

## Rebranding Halloween

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### ABSTRACT

This process of rebranding requires a high degree of creativity, consumer sensitivity, strategic marketing acumen as well as a deep appreciation for the current image of a brand and how difficult that is to change. Theoretical foundations of rebranding are not well developed, and students often underestimate the various difficulties inherent in rebranding. This article presents a case which is designed to help students conceptualize and implement dramatic changes to long standing brands and their images. It uses the Halloween holiday as it has popular traditions and icons to form a common base of knowledge for all levels of business students who are then tasked with implementing fundamental changes to how the holiday is perceived. This process forces students to appreciate importance of symbols, brands, and traditions while giving them experience in making strategic marketing decisions while offering the instructor numerous opportunities to correct misconceptions many students could have about the rebranding process.

Keywords: Halloween, Branding, Rebranding, Strategic Marketing, Marketing Communications

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## INTRODUCTION

A brand is defined as "a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers." (American Marketing Association, 2021). Marketing educators have long taught that brands are built through a sustained investment over an extended period of time, and if those investments are well received, the company will enjoy market advantages including loyalty and higher margins (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 1998; Keller, 2002). Many companies change their brand image or brand names as part of a rebranding strategy (Wiggins, 2003) and companies often rebrand themselves or their products in response to changing market conditions (Kapferer, 1998), to create a different identity, enhance brand relevance, and to improve operational efficiency (Melewar, Gotsi, & Andriopoulos 2012; Vallaster & Lindgreen 2011). Corporate rebranding, which is defined as 'a change of a corporate brand's attributes such as its name, logo, color and values singularly or in combination' (Joseph, Gupta, Wang, & Schoefer, 2021, p. 2) is a risky and costly venture as company reputations can be damaged if the rebranding is improperly implemented (Dunham, 2002).

Branding is an essential component of marketing, and since most undergraduate students have had very little to no experience with managing major brands, teaching them the nuances can be challenging. Students often struggle to conceptualize an effective rebranding strategy because they fail to appreciate consumer response and tend to overestimate the effectiveness of their strategy while underestimating the time it would take for a dramatic change to be implemented. employers seek graduates who can apply business skills to problem solving (Kaufman et al., 2019) and yet, theoretical foundations concerning rebranding are underdeveloped (Merrilees & Miller, 2008) leading students with few academic resources to learn the practice. Cases and reflective works are active learning strategies that instructors can employ to encourage critical thought (Stavredes, 2011). Applied cases in business courses may help engage students beyond traditional lectures (Nandedkar & DiRusso, 2019), and have been established as an effective way to enhance student learning (Manzon, 2017). Thus, this applied case was designed to help students understand and effectively apply rebranding using the Halloween Holiday as it is a well-known brand with firmly established cultural roots. Using Halloween as the subject of this exercise will allow even lower level business students to identify the numerous risks involved in rebranding which they can then apply to company brands.

Halloween is a holiday with presence in a wide variety of media including music, movies, websites, and shows (History.com Editors, 2021). Many of its currently popular symbols and customs such as the Jack-O-Latern and Trick or Treat have been practiced for nearly a century in the United States (Business Insider, 2017). Thus, they are likely to be well known by most undergraduate students and most have likely participated in Halloween activities. This common base of knowledge forms a solid foundation for the instructor to instruct students on the fundamentals of rebranding. Allowing students to discover the major barriers and difficulties with dramatic alterations to a brand that they know very well will allow them to understand why large companies such as Exxon and Coca-Cola cannot quickly or easily change their image. This exercise will allow students to fully appreciate how deeply ingrained major brands are in a culture and in consumer's minds. As a result, upon completion, students will be able to implement a rebranding campaign more effectively. This is a fictitious case. All information contained herein was fabricated by the authors. Any similarity contained herein to actual persons, businesses, events, etc. is purely coincidental and is the responsibility of the authors.

The assignment involves both applied and reflective components where students are forced to conceptualize rebranding the holiday and consider how well their new vision would be received. Often students will foresee a dramatic change to Halloween which will spur students to make several drastic changes to the brand. This offers the instructor the opportunity to correct these misconceptions and illustrate more effective rebranding strategies. Classroom-ready directions are included as are teaching notes.

## **THE ASSIGNMENT**

### **Learning Objectives**

This applied case will force students to think critically about brands and the difficult process of changing them which will lead them to deep exploration of logos, brands, symbols, and marketing communications. Students will gain the following skills upon completion of this case:

- Marketing Strategy
- Branding Strategy
- Creativity
- Business Writing
- Critical Thinking

Students do not need to have knowledge of any particular software or analysis package; they just need to have a basic understanding of Halloween.

### **Audience**

This assignment may be implemented as an exercise for individuals or student teams. It can be used virtually by employing discussion boards on various learning management software packages. Regardless of modality, it is best if students share their work with others so students can see the variety of creative ways that it can be implemented, and the results can be discussed among the class. This exercise can be used with any level of student, but it is best employed in business curriculums where students first start discussing the importance of branding, which is often an Introduction to Marketing Course. It has been applied in sections of Principles of Marketing which is a sophomore level course, with prerequisites of Microeconomics and Macroeconomics. It has been applied in-person and during the COVID pandemic, applied online through discussion boards. It could also be expanded for use in higher level marketing courses such as Advertising or Consumer Behavior if the instructor wishes to focus on the nuances of rebranding.

### **Assignment Directions**

The Halloween holiday is facing increasing backlash from a growing number of consumers. Many parents have grown tired of a Halloween holiday that is focused on scares, pranks, the purchasing of costumes which are only used once, and excess consumption of candy. They are starting to view the holiday as a waste of money that is hurting their children and are seeking help to create a new vision. They contact a major brand consulting firm for help in

changing the image and practices of the holiday to make it a more positive and less wasteful experience. They are asking for a national campaign to recreate and redefine the Halloween holiday into something with a greater focus on positivity, politeness, and healthiness.

You are leading the consulting team, and you are tasked with designing this new vision for the holiday. This rebranding will involve several critical steps and must be implemented carefully. It will involve changing established symbols, a fundamental change to the process of trick or treating and coming up with a way for people to dress themselves in something that they do not feel they are wasting their money on. Therefore, you must come up with a rebranding campaign to dramatically alter the image of Halloween, which will involve several key changes outlined below.

### Rebranding Tasks

- 1) *Change “Jack O Laterns” from pumpkins to something different in order to help communicate the changes of this new Halloween.* Explain your choice and offer an example of how it could be decorated.
- 2) *Change the traditional “scary costumes” of Halloween into something more positive.* Focus on attire that can be worn on other occasions.
- 3) *Change the Standard “Trick or Treat” process from scaring people and giving out candy to something positive and healthy.* Discuss what children can do when visiting their neighbors in lieu of asking for candy
- 4) *Identify a new name for “Trick or Treating” based on your new vision for the holiday.* Discuss your choice.
- 5) *Come up with a new slogan for your new Halloween.* Discuss your choice.

### Reflective Analysis

- 1) About how long do you believe it would take for your rebranding strategy to effectively change the minds of most consumers? Why?
- 2) What organizations, media, and aspects of culture support the current Halloween Brand?
- 3) What actions can you take to make your rebranded vision of the holiday to be better received by consumers?
- 4) On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being “definitely not successful” and 10 being “definitely successful” how successful do you think your vision for Halloween would be if implemented? Discuss your answer.
- 5)

## TEACHING NOTES

Students can become stuck at the very beginning as some struggle to conceptualize changing something so established. Offering examples can help students come up with creative solutions. Some helpful ones are offered below which the instructor can choose to share for students who are stuck early in the process.

- 1) *Change “Jack O Laterns” from pumpkins to something different in order to help communicate the changes of this new Halloween. Examples*
  - a. Watermelons
  - b. Coconuts
  - c. Grapefruit
  - d. Squash
- 2) *Change the Standard “Trick or Treat” process from scaring people and giving out candy to something positive and healthy and identify a new name for “Trick or Treating” based on your new vision for the holiday.*
  - a. “Smile and Tweet” – children will take selfies with their neighbors
  - b. “Healthy Street” where kids are given only fruits and vegetables
  - c. “Move Your Feet” children will perform a quick dance move
  - d. “Joke Repeat” children will exchange their favorite joke with their neighbors
- 3) *Change the traditional “scary costumes” of Halloween into something more positive.*
  - a. Formal attire
  - b. Pajamas
  - c. Hawaiian theme

## Reflective Analysis Notes

- 1) *About how long do you believe it would take for your rebranding strategy to effectively change the minds of most consumers? Why?*

Answers to this question will likely vary with some students believing that such a change could be implemented in “a year or two” while some believe it will be “several decades.” This presents an opportunity for the instructor to discuss the fact that rebranding is a long-term, multi-step strategic process. Once a brand is well established and has strong associations, it will be very difficult to change, and almost impossible to do it abruptly. Most companies view rebranding as a process that will take several years along with heavy communications with consumers and many students will come to this conclusion at the end of this exercise.

- 2) *What organizations, media, and aspects of culture support the current Halloween Brand?*

The overall answer to this question is “almost everything currently associated with Halloween.” This includes movies, books, television shows, websites, magazines, newspapers, a wide variety of retailers, manufacturers, and consumer goods companies. Classic examples such as the original “Halloween” Movie (1978) and its various sequels, spinoffs and remakes can be discussed. This presents the opportunity for the instructor to



discuss how popular brand images are supported and reinforced through established culture, thus very difficult to change.

- 3) *What actions can you take to make your rebranded vision of the holiday better received by consumers?*

It is best to discuss the fact that such dramatic changes to a brand image should be accomplished slowly and involve making several smaller changes over time. The instructor can provide examples of how companies manage their brand logos, highlighting that those changes to them tend to occur every few years, but are slight and gradual changes that are much better received by consumers. Several examples of brand logo change histories such as Pepsi's (Exhibit 1) are easily found online, and students can see that changes occur every several years but are often small. Dramatic changes tend to only be apparent when looking at spans of decades. This also leads into the discussion that dramatic changes to a brand are risky, which is highlighted in the next question.

- 4) *On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being "definitely not successful" and 10 being "definitely successful" how successful do you think your vision for Halloween would be if implemented? Discuss your answer.*

This presents the instructor with the opportunity to discuss the extensive risks associated with rebranding. Consumers often resist changes to brands they currently like and can become easily alienated. Classic examples such as the failure of "New Coke" can be discussed here. The instructor could also use it as an opportunity to discuss market segmentation, and that perhaps new visions can be adopted by smaller consumer groups if not the mass market.

## CONCLUSION

This case allows students to learn about the importance of branding and rebranding through an applied exercise that can be employed in-class or virtually. Regardless of modality, students will be able to better apply changes to established brands and learn how to do so strategically. It can be implemented with little explanation to the topic as Halloween is a well-established holiday. This offers the instructor numerous opportunities to guide students through the dangers of the rebranding and forms a strong foundation for more advanced concepts in branding and marketing communications.

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APPENDIX

EXHIBIT 1 – PEPSI LOGO VISUAL HISTORY



Source: Logo My Way - Pepsi Logo History

