

What's in a name?

The story of an agency re-branding

By Martin Waxman



I used to have Moxie. I thought it was the greatest thing. I knew what Moxie meant, knew that it originated from a New England cola, even searched eBay for a vintage store display poster bearing its name.

And then one day, I didn't have it anymore. Or, to put it a bit more clearly, I may have had Moxie, but I was about to lose *Morie*, the name we had chosen for our fledgling agency, because another company had a similar moniker.

So why did this happen? And how was it going to affect us?

Why it happened is the stuff you read about in business books and tabloids, a series of circumstances beyond our control that, in the grand (or even small) scheme of things amount to no more than what Humphrey Bogart refers to in *Casablanca* as "a hill of beans."

STEP 1: Put things in perspective – What were we going to do? First, we had to evaluate the situation and put things in perspective. We weighed the

options, determined what truly mattered to us and made a decision. Putting things in perspective is one of the most important lessons you can learn in PR (or in life for that matter). We began by playing out various scenarios and asking questions. What's going to happen if we change our name? Could we successfully re-brand without hurting our reputation, losing clients or jeopardizing our business?

STEP 2: Accept and embrace the change – I'm a firm believer in change being a catalyst for positive actions. Not simply change for the sake of change, but true, meaningful change. The kind that makes your stomach turn from nerves and challenges the status quo. And once you put things in motion, you can't run away and hide, you need to embrace the change. We knew that we had four months to come up with a new identity. We did it in four weeks.

STEP 3: Plan, plan, plan – We wanted this transition to be as seamless as possible. We began by doing what we do for clients: developing a communications plan. We started making lists of potential names. We had one immutable law: our domain

had to be *companynamepr.com*. Everything else was open to discussion. Of course, this proved to be more difficult than we initially anticipated, and not just because there are so many PR agencies. No. In fact, a number of the names we had selected were registered to companies that had nothing to do with communications: 'PR' referred to the fact that they were based in Puerto Rico!

We went back to the drawing board. We knew we could come up with another name. The next big challenge was to let everyone know about it.

STEP 4: Communicate – Once we had the name, approach and "To Do" list settled, we finalized the date. Pretty soon it was P-Day (Palette Day). We gave heads-up calls to clients, prospects, suppliers and friends and made our announcement. We were upfront and honest and told them the news. It was very enthusiastic, because that was exactly how we felt. We distributed a release that told our story with a sense of humour. We kept doing client work. We ordered a new office sign.

STEP 5: Introducing Palette PR – So did it all go smoothly? For the most part, yes. We noticed that our Web site

design, with a few modifications actually resembled a palette. We made what the tech provider called a mirror of our old site and as if by miracle, all email was being transferred to our new domain.

Sure, there were a few blips along the way, like the phone company taking nearly two months to change our name in outgoing call display. And the few individuals who tried to commiserate and say they knew how hard this must be. But truth be told, it wasn't that difficult. We actually like our new name better. What's more, the re-branding process gave us a good opportunity to get out there and promote Palette Public Relations Inc. The glitches were minor.

In the end, PR is a people business. Someone finds out about us through our work, word of mouth and 'PR.' In the end, it probably wouldn't matter what we're called because it's our reputation that truly counts. Funny, isn't that just what we tell our clients?

And if you're still curious about why it happened, ask me sometime. I'd be happy to take less than a minute to tell you.