

Out With the Old, In With the New

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During our morning reading, we stumbled across a nifty little piece from *Fortune* magazine on major brands that have (somewhat) recently transitioned or “freshened” their well-known logos to something new and different. As a consumer, you have probably “felt,” if not actually seen, these changes during your weekly run to the supermarket. For a group of trademark lawyers, these rebrandings are profoundly fascinating, as it gives us a glimpse into the minds of marketers, and helps us understand how they are perceiving their own brand image as well as the public’s perception of it.

The *Fortune* piece does a great job on its own of explaining the background and rationale behind the changes to these logos, and we won’t spend time rehashing the article here. Instead, we thought we’d discuss a couple of the design changes that we particularly like, and a couple that we think went absolutely wrong. Before we get there, the point in all of this (besides the obvious – which is that we trademark lawyers all started off following along with Bill Cosby in Picture Pages) is that rebranding of any kind is a huge decision for a company to make. In all of these examples, the primary mark or “house brand” has been significantly altered such that the consumer has to re-learn the company anew. These decisions can be bet-the-company propositions, as at least some of the existing goodwill a company has built up under its outgoing mark will inevitably be lost once the new mark comes on board. The less-than-savvy consumer who has not been properly bombarded with the rebrand-supporting advertising blitz is likely to ask, “What is this?” However, this is often the point, as one of the primary reasons for this kind of drastic rebranding is to help wipe away some negative perception of the company and better ingratiate the brand with its (sometimes new) target audience. As you will see, some companies pull this off better than others.

The Good:

BP (British Petroleum) – Probably our favorite logo refresh of the last few years, this one has been around awhile, having been rolled out in 2000, according to the BP website. Here are the logos, side by side:

(1989-2000) (2000-current)

To us, the old design screams “big oil,” with its stoic appearance, brandishing a shield. The new logo is softer and more friendly, swapping the upper-case serif typeface for a lower-case sans serif design, simultaneously evoking a shift to solar energy as well as other renewable sources of fuel, including biofuels (do you see the sunflower?). In this respect, the designer’s use of BP’s existing colors, green and yellow, in a manner that ties in to the movement of the moment – “green” – is particularly well executed.

Apple – Another one of our favorites, Apple Computer’s logo refresh seems to have been executed just as naturally and smoothly as the explosion of the Internet... you almost didn’t notice it happening. Here are the logos, side by side, courtesy of Edible Apple:

(1976-1998) (1998-current)

Out With the Old, In With the New (Continued)

See? We're really not making this up...

The Ugly:

Kraft (Kraft Foods) – We have to admit, we had no idea that Kraft had changed its logo until reading the *Fortune* magazine piece. We've even been grocery shopping recently (and with little kids in the house, we eat the heck out of their Mac N' Cheese) and we didn't catch it. Probably a good thing. Here's the comparo, last time:

(old)

(new)

Again, like the Pepsi case, the old Kraft logo is iconic. It is the definition of a "brand" when one uses the word "brand" as a verb. Three colors – red, white and blue. Strong, bold, eye catching. The new one is, umm, upset that someone spilled something on it. The *splurt* or whatever that thing is on the left is downright nonsensical. What is it meant to evoke, besides the ire of corporate accounting when this new eight-color print job is applied across all the new marketing materials? Plus, all the letters are in lowercase now, and instead of shouting, "KRAFT!!" this logo seems to whimper. As we understand it, the logo on the right is now the "corporate" logo, designed specifically for corporate messaging, and will not replace the more familiar logo on products like cheese, (and Mac N' Cheese...*whew*, we thought we were getting senile there for a minute!). However, when you actually launch a product site from the Kraft corporate site, the corporate message still hangs there in the frame, which is a bit unsettling. But one is really left to wonder as to the rationale behind the change. Were the additional colors intended to discourage counterfeiting? If that's the case, why not put it on product? And if "Kraft Foods" is merely corporate, and "Kraft" is on product, does that mean that things that are branded only with "Kraft" are not food? Yikes... not the questions they wanted us to be asking.