



New Identity Alert

February 2009



Among the new brand identities featured are Kraft Foods, Rohm, Reckitt Benckiser, Pepsi, Citroën, and Air France. As noted in the last issue, there appears to be a decline in the number of new brand identities being launched (though this past month has seen some significant ones). This observation, it should be noted, is completely anecdotal and not based on any actual verifiable data.

January was remarkable for the number of Obama-related products that were brought to market. It's certainly not surprising, considering the truly historic nature of President Obama's inauguration, that many people would want to have some memento of the occasion and that companies would be only too happy to oblige and make a quick buck. Inevitably these articles ranged from the tasteful, quality products to others that were quite strange. Who would not want to have an Obama tequila shot glass in their bar or an Obama Chia pet in their living room?

Given all that was written about how Barack Obama's campaign was the first true presidential brand, one wonders if these companies have the right to sell products bearing the likeness

and name of a "branded" person without a license do so. Would they dare produce Tiger Woods memorabilia or Madonna commemorative shot glasses without these individuals' prior approval and without paying a hefty licensing fee?

Being a politician of course changes the rules of the game. Claims of free speech can deflect anything if it's in the political realm. And yes, Ty Inc. did rename their Marvelous Malia and Sweet Sasha dolls after complaints from the First Lady, insisting, of course, that the dolls were not named after the President's daughters. But most would agree that the kids are out-of-bounds.

The question is, who owns the Obama brand, who own his likeness? Does he own it? Do the American people own it? If they do, should taxpayers reap the benefits of a licensing agreement? Would it also mean that only American firms are entitled to produce/market these goods? Or once someone decides to run for office, does it mean that this person is renouncing any claim of ownership to their name and likeness?



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KRAFT FOODS This global food powerhouse launched its new brand identity on February 17, with a new “purpose” to “Make Today Delicious.” Kraft has 100,000 employees in 150 countries, with brands ranging from Kraft cheeses to Maxwell House, Oscar Mayer, Nabisco, Lu, Oreo and Toblerone. Based in Northfield, Illinois, Kraft Foods claims to be the world’s second largest food company with annual revenues of \$42 billion U.S.

Comment Is there anything positive or should we say, delicious, about the new brand identity? Simply stated, no. The old Kraft brand mark is apparently not going away; it will remain the consumer-facing brand on packaging. So why have a different Kraft corporate brand identity with no relation to the product brand? Never mind that there is nothing original about the new brand identity: it looks like someone combined the *Amazon.com* and the *Dr. Pepper Snapple Group* brand identities (and, let’s not forget the new *Pepsi* circle and wordmark [see page 10]). The whole exercise smacks of plain silliness. The new brand identity looks like the effort of an average first-year design school student. The press release issued to announce the new brand identity refers to the employees as “Foodies.” Really, who would think of the term *foodies* in the same breadth as Velveeta, Jello and Miracle Whip? Pass the Cheez Wiz.

kraftfoodscompany.com

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RECKITT BENCKISER This British-based company that describes itself as a “World leading Home, Health and Personal Care company, passionately delivering better consumer solutions for the ultimate purpose of creating shareholder value,” began using its new corporate brand identity this month. Reckitt Benckiser has operations in over 60 countries, and claims sales in 180 countries with 43 manufacturing facilities worldwide employing over 23,371 people. Their brands range from Calgon, Lysol, Woolite, Clearasil, to French’s and Frank’s Red Hot.

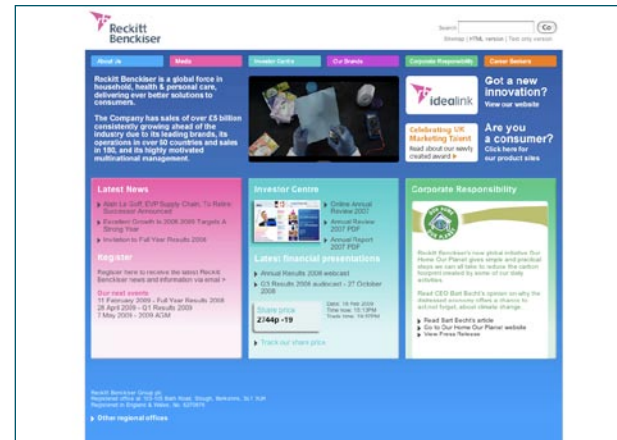
Comment It’s hard to know what to make of this new brand identity, in that no press release or statement from the company was found commenting on it. As such, it is a “nice” brand identity. The pink arrow (or kite as it was referred to in online reports) has positive energy. Other than assuming that the colour will appeal to what is most likely a primarily female customer base, it is hard to know what they are trying to communicate with the pink. The typestyle with its upper and lowercase lettering is more contemporary and approachable than the old wordmark, but why? In the end, the company does itself a disservice by trying to pretend that nothing has changed. Something clearly has, and in these days where corporate transparency is gaining even more currency, they ought to have at least issued a statement explaining the rationale behind the change in brand identity.

reckittbenckiser.com

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AIR FRANCE Earlier this month, Air France unveiled its new brand identity. The company claims the new brand identity reflects that the airline is now a global brand with over half its customers living outside of France. Air France stated that the new brand identity will be implemented gradually, with aircraft being rebranded during fleet maintenance operations. The Air France web site states the airline serves 183 destinations in 98 countries with 1,700 daily flights. They have 383 aircraft and nearly 75,000 employees.

Comment This evolution of the Air France brand identity is generally well done. It is lighter while still being bold and overall feels more contemporary. While heralding this new brand identity as a global brand, they clearly wanted to communicate that it is “an airline which is proud of its national identity.” The new tail graphics, a simplified version of the old ones, is an improvement. However, the addition of a shaded curve to the “red accent,” while well done, inevitably evokes comparisons to the British Airways ribbon. In a move that is confusing, the name is now one word. It remains two words, though, in the text of the press release announcing the new brand identity, and in all subsequent materials. They should have opted for a small word space in the logotype or writing their name as AirFrance in text. Considering all the bad work that is released as “great brands,” this effort is still very well done.

corporate.airfrance.com
airfrance.com

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AIRFRANCE

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AIR FRANCE



BRITISH AIRWAYS

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AIR MAURITIUS The national airline of Mauritius unveiled its new brand identity late last year. (Mauritius is an island nation off the coast of Africa in the Indian Ocean.) Founded in 1967, Air Mauritius serves more than 24 destinations on 4 continents with a fleet of 12 airplanes and carried 1.3 million passengers in 2007. The company also states it has 2,800 employees and that it makes a major contribution to the key drivers of the island's economy, in particular the tourist industry.

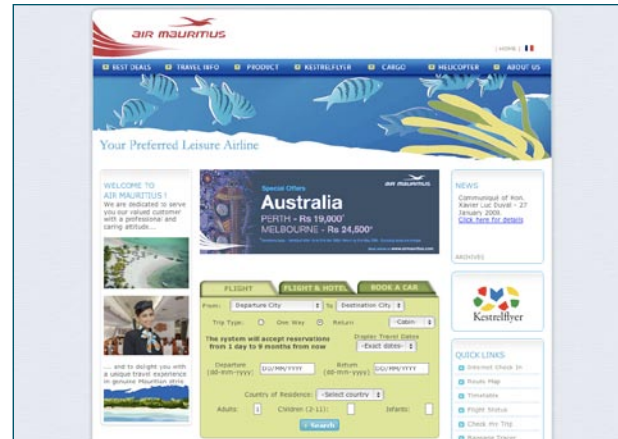
Comment They have 12 aircraft to Air France's 383, 24 destinations to Air France's 183. So do you hold both airlines to the same standard? The answer has to be yes. Both offer flights to each other's countries, so they therefore compete. They clearly offer different brand experiences as the "flag" carrier for their respective countries, with vastly different brand perceptions. Ironically, Air Mauritius also opted for an evolution of its brand identity. The "Paille en Queue", a mythical tropic bird, has been updated and the result is a more compelling bird symbol, even if it is not totally satisfactory. The logotype has that unfortunate feel of trying too hard to achieve the airline's "quest for modernity, refinement and friendliness." Had they opted, for example, for a lighter weight and upper and lowercase version of the former logotype's typestyle, the result would have been much better. In the end, if one were to choose which airline to take between the two simply based on their new brand identities, the choice is clearly Air France.

airmauritius.com

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EQT At the beginning of February, Equitable Resources, Inc., announced that it was changing its name to EQT Corporation, adopting its stock symbol as its name. This Pittsburgh-based company claims it has grown over the past decade to become the largest natural gas producer in the gas-rich Appalachian Basin, and one of the largest in the country. EQT states it is organized into major operating units focusing on the production, gathering, processing, transmission and distribution of natural gas. The latter's activities are regulated by the Public Utility Commissions of Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

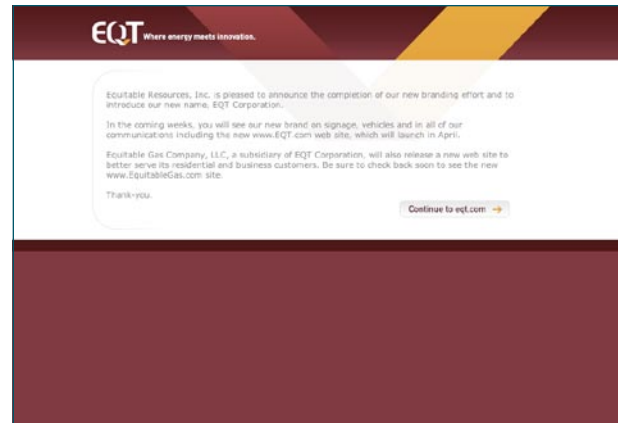
Comment The first question is of course, why use a stock symbol as a name? Is its primary audience shareholders and the investment community? If it isn't, then the name does not make sense. Beyond that, the wordmark would be graded 2/3. The letter *Q*, the focus of the wordmark, is interesting, though it is not clear exactly what it is or what it's trying to convey. The letter *T* works well enough, though it is tucked in a little to close to the *Q*. The *E* on the other hand does not fit. It is awkward and does not work. Making it less rounded might have helped it some; had the letter kept its right angles, it could have acted with the *T* as bookends to the letter *Q*. In the end, the result is not a terrible wordmark, but one that will fade in the ocean of forgettable brand identities.

eqt.com

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ROHM SEMICONDUCTOR Towards the end of December, this Japanese company unveiled its new brand identity to commemorate its fiftieth anniversary. ROHM was founded in Kyoto in 1958. The company designs and manufactures semiconductors, integrated circuits and other electronic components for the wireless, computer, automotive and consumer electronics markets. ROHM has sales, R&D and quality assurance centres in Asia, Europe and North America.

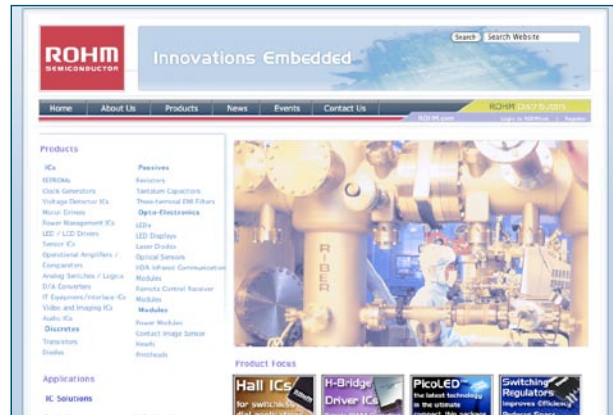
Comment This is definitely an improvement over the old wordmark, and not just because it has abandoned the IBM look-alike wordmark with blue stripes. First, and most significantly, the name is much easier to read in the new brand identity. It is straightforward and strong, yet still has a certain unique look to its lettering. The company explains the rectangle as reflecting the same shape as semiconductor chips. Now, if they can only do something about their web sites. The US site (rohmsemiconductor.com) is better, but both sites are trying to cram as much information as possible on the home page. An improved site architecture and better menus would go a long way to make these site more user friendly with a more up-to-date look.

rohm.com
rohmsemiconductor.com

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PEPSI After months of rumours and stories on numerous blogs, Pepsi-Cola North America Beverages acknowledged the new brand identity in a press release in December, trumpeting the results of a survey in the United States of Millennials (people who were born between 1980 and 1990). The company – based in Purchase, NY – also announced a new advertising campaign “featuring a consistent theme of optimism that mirrors the current social climate.”

Comment It’s nice to hear that some people are optimistic in this time of “economic tsunami.” Then again, one wonders, assuming the survey results were accurate to begin with, if the results would have been as optimistic a couple of months later. But one digresses. This may actually be Pepsi’s “New Coke” moment. (In 1985 Coca-Cola announced its had reformulated Coke, only to retreat after it proved to be a disaster.) Pepsi’s red, white and blue ball always had a positive and strong Ying-Yang balance that was maintained through all the previous iterations of the brand packaging. Now that balance has been broken, to find a white area that appears to be a tight-lipped smirk on one package to outright laughter on another (“You guys actually drink this stuff? HA! HA!”) While the idea of the ball not being static and identical on all Pepsi products is interesting, the overall impression is of something very smug: maybe of a company using research as a replacement for corporate decision-making, or drawing the wrong conclusions from its surveys.

pepsi.com
pepsico.com



OLD BRAND IDENTITY



THE BEST OF 2008 As in past years, the first issue of the year brings a look back at what were some of the best brand identities featured last year. The best brand identities came from Europe and North America. They include a software company, a national postal service, an oil exploration company and a frozen yogurt franchise. This proves that good brand identity work is not predicated on the industry, but the client's quest for excellence and brand designers being true to the brands they are creating.

Royal & SunAlliance rebranded, taking on a new name and brand identity that was fresh, unexpected and very well executed. Inspired by the horn in its old brand identity, Posten has Scandinavian clean lines that work very well. The happy face of the *u* with the umlaut dots works well to give Yogen Früz a positive, friendly attitude. NetNorske was a visually interesting new brand identity, and unexpected for an oil exploration company. Strong brand identities do not need to be complicated, and CSC made simplicity work for them.

rsagroup.com

posten.no

detnor.no

csc.com

yogenfruz.com



THE WORST OF 2008 There is no question that it is easier to write, and at times more entertaining to read, a review that is scathing. The reality, though, is that the companies represented here by their bad identities have employees, shareholders and others who, through no fault of their own, are being short-changed by the bad branding decision made by the management of these companies.

Often, these brand identities are merely the visual display of bad management on a whole range of other issues. A case in point is the new Vauxhall brand identity. Why would this GM company launch a brand identity that has more in common with gas-guzzlers than with smaller, more fuel efficient vehicles? Bell was on the verge of Canada's largest takeover before they launched their brand identity reminiscent of what it looked liked when it was a bureaucratic monopoly. Coincidence of events? Cinterion was another example of a successful, well-branded company selling to a private venture group a unit which then adopted a brand identity not worthy of a "Mom and Pop Shop." Canwest was an amateurish attempt to convey that it "is many parts which are different and distinct." Virtually at the same time that Belfast unveiled its brand identity, two UK towns were fighting over their brand identities claiming one infringed on the copyright of the other, which was essentially the same concept as Belfast's.

bell.ca
canwest.com
cinterion.com
vauxhall.com
www.belfastcity.gov.uk/brand



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Please contact us if you have any comments about the corporate brand identities featured in this issue, or if you wish to alert us to new identities that have been just launched or are about to be launched. We also welcome receiving the names and e-mail addresses of anyone you think would be interested in receiving this newsletter.

And if you have a branding challenge, we would of course be pleased to meet you and discuss how your brand can be effectively leveraged to its maximum potential.

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ABOUT METHOD BRANDING

A design firm with extensive experience, we work with a wide variety of clients including corporations, government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, start-up companies and others.

We work collaboratively with other communication agencies and firms, and collaboratively with our clients, to create compelling solutions. The brands and branded communications (brochures, annual reports, etc.) we create endure and build value. Bringing together the science and art of branding, our solutions are engineered to elicit the desired responses from stakeholders, building maximum brand value for our clients.

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