

¿Por qué muchos clientes se enfadan cuando las empresas modifican sus marcas?

El "sus" precedente, ¿a quién se refiere, realmente?

¿Qué han hecho las empresas para reforzar ese sentimiento?

¿Acaso personalizamos lo anónimo?

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**The
Economist**

Schumpeter Logoland

Why consumers balk at companies' efforts to rebrand themselves

Jan 13th 2011 | from PRINT EDITION

1 Me gusta



ONE of last year's most interesting business books was Clay Shirky's "Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age". The rise of the affluent society has left people with lots of time and talent to spare, Mr Shirky argues. For decades they squandered this cognitive surplus watching television. Today, thanks to the internet, they can also channel it into more productive pursuits.

For a surprising number of people these productive pursuits involve worrying about companies' logos. Howard Schultz, the boss of Starbucks, recently announced that his company would mark its 40th anniversary this March by changing its logo a bit. The words "Starbucks" and "coffee" will disappear. And the mermaid, or siren, will be freed from her circle.

Starbucks wants to join the small club of companies that are so recognisable they can rely on nothing but a symbol: Nike and its swoosh; McDonald's and its golden arches; Playboy and its bunny; Apple and its apple. The danger is that it will join the much larger class of companies that have tried to change their logos only to be forced to backtrack by an electronic lynch mob.

As soon as the change was mooted, bloggers started blogging and tweeters began to tweet. Starbucks.com has been inundated with complaints, such as "focus on your core business and forget this foolishness". Fox News, not normally an authority on corporate marketing strategy, has likened the proposal to Prince's decision, in 1993, to swap his name for an unpronounceable symbol, an action he reversed seven years later. The protesters have plenty of success stories to inspire their efforts. Gap, a clothing retailer, abandoned a new logo in October after a week of concentrated online hazing. Tropicana (which tried to replace its straw-in-an-orange logo with a picture of a glass of orange juice) and Britain's Royal Mail (which renamed itself Consignia) held out a bit longer but eventually had to retreat.

Why do people get so upset about such changes? An obvious reason is that so many logos and names are either pig ugly or linguistically challenged. Think of BT's "piper" logo, which looked like someone drinking a yard of ale and disfigured all things BT-related for 12 years (admittedly, Britain's incumbent telecoms firm was not too popular to begin with); or the SciFi channel's decision to call itself SyFy—a name that raises the spectre of syphilis.

Moreover, the people who spend their lives creating new logos and brand names have a peculiar weakness for management drivel. Marka Hansen, Gap's president for North America, defended the firm's new logo (three letters and a little blue square) with a lot of guff about "our journey to make Gap more relevant to our customers". The Arnell Group explained its \$1m redesign of Pepsi's logo with references to the "golden ratio" and "gravitational pull", arguing that "going back-to-the-roots moves the brand forward as it changes the trajectory of the future".

Ghastly stuff, to be sure. But why do aesthetically sensitive consumers harry companies to go back to old logos rather than simply shifting their loyalties elsewhere? One answer is that people have a passionate attachment to some brands. They do not merely buy clothes at Gap or coffee at Starbucks, but consider themselves to belong to “communities” defined by what they consume. A second reason is that the more choices people have, the more they seem to value the familiar. These days there are so many choices available to Western consumers—the average supermarket stocks 30,000 items and America’s patent and trademark office issues some 200,000 patents a year—that they are in danger of being overwhelmed. *Homo economicus* may be capable of carefully considering all available products. But poor, fumbling *Homo sapiens* seizes on logos as a way of creating order in a confusing world.

The debate about logos reveals something interesting about power as well as passion. Much of the rage in the blogosphere is driven by a sense that “they” (the corporate stiff) have changed something without consulting “us” (the people who really matter). This partly reflects a hunch that consumers have more power in an increasingly crowded market for goods. But it also reflects the sense that brands belong to everyone, not just to the corporations that nominally control them.

They want your opinion, as long as it’s positive

Companies have gone out of their way to encourage these attitudes. They not only work hard to create emotional bonds with consumers (Victoria’s Secret is one of many firms, including *The Economist*, that encourage customers to “like” them on Facebook). They involve them in what used to be regarded as internal corporate operations. Snapple asks Snapple-drinkers to come up with ideas for new drinks. Threadless encourages people to compete to design T-shirts.

Starbucks has been in the forefront of this consumer revolution. It consults consumers on everything from the ambience of its stores to its environmental policies. It emphasises that it is not just in the business of selling coffee. It sells entry to a community of like-minded people (who are so very different from the types who get their coffee from Dunkin’ Donuts or McDonald’s) gathered in a “third place” that is neither home nor work.

The company’s new logo hints at a big ambition. Mr Schultz wants to burst asunder the bonds created by Starbucks’s humble origins as a coffee shop. Some of his cafés are to sell alcohol as well as coffee. Many more Starbucks-branded goods are to appear in supermarkets. Starbucks is to become a force in the emerging world as well as the emerged. Such changes would be difficult even for an old-fashioned corporate dictatorship. Mr Schultz is about to discover whether they are possible for a company that has made such a fuss about giving power to its customers.

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