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Branding in the Real World: Acronym Branding



Imagine you're Head of Brand for a 50-year-old fictional company called Colorado Construction Consultants. When CCC started, the owners chose a descriptive name to define what the 20 people in the company did. Today, CCC employs 6,000 employees, has customers all across the country, and delivers services to a host of other industries beyond construction. Over time as the company evolved, it abbreviated its name to CCC.

This year, you're preparing for a major home improvement conference where CCC will launch its new software and service offering resulting from an acquisition that is poised to position the company as a leader in the growing Internet of Things (IoT) segment in home solutions. It's clear that the words behind the CCC acronym no longer describe the

breadth and depth of what the business does today. The board has recently approved a brand refresh to communicate the company's new direction. As part of the discussion you've been asked to put together a recommendation to the Board that as part of the rebrand, the company consider a name change too.

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Investing in Emotional Bonds to Find the Missing Multiplier

(<https://www.brandingmag.com/2016/09/06/investing-in-emotional-bonds-to-find-the-missing-multiplier/>)

You begin to make the business case by outlining all of the challenges associated with managing the CCC brand:

- We're constantly having to explain what CCC means and how the name doesn't describe what we do today.
- It's difficult to create meaning and personality.
- We waste precious time and resources explaining what the name means, instead of touting the benefits to customers.
- It's hard to "own" the name from a legal and search (SEO) standpoint.
- It's expensive to drive meaning, as we have to overtly compensate the other elements of the brand to drive distinction (elements like logo, design system, retail experience, people and culture).
- We face the potential of competing against all other types of acronyms, including literally hundreds of other companies, associations, and non-profits.
- We struggle to show up on page 1 for search results on CCC despite a big effort in improving SEO.

- We future prove ourselves by creating a name that extends to new market opportunities and represent the breadth of what we do.
- We run the risk of a new undesirable acronym emerging that would be very harmful and wary of stories such as that of ISIS Pharmaceuticals (<https://money.cnn.com/2015/12/18/investing/isis-pharmaceuticals-name-change/>).

You put together a list of companies that have been able to build a strong equity in an acronym. From GE and IBM, to AARP and USAA these brands have been able to “own the letters,” partly investing millions of dollars to earn that recognition. You also note that a quick “sniff test” in assessing whether a company is well-known for an acronym is the extent to which they appear as the first organic search term in a Google search.

SEE ALSO:

The Language of Branding: Verbal Identity in the Chinese Market

(<https://www.brandingmag.com/2016/01/23/language-branding-verbal-identity-chinese-market/>)

You feel there is a strong strategic and theoretical case for a name change, but what about the practical and emotional aspects of the decision. Members of the board still associate strongly with the origins of the company and discussions would be viewed through a personal lens, no matter how facts were presented.

You shift gears and you begin to make the case for keeping the name:

- In addition, with business booming some may question the need to make a change with a “if it ain’t broke”

argument and the potential disruption to business, customers, and associates in having to implement and explain the brand transition.

- Finding a unique own-able new name has never been more challenging with the explosion of new companies and brands over the last decade. An own-able descriptive name is almost impossible to find.
- The cost of making the change is often ignored. From legal to signage, a new name adds costs that we haven't budgeted.
- Although other companies with the CCC name exist, none play in our category. Our latest brand research shows we have equity with our existing customer base and high familiarity within our core market.

As you contemplate the other side of the coin, the benefits of changing the CCC name appear less straightforward and the trade-offs don't appear to reveal a clear decision path.

The board meeting is 1 week away and there is a lot more work to do. What other nuances might there be? What else haven't you thought about? How do we ultimately make the go or no-go decision.

What comments or suggestions would you have to help make a go or no-go decision?

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6 articles

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