

“Brand Soul” – The Renaming Principles of a Service Organization

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This paper investigates the process of renaming, and the impact that changing a service organizations' name has on its ability to profitably compete. It analyzes the role of the service brand management process, develops benefit analysis insight in a renaming scenario, and seeks to determine the effects that renaming & repositioning have on brand equity, thus offering a continuum to tie the organizations' brand identity to the consumers' brand image to develop consumer co-creation of value. The renaming process is part of brand management responsibility to bridge the gap between the way customers currently view and value the brand image (customer-based-brand-equity); the way employees perceive the organization brand (employee-based-brand-equity); and how the company wishes the consumer viewed the brand identity (firm-based-brand-equity).

When a brand audit reveals the need to adjust the factors affecting the consumers' brand image of an organization in order to compete, literature reveals the organization can elect to rebrand, rename, or retire the brand. Little is currently known about the renaming option, especially regarding its impact on the organization or “corporate” brand, and it is this gap our study addresses. We discuss the principles of renaming within the context of the increasingly marketized field of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) by utilizing a multiple embedded case study process using cases from the U. S. Higher Education market. Secondary data was gathered along with over fifty depth interviews conducted with administrators, Trustees, faculty, staff and alumni using semi-structured/open term questions.

Our study reveals the six principles of a service organization corporate brand renaming process. These six principles of renaming service organizations were evaluated against the evidence in the cases; all the principles were supported. Principles 1 & 2 refer to the participants involved with the renaming process, Principles 3 & 4 are more ‘technical’ issues, while Principles 5 & 6 reflect upon the implementation of the renaming process.

Perhaps the most important aspect to consider when renaming a service organization involves the leadership of the organization and its relationship with the employees during the process of renaming. Renaming signals something is changing, and the actions of the leadership heavily influences whether the motivation is more reactive and defensive or whether it is proactive and positive. The way employees perceive and live the organization brand (employee-based-brand-equity), and their impact on the renaming process, is a critical component in the development and optimization of brand equity.

We thus define “Brand Soul” as “the essence or fundamental nature – the authentic energy – of a brand.”

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