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Guerrilla Sales & Marketing

A Gap in Judgment

Lori Turner | Special to The Daily News

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The last few weeks, whenever the topic of branding comes up, conversation inevitably shifts to the Gap logo debacle. Why? Because consumers don't expect Fortune 250 companies to make such colossal and obvious missteps.

As thousands of consumers voiced their opinions – quite loudly from veritable social media rooftops – anxiety stirred among small business owners embarking on branding initiatives of their own. The natural question was, "If the Gap can fail at branding, what chance do I stand?"

Why all the fuss? On Oct. 4, Gap nonchalantly introduced a new logo on its website, claiming it was more modern and relevant to its targeted customers (average age of 28).

To say consumer reaction was negative is an understatement. Public sentiment decried the logo as "outdated." AdAge called it "something a child created using a clip-art gallery."



Public reaction to the new Gap logo was overwhelmingly negative.

On the defensive, Gap executives issued a statement that they welcomed the passionate consumer feedback and would consider it as they continue to evolve the brand – an indication they would proceed with the rollout as planned. They also announced plans for a future crowd-sourcing promotion, in which the public

could submit future logo ideas.

The reaction was equally negative.

Days later, Gap backtracked, announcing the restoration of the old logo and canceling any crowd-sourcing plans.

A Gap executive described the cost of creating and killing the new logo as "minimal, almost inconsequential," but the cost to brand reputation is certainly consequential.

So, where did Gap go wrong? The mistake wasn't in evolving their logo; it was in the testing and execution. Gap's four missteps:

No. 1 – Uninspired design. Most agree the new logo creative was uninspired. Ironically, the intention to appear more modern resulted in a dated look. Design is subjective, however, which is why consumer testing is important.

No. 2 – Rushing rollout. With a popular, history-rich consumer brand, the introduction of brand changes should be carefully orchestrated with



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PROPERTY SALES	53	53	14,329
MORTGAGES	97	97	22,652
FORECLOSURE NOTICES	0	0	9,519
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BANKRUPTCIES	78	78	17,595
BUSINESS LICENSES	23	23	4,943
UTILITY CONNECTIONS	124	124	25,090
MARRIAGE LICENSES	27	27	5,167



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should be carefully orchestrated with lots of pre-selling to key stakeholders.

So, the company reverted back to the old logo.

No. 3 – Crowd-sourcing. The strategy to crowd-source logo design through an open call to the general public was not the right path. With crowd sourcing, you cannot determine if your feedback is from brand loyalists who actually buy the product or just bloggers and social media regulars. However, if you are going to crowd-source, do it before rolling out your own design so it's not perceived as a defensive countermove.

No. 4 – Retreating. For argument's sake, let's assume Gap conducted proper consumer testing prior to launch. If loyal customers supported the new logo in testing, then Gap should have held its ground. Had Gap just waited it out, consumers would have adapted rather than boycotted. Did Gap pacify a few (in the grand scheme of things) outspoken consumers at the expense of its long-term future?

Staying fresh is critical for successful brands. The key is to retain the essence of what originally brought you success while evolving to maintain relevance among new consumers.

Consumers can have a knee-jerk resistance to change, especially among brands with which they share a long history. If your strategy is the right one, be willing to stomach a little consumer backlash and evolve your brand.

Lori Turner is managing partner of RedRover Sales & Marketing, www.redrovercompany.com. You can follow her on Facebook and Twitter.

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