but 'brands the merger' by integrating brand elements into each from the other.

At a joint Forward/IPS session, design and management leadership reviewed the existing brand messaging and visual branding approaches for each of the companies to understand the underlying philosophies of each. The immediate goal was to create a blended logo to be used on next gen business cards for each of the firms. We discussed the importance of clarity, putting forth only that messaging which could be delivered upon in the early stages of the acquisition. During the 3-hour meeting, we compared and contrasted each of the 2 approaches with these questions in mind:

**What are key messaging points for each?**

**Where are we similar?**

**Is there any conflict or overlap?**

Company	Key Services	Key Messaging
IPS	Design & Engineering	Expertise, Precision, Relationships, Enthusiasm
Forward Industries	Manufacturing, Logistics/Distribution	Quality, Relationships, Custom Solutions, Innovation

**Noticeable affinity in the brands' messages was also evidenced in the logos, both evoking optimism and moving ahead:**



Next, the IPS design team set out to hybridize some of the logo elements as well as other visual and messaging features into a format for business cards for each firm to:

- ▶ Retain original brand identity while...
- ▶ Communicating the newness and excitement of the partially blended brand.
- ▶ Note that the original IPS tag line, “Unrelenting Dedication to Great Product Design” now reads “Unrelenting Dedication to Great Product Design and Manufacturing” on the backs of the blended brand cards (below, right).

### Original Cards



Notes: 1) at the time of acquisition, both companies favored a clean, open design approach to card fronts with a more saturated approach to the back. 2) IPS' iconic triangle/pyramid motif appear on each side with modifications, as does Forward's optimistic dual leaf motif.

### Blended Brand Cards

Notes: 1) Cards are die cut to blend original corner shapes incorporating 3 rounded corners with one right angle corner at the top right of card fronts to communicate the upward and onward motion; the joint force of combined company potential. 2) Card backs feature the most blended design with side by side logo icons knocking out of the original IPS pyramid, now in Forward blue on that card. 3) Forward's optimistic leaf motif provides the ground.



## Results

The new, blended brand business cards have been universally well received, prompting appropriate interest and desired questions from clients and prospects alike. The attention has brought inquiries for extended, blended services from existing customers. New prospects and customers are engaging us in more end-to-end projects as many companies, large and small, are opting to outsource product design and manufacturing services rather than to incur the increased overhead inherent in paying the salaries of large internal teams. Many are pleased to choose one-stop shopping with a single, trusted source.

## Conclusion

*Strategizing brand messaging can be daunting, but especially when your team holds the ultimate responsibility to market an ever-morphing tech brand. Here are a few quick tips to keep in mind:*

- **To construct your brand's future, build on its past.**  
Where your past successes lie can provide a solid foundation for continued success.
- **Be protective of your brand, but not protectionist.**  
While ensuring an updated brand is recognizable to all stakeholders, be bold about using messaging vehicles to positively communicate what's new.
- **Tell the new story with everything in your arsenal.**  
Updates don't have to be rolled out all at once, but be sure that every aspect of the brand concurs with the current state of your evolution; logo, collateral, websites, social media, etc.
- **Don't jump the gun.**  
Design each update to communicate the services or products you are delivering into the current marketplace.
- **Be sure you're ready to deliver on updated brand messaging!**  
Beware of the oversell. Don't launch updates making claims about products or services if the company is not 100% ready to deliver them.

