



Brand is the essence of who you are as a company represented by every point of contact you have with a customer or prospect – from your name, logo and Web site, to the way you answer the phone. But what happens when that brand no longer reflects who you are or who you want to be? This month, *SmartCEO* asks CEOs who recently re-branded their companies to share the process and the results.

One way to express your company's brand is through a corporate blog, and an increasing number of local CEOs in a variety of industries are embracing the two-way communication tool as a new way to engage their target audience. Local CEO bloggers reflect on their biggest blogging challenges and share how they measure success.

# Re-branding Dress Code Drama CEO Blogging



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Share your ideas and experiences by e-mailing [jeanine@smartceo.com](mailto:jeanine@smartceo.com).



# brand new

## HOW TO SOLVE YOUR IDENTITY CRISIS

BY JEANINE GAJEWSKI

The first step toward a successful re-branding is admitting you have a problem. Perhaps fast growth has left you with mismatched marketing materials, an amateurish logo and a name that no longer encapsulates the scope of your business. Perhaps your venerable brand has grown dusty and tired and your customers are leaving you for your hipper competitors. Perhaps you – and your customers – can no longer answer the simple question: Who are you?

“There are inflection points with companies where they realize that they’ve never really defined what their brand stands for, or the company is growing and realizes it is still projecting itself as a smaller, earlier version of itself,” says Toby Eckhardt, CEO of Focused Image. “The real key is the questions they can’t answer: What clearly differentiates me? What are the real value and benefits I bring to my customers?”



“Brand can’t be developed unless someone creates a vision.”

Anthony Pappas, president, Pappas Group

“Branding a good starting point for people to look at what they do for a living,” says James Naylor, president of Axiom Brand Marketing. And often that starting point involves taking a good look at the company’s name. “Most of the re-branding we do is because what the company is a misnomer. Some companies come to us with names that are so off the wall that people can’t spell them, or they don’t mean anything, or some egghead came up with it 15 years ago.”

### Makeover Story: Highline Wealth Management

Neal Simon, CEO



When Neal Simon, the president of the wealth management arm of an insurance brokerage, spun off the group into its own entity in March 2007, he needed a new name to match. “Having the name change was largely to create clarity between the two organizations,” he says.

**Challenges:** Finding a fitting name with a corresponding URL was a challenge for Simon. “It’s hard to find a new name these days,” he says. “We are living in a world where many of the names you would think of off the top of your head have long ago been taken and the URLs have been taken.”

**Results:** Since the re-branding, the company has grown from \$400 million under management at start of 2007 to \$535 million by year’s end. “I think the team has been very energized, focused, excited about the future,” Simon says. “We’ve set ambitious growth targets. It’s been exciting for our clients who have been with us for years to watch us make this transition.”

**Advice:** “As the leader of the organization, you need to have a clear vision of where we’re going and communicate that to the team,” he says. “The brand and image need to fit into that vision. And you all need to understand and share the same vision.”

### Makeover Story: BrightKey

Rita Hope Counts, CEO

In the 20 years since Rita Hope Counts started the company, Professional Mailing and Distribution Services had evolved to be much more than a mail house. But when Counts exhibited at tradeshow or sent out marketing materials, the name gave clients a limited vision of the company. “As soon as we would say our name, people would say, ‘We already have a mail house.’ But we do so much more than that,” Counts says.

**Challenges:** At first, many long-time employees seemed hesitant to make the switch. “Our name had a reputation going way back,” Counts says. “How I had to pitch it was, ‘We want to grow this company, so let’s not limit ourselves with our name.’ Once we got into the process, everyone got excited about it, because they were part of the process, too. It got people invigorated. I think that in itself has paid for the re-branding.”

**Results:** In addition to the shot of adrenalin invigorating her employees since the February 2007 launch, Counts says the new name has helped marketing efforts, as well. “Our booth attracts more attention,” she says. “When we meet folks, it gives us an opportunity to explain what we do.”

**Advice:** “Make sure you have a major launch so it is something exciting to the clients, to the employees,” she says. “Make it exciting, because it is exciting. It’s showing how positively things are going for you.”



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**"A brand is the essential promise a company makes to its customers."**

**Roger Gray**, chairman, CEO and president, gkv

Sally Roffman, president of Creative Strategies, says a telltale sign that you have outgrown your name is that you have had to shorten it to an acronym because your name is no longer relevant. "Generally speaking, an acronym does no harm, but it also does nothing to forward the conversation," she says. "There are some names that are actually distracting because they are confusing. And sometimes it is distracting because it is far more limited than the actual company vision and the direction the company is heading."

Sometimes the name holds true, but the message is tired. "Often our customers feel they are talking to themselves, and they don't feel they have a competitive differentiation in the marketplace – they have become kind of 'me too,'" says Raymond Crosby, chairman and CEO of Crosby Marketing Communications.

The "me too" mindset can lead to following the herd under the illusion that blending in is safe. "People tend to follow the pack," says Julie Burnette, president of Julie & Company LLC. "Like for taglines, you've got the three-line 'honor, integrity, trust.' And then every company in America did that crap."

Or maybe you never gave your message much thought in the first place. "Maybe they designed their own logo, which is usually a nightmare, or they had their cousin do it, or designed it on the back of a cocktail napkin – this is the kind of stuff that new entrepreneurs do," Burnette says.

#### BRANDING: DEFINED

Before addressing the nagging suspicion that your brand is somehow deficient, it is helpful to be sure that it is really your brand that ails you.

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## Makeover Story: Greetings & Readings



**Steven S. Baum**, president

When long-time Towson retail staple, Greetings & Readings, moved to Hunt Valley in 2005, the opportunity for a new space and new clientele made it a perfect time to re-brand. "When you start

from scratch with a new building and layout, that's the time to do it all," Steven S. Baum says. "This shopping center brings in a true diverse mix. Here we can handle a higher price point, a little bit finer goods."

**Challenges:** Baum says he had one false start before the successful re-branding in 2005. "We had a whole re-branding done and scrapped the whole thing," Baum says. "We literally had everything ready to go and just scrapped it because we knew it wasn't right. It was expensive, but it was the right thing to do. It was 10 million percent the right move."

**Results:** Baum says the re-branding touched every aspect of his business, from the new logo and Web site, to signage, business cards, store layout and gift bags. "Everything changed," Baum says. "It was like a new company. The new logo and brand shows the Greetings & Readings of today, not one from 1969." But Baum was careful not to alienate his faithful customers. "We still do mailings to our old customers and in our old area. We don't want to lose any of our old customers," he says.

**Advice:** "Just because someone comes up with some ideas, you still have to be very comfortable with it and you have to feel it is a big plus for your business. If it's not, then find something else," Baum says. "It's really important that you like what you have. You see it every day. And seriously, if you don't like your logo, it's not good."

"Brand means a lot of things – it's probably one of the most overused words today," says Anthony Pappas, founder and president of The Pappas Group. "A brand should represent every touch point and every essence that a customer or potential customer interacting with the company experiences. That could be the visual, the logo, to interacting with the employees, to calling customer service, to actually using the product."

CEOs often think of their brand in terms of external communications: the name, the logo, the Web site, the advertising. But according to Roger Gray, chairman, CEO and president of gkv, brand is much more. "A brand is the essential promise a company makes to its customers," he says. "It's the sum of the values and beliefs that create a company's reputation – and ultimately its worthiness to its customers."

Crosby urges CEOs to think of re-branding as a process, not an event. "It certainly isn't, 'Hey, let's revise our logo.' It's really a strategic business tool to ensure the

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"An ill-directed brand exercise is just art on a stick. It is not strategically grounded."

Toby Eckhardt, CEO, Focused Image

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## Makeover Story: SnowMovers



Rodney Anderson, CEO

With such a generic company name, when Rodney Anderson asked potential clients whether or not they had heard of Snow Services, the usual response was, “Yes, I use snow services every year.” To combat the confusion between the generic term for the industry and his specific company, “we decided a name change was necessary and a new logo and new look,” Anderson says.

**Challenges:** Coming up with a name that was distinctive and appropriate was a challenge, Anderson says. “We came up with the name SnowMovers along with several others,” he says. “One of them was ‘Snow Busters,’ and that was a recognizable name, like Ghost Busters, I guess. But we thought it might be a little corny, and we wanted to keep more of a serious corporate image.”

And when it comes to company names, old habits die hard. “We still occasionally answer the phone ‘Snow Services’ because we were used to doing that,” Anderson says.

**Results:** By the time SnowMovers launched its new brand in fall 2006, it was a bit too late to capture new clients for the coming winter. “But this year we have more proposals going out,” Anderson says. And while sales had remained flat for the past two or three years, he anticipates at 10 percent to 15 percent increase for the 2007-08 season. “We have companies that have not contacted us in the past who are now contacting us,” he says.

**Advice:** “When you make a name change like we did, the most important thing is to talk to your existing customer base and make sure that they know you are still the same company and you haven’t been sold to a bigger company,” Anderson says. “Our existing customer base likes that we are a small local company, so we were careful to explain that we merely made a name change.”

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**“Don’t let any company talk you into something you are not comfortable with in your gut.”**

**Lou Santoni, owner, Santoni’s Marketplace and Catering**

customer selects you over someone else. And a quick fix doesn’t get results. It might give you a blip, but branding is a long-term strategy.”

Eckhardt calls an ill-directed brand exercise “just art on a stick. It might move the needle, but it is not strategically grounded.”

“I think people sometimes imagine that if they have a new Web site that the industry will ignore all the other components of their brand that are out of whack,” Roffman says. “Of course, slapping on a new coat of paint and dressing it up isn’t going to change your problems, but a true strategic exercise that leads to a new strategic positioning as expressed through a new brand actually uncovers those problems that need to be solved and goes a long way toward solving the problems.”

## A STRATEGIC EXERCISE

If the first step is admitting you have a problem, the second is asking the right people what that problem is.

“Really, the brand is whatever your clients perceive you to be,” Burnette says. “If

## Makeover Story: FedChoice

**Dave Bunch**, president and CEO

Since its inception in 1935 as one of the country's first credit unions, Internal Revenue had expanded its member base to include a diverse mix of federal and private industries. "We were serving a lot of groups that were not fitting one mold," Dave Bunch says. "What happened was, we had become an all things for everybody, but not fitting anyone's needs. I think the brand escaped us. We didn't have a brand that we could all rally around."

**Challenges:** Before Bunch could look at changing the credit union's brand, he first had to change its charter to create a more homogenous customer base. "My role was to try to sell the vision to the board," Bunch says. "In 2005 we got approval to change our charter to broaden our scope of federal employees in the mid-Atlantic states. With that sense of community and uniformity, we could then look at building a brand."

**Results:** Internal Revenue re-launched itself as FedChoice in September 2007 with a new name, new logo and new look. "In trying to create our brand and our name, we thought we wanted to be the preferred 'choice,' acknowledging you do have a lot of choices out there," Bunch says. "For us, there was a process of evolution, even revolution. It is a start that never has a finish."



**Advice:** "You have to be a good listener. Listen to your staff, your customers and desired customers. That's the first thing," Bunch says. "You must understand who you are trying to serve, and that is the key driver. You have to build your whole brand around that, or you've missed the boat."



you have a bad reputation for having sloppy work, then that's what your brand is."

The best way to assess your reputation is by asking those who know you best – your employees and your clients – and those who you want to know you better: potential clients.

"Branding isn't just an inward process; it's how the outside world perceives the company and the benefits they are looking for. It's about the customer," Crosby says. "So it is critical not to be staring at your own naval, if you will. And that is why research into customers and influencers and your own employees is the first and most critical step of the brand development process."

That research might even lead to you to conclude that you don't need to re-brand after all. "A lot of times the research will show that you that you just need to refresh the company's look and feel," says Ethan Assal, chairman and CEO of Verasolve. "I come from a perspective of providing a budget-conscious ROI, and there is no need to re-brand for the sake of re-branding. There has to be logic and reason behind it."



"There is no need to re-brand for the sake of it. There has to be logic behind it."

Ethan Assal, chairman and CEO, Verasolve

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## Makeover Story: Santoni's Marketplace and Catering

**Lou Santoni**, owner

Lou Santoni launched his company in 1986 as Santoni's Deli Bakery. As the concept evolved, Santoni changed the name to Santoni's Country Market. But in recent years, with the addition of fine catering and more upscale products, Santoni once again felt he had outgrown his name. And with various tweaks to its look over the years, Santoni's needed a stronger sense of unity in its image.

**Challenges:** Deciding which aspects of the brand to keep and which to discard was a challenge for Santoni. "In the re-branding, we didn't want to lose the feel that our customers had," he says. "We wanted to make it a more upscale store without alienating the core base." The one image that stood out as a keeper for Santoni was a red oval in his logo. "We came up with other looks, but we found that it was this darn oval that was a powerful symbol."

**Results:** In the second year after the launch of its new brand, Santoni's was named one of the fastest-growing local caterers by *Baltimore Magazine*. "Could that have happened if the vans looked like Hillbilly wagons?" he says. "It needed to have a look of congruency."



**Advice:** "I would say that you have to never forget it is your company," Santoni says. "Don't let any company talk you into something you are not comfortable with in your gut. They haven't lived in your skin. Be open to all possibilities, but be true to yourself."

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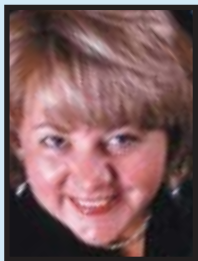
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## Makeover Story: Crews Control



**Andrea Keating**, president and CEO

After 20 years in business, Andrea Keating felt the look and feel of her industry was changing and it was time for her company's image to change, as well. "It was time for something fresh," Keating says. "Our brand reflected the more traditional, non-electronic way of presenting your company and we wanted to bring in the whole Internet feel, not only to our Web presence but our print material."

**Challenges:** With two decades of value built into the brand, Keating felt her biggest challenge was identifying which parts of the company identity were worth leaving untouched. "My big fear is that while I was ready to make the change, you don't want to lose those 20 years that you've had with your customer base," she says. "We don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater so people wouldn't recognize who we are. So I spent a lot of time analyzing what I liked about our brand, what was working and strong."

**Results:** Crews Control is still in the process of re-branding, but Keating says that she will consider the effort a success if the brand retains its traditional value but with contemporary zip. "The way I would measure if it worked is if a year from now someone saw our ad in a magazine with our new brand and said, 'Look, it's Crews Control. It's fresher and more cutting-edge – more 2008 instead of 1998 – but I still recognize who they are and the value that they can offer,'" Keating says.

**Advice:** Keating would advise companies to do their homework before sitting down with a re-branding team. "If you don't, it's like asking someone to paint a room for you and saying you'll know the right color when you see it. It's much better if you can do your internal decision-making in advance and get your message down clearly and concisely."



**"A great brand makes your vision tangible in the marketplace."**

**Sally Roffman**, president, Creative Strategies

### DON'T MAKE THESE MISTAKES

There are two mistakes that CEOs often make during a re-branding process. The first is re-branding by committee.

"You have to watch the thin line between inclusion and everyone and their family picking out wallpaper," Naylor says.

As in all business endeavors, the CEO's job is to articulate the company vision and be the ultimate decision-maker.

"Brand can't be developed unless someone creates a vision. Someone needs to know where they want to go, and that sole responsibility should be laid on the CEO," Pappas says.

Naylor recalls one re-branding that took more than 20 months because of a wishy-washy CEO. "He was never decisive or insistent on getting his thoughts planted firmly, and what he ended up having was watered-down vanilla milque-toast," Naylor says. "And now he doesn't know what to do. I'm almost in corporate



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## Makeover Story: Critical Connection

**Telly Telhan**, president

When Telly Telhan started his company four years ago, he did not have the marketing budget to clearly articulate his message to a target audience. "We were trying to convey our thoughts as quickly as possible, get a presence on the Web and give our potential clients a resource to take a look at," Telhan says. "Because of our low budget, there wasn't much true messaging or branding. It wasn't really telling anyone who we were and what we were planning on doing."

**Challenges:** Telhan wanted to take Critical Connection's image from a well-established local name to a national brand. "We needed to step up our game to make sure that when potential clients were researching some of the top firms in the country, that our brand is powerful and commanding," Telhan says.

**Results:** In the five months since his company re-branded, Telhan says the effort has more than paid for itself. "It's been phenomenal," he says. "The whole re-branding campaign paid for itself within the first month because we had a more effective Web site. It was a pleasant surprise. I wasn't expecting the ROI that quickly, and now it has paid for it three to five times over at this point."

**Advice:** "Think about where you stand in terms of growth and where you want to be five to 10 years from now," Telhan says. "I found a little difficulty not just thinking about today or tomorrow, but several years down the road in terms of if the message stays the same and there is continuity."



therapy with the guy. That lesson really is, include some people but go with your gut."

Equally important is avoiding mistake number two: re-branding by dictatorship. "Branding is not like surgery," Eckhardt says. "When it comes to things that are subjective, it is easier for CEOs to get caught up in absolute micromanagement of the execution of the brand, but it can be a very big mistake."

While your favorite color might be blue, blue might not be the best color for your brand. "There is a little bit of letting things go," Crosby says. "The consumer research should be fuel for decisions and not just kept to the ivory tower of the boardroom."

"The number one rule is the customer is king," Pappas says. "You have to know the king, and if you confuse the king, the king won't know what to do. If your entire identity is built around innovation and it's cool and creative and light and airy, we don't want to make something that is disruptive, over the top and out of the ordinary."



"Really, brand is whatever your clients perceive you to be."

**Julie Burnette**, president, Julie & Company LLC

## Makeover Story: Prime Alliance



**Keith E. Nolan,**  
executive vice president of sales and marketing

While Prime Alliance had seen tremendous success since it began in 2000, by May 2006 when Keith Nolan joined the executive team, sales had begun to stagnate and new competitors were eating away at its customer base. "Our existing customers started to feel we were becoming inflexible in responding to the market conditions," Nolan says. "We wanted to remind our clients and the industry of all the great things the company represented. And there was no better way to reintroduce yourself than by re-branding."



**Challenges:** Prime Alliance put every aspect of the way it did business on the table, prepared to change anything that was holding the company back. "There were no sacred cows," Nolan says. "When you look at yourself in the mirror and you are picking yourself apart, it is not the most pleasant of exercises, but it is somewhat cleansing."



You also identify the things you do well and perhaps need to do a better job of communicating."

**Results:** In the 13 months since the re-branding, Nolan says the company has won 10 new contracts and is earning compliments from new and existing clients. "The new clients who are joining us are saying, 'I see the difference, and that is why we're going to do business with you,'" Nolan says. "All of the sales are hard fought, but now we win more than we lose. It doesn't mean we have arrived – it is a constant battle – but certainly we have reversed the trend."

**Advice:** For re-branding to work, Nolan says you have to be willing to take an honest look at yourself and be willing to make all necessary changes. "You have to be willing to put everything you do on the table for review and accept that everything, including the name and identity, might have to change if it makes sense," he says.

## CEO Pick: Read This

For a quick read about branding, **Raymond Crosby**, chairman and CEO of Crosby Marketing Communications, recommends *Brand Aid*, by Brad VanAukin. "It's a Cliff's Notes for branding," Crosby says.



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## Makeover Story: Reliant Financial Consulting



Dean Schauer, CEO

A year ago when Dean Schauer launched his new company, Reliant Financial Consulting, he did not have much time to put together a powerful logo. "Our logo was just the initials, RFC, in simple color blocks," he says. "It wasn't offensive, but it looked a little amateurish. It didn't project the image of a professional service firm. I liked the name, but the logo wasn't going to go the distance."

**Challenges:** Along with his new look, Schauer says he will punch up his company's marketing collateral to deliver a concise and powerful message. "We want it to be less wordy and more succinct," he says.



"I'm a big believer in marketing creating more business for your company. In my industry, accountants sometimes do a miserable job at marketing themselves and I don't want to follow that trend."



**Results:** Schauer says that he expects to launch his new brand this month and will measure the re-branding's success by the impact it has on potential clients. "I'll know it's been successful the first time I go to a conference and hand out my business card and someone looks at it and says, 'Oh yeah, I've heard of you guys,' because that means the image stuck in their minds."

**Advice:** "Take your time and make sure you come up with the right image for yourself," Schauer says. "You don't want to be changing your image every couple of years and confusing your customers."

Between the two extremes lies a middle ground for CEOs. "The happy medium is the CEO who is open, willing to listen and really understand strengths, weaknesses and obstacles, who listens to everyone, establishes strong objective criteria and at the point of making the ultimate decision, makes the decision," Roffman says.

Add one more mistake to the list: re-branding without maintenance.

"If you are going to do it, have faith in it," Eckhardt says. "Once you have the brand, you need to continually invest in the brand."

"Part of my job beyond delivering the brand is to guard it," Naylor says. "I once watched a receptionist send out envelopes with the old logo. She said she found them and didn't want them to go to waste, so she was using them up. I said, 'Give them to a nursery school for coloring paper!' Tell everyone from here forward: it's the new stuff, not the old stuff."

### RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Brand is difficult to define, much less measure. How do you quantify the return



"You have to watch the thin line between  
inclusion and everyone picking out wallpaper."  
James Naylor, president, Axiom Brand Marketing

on investment for perception and reputation?

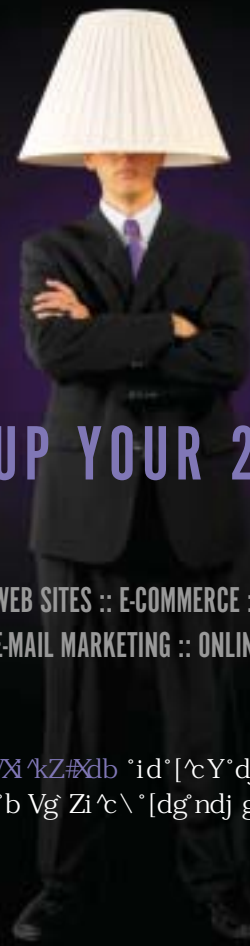
“It can be extremely difficult to quantify the return on a branding investment,” Roffman says. “But a great brand makes your vision tangible in the marketplace – which means you are making the potential of the company tangible, and that has a dollar value.”

One way to assess that dollar value is through a before-and-after benchmarking study. But Assal says few CEOs invest in such a study because they view it as an additional expenditure.

“I look at it as by re-branding, you are able to reposition the company and if because of that, if it helps you retain clients, that will help give you an ROI,” he says

Crosby cites one other indicator of re-branding effectiveness. “On a practically level, if your company has a clear brand position, like a guiding light for the company, it is much easier to retain and attract employees,” he says. “But certainly some of it is soft science.”

CEO



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