How (and how not) to Rebrand:
A Huddle Creative Step-by-Step Guide
What’s in a brand?

A brand is much more than just colours, logos, fonts and all the stylistic good stuff.

A brand is your business identity. In other words, it’s the image you wish to portray to the world. It communicates who you are, what you do, what your promise and mission is, what your company stands for and the values it’s built upon.

Recognisable and effective branding promotes your brand out into the world, connects you with your customers, enables you to capture a piece of the market, and edges you ahead of competitors.

And though the visual identity aspect of branding is important, what’s more important is how that reflects the very core of the business itself:

Who it is, what it does, how it does it, and why.
A brand is your business identity. In other words, it’s the image you wish to portray to the world. It communicates who you are, what you do.
What is rebranding & its purpose?

Rebranding is both a marketing and branding strategy where a new brand name, concept, design or brand identity is created to replace or update an already established brand.

The purpose of rebranding is simple: Businesses and industries evolve. For a business or brand to stay competitive and relevant it too must showcase its own evolution both through the brand, and its brand design (also known as its visual identity).

Because of this natural evolution, which could involve changes in positioning, values, or missions, there are a multitude of reasons why a brand may choose to rebrand. Some are good, some are terrible (we’ve listed the right and wrong reasons below), but at its heart rebranding can rejuvenate businesses of any shape and size by modernising them, differentiating them, and reinventing them.
For a business or brand to stay competitive and relevant it too must showcase its own evolution both through the brand, and its brand design.
Right and wrong Reasons for a Rebrand.

Rebranding is more than choosing a new logo, name and colour scheme. Rebrands can come with significant risks, like audience disconnect, loss of market standing, and potentially huge impacts on sales and industry leadership.

A good example is Royal Mail who in 2001 attempted to completely overhaul their brand to become Consignia. The decision cost them £3million to correct, and they suffered a complete loss of brand identity, industry standing and audience connection because nobody quite understood who they were or what they did.

Before rushing in, businesses and brands must understand the reasons behind why they want to rebrand. If it’s poor sales or low brand awareness for example, these are two things that can be rectified through analysis and marketing strategies or research.

To help, we’ve listed four right reasons and four completely oh no don’t do it reasons, with real life examples, below.
Rebranding to stand out from the competition.

Rebranding to leverage brand uniqueness and step out of the shadow of competitors is one of the correct reasons for rebranding. Generic names, poorly designed logos, or even failure to capture brand personality within the brand identity will restrain the business from filling its potential and claiming a share of the market.

Why? Because there's no opportunity for your audience to resonate with your brand and therefore connect with it.

This is where the power of rebranding comes in: It enables your business to differentiate from competitors by showing off what's unique about it, and why it's worth opting for over others.

Siemens is a technology company who got their rebranding right. Their identity before looked tired and too corporate, with stock image pictures of businessmen in suits and a logo that was simply their name in a standard font with not much else.

Fast forward, and Siemens realised the technology market was growing with the introduction of brands like Huawei and LG, and so needed to differentiate themselves. Admittedly they didn't change much about their logo, keeping the same font and colour, but they added a white box around it and underneath added their brand ethos: Ingenuity for life.

The addition of their ethos was powerful: It enabled Siemens to speak directly to the audience they needed to and outrightly promoted their brand promise twofold: To always deliver ingenuity forever (for life) and also in the everyday (for life). Siemens further displayed this connection by running a marketing campaign that featured people from all backgrounds and diversities in different environments, such as music gigs, DJs and female tech entrepreneurs.
In this digital age of gorgeous graphic design, animation and even technological leaps like AR and VR, Comic Sans 1999 Windows Frontpage branding sticks out like a sore, consumer off putting thumb.

Tired designs, dullish colour palettes, Clipart logos and failure to diversify or innovate can all leave brands behind like a desolate 1970s amusement arcade that got overshadowed by Alton Towers.

Rebrands are necessary for dated designs because something in the business is bound to have changed, whether it’s a new mission or value, or even a new product range or position. If nothing’s changed, then a rebrand can still be necessary to revolutionise the brand’s identity, drag it into the twenty-first century and show its audiences that it is evolving with the world around it.

One such example is Global Lightning Protection Services. This industrial firm specialises in lightning protection for the aerospace, construction and wind industries which is actually, when you think about it, pretty cool.

Unfortunately their original branding was not very cool. For a start their logo was what appeared to be a metallic beach ball with a lightning icon on it and their entire name in a Wordart font. There was no colour scheme, and nothing that really emphasised the fact that by nature the business was always evolving as technology and products around it did. Thankfully they opted for a rebrand and it paid off. Their new logo is quite frankly badass and dramatic, and uses a cutting strike of a lightning bolt to tell everyone exactly what it is they work with. They’ve shortened their name to GLPS, a much easier brand to identify and refer to, and even added their brand promise “empowering you to take charge” which is a clever use of a semantic field to create a play on words for both the mission of the business, and also why consumers need to use them.
Rebranding to change positioning.

Brands serve to connect your business with your ideal customers. But if you’re noticing that who you’re selling to is starting to differentiate entirely from who you want to be selling to, and you’re being associated with an incorrect brand image, your brand may need to reposition itself to appeal to the correct, or desired, audience.

One notable example of this is luxury British fashion house, Burberry. In the early 2000s, Burberry was in a bit of a slump. The brand with a 150 year heritage of fitting Lords and Ladies of the manor found themselves instead delegated to connotations of “gang wear” as predominantly white groups of males starting wearing the brand and then causing trouble at football away days. Things got so bad that a pub in Leicester famously banned anyone wearing Burberry, and the iconic red, white and beige checked scarf could be quite openly side eyed on the street.

In 2009, creative director Christopher Bailey took charge and decided the brand needed a rebrand, and fast. It needed to keep its luxury heritage, but it needed to show some kind of revolution. His answer? Repositioning.

Burberry used new product design to overhaul its tired classics and instead introduce new, sleek silhouette styles and for the first time, a line of female swimwear, both decisions which were aimed at enticing a much younger, much more fashion conscious female audience.

Some clever brand sponsorship deals later with clean as a whistle, teenage role model Emma Watson and fashion model Cara Delevingne (who stepped out in a Burberry coat in the centre of New York) cemented the rebrand. All of a sudden Burberry wasn’t gang wear. Burberry was edgy, high couture fashion and a decade on, that’s still exactly how it’s perceived.
This is another important reason. When two brands or businesses merge they need to reinvent themselves. Not only will repositioning need to happen as the now merged company looks to appeal to two pre-existing audiences, the original mission and values of the merged companies may have changed or become streamlined.

When that happens, the branding needs to reflect the changes happening behind the scenes and that's where a rebrand becomes necessary. Letting two brands sit side by side to try and appeal to the same audience with the same vision will ultimately cause confusion, disconnect and failure.

Two brands who faced this problem were tech giants Computer Sciences Corporation and Hewlett Packard Enterprise Services. Both companies specialised in providing IT services, but because they had previously been competitors – as opposed to innovators – the businesses needed to show unification across the brand in order to successfully carry across their existing audiences and values.

So, rather than sit side by side, they both took the leap and rebranded into DXC Technology. The new branding solidified them as a solitary industry leader and their rebrand, which was designed around their mission: “To help clients succeed in the face of accelerated innovation” represented just how committed to innovation they truly were.
The wrong Reasons.
Boredom is perhaps the worst reason for rebranding, ever. Many businesses or brands end up spending significant amounts on rebranding—and then getting it wrong—all because someone is getting tired of looking at the same logo and colour scheme and longs for shiny new things.

However, often with branding, shiny new things aren’t the answer unless there is a definitive reason (like the logo coming out of Microsoft 2000 Clipart). Though internally some departments may long for a change, it’s unlikely that consumers will because of their longstanding or preferred associations between the brand and a logo or colour scheme.

A classic example of boredom backfiring was the football team Leeds United. Leeds, a team with significant heritage, one day decided to sanction a change in brand identity that would see their historical coat of arms eradicated and instead replaced with a generic icon of a man thumping his chest.

It went as expected: Horribly. Over 77,000 Leeds fans protested the change and it was mocked openly on social media for being better suited as an advertisement for indigestion tablet, Gaviscon.

The damage was minimal apart from some red faces and refusals to buy the kit if ever it came to fruition (which would have eventually impacted profits), but had this been a different industry such careless and restless thinking could have been catastrophic. Leeds PR ended up reversing the changes within days, and the team has since done a minor, much cleaner, brand refresh.
In money troubles? Had skeletons fall out of the closet? Fending off bad press for brand mismanagement or mistakes?

**Do not rebrand.**

Rebrands that come in the midst of a catastrophe are seen through faster than your partner who knows you’ve watched something without them.

Often a rebrand in the face of a crisis will only tarnish the brand or business further as it will be seen as trying to distract from its bad press or shirk its accountability. Instead, face up to the trouble swirling around the brand, take responsibility and display how the lesson you’ve learnt from the issue is going to completely haul the brand or business so it can come back bigger and better.

Wells Fargo, one of America’s oldest and most loved financial services brands learnt this the hard way when it was revealed that they had been fiddling their sales figures by opening millions of fraudulent accounts.

In an attempt to overcome the scandal they tried to rebrand it out of the public stratosphere, swapping their management, launching diverse advertising campaigns and even updating the logo that best reflected their heritage.

Their message was an attempt to persuade customers they’d built back better, but in 2019 the rebrand was seen as nothing but the distraction many suspected it of being after more evidence revealed Wells Fargo was still paying checks drawn on the fake accounts.
In branding, an oversized ego can do oversized amounts of damage. If the brand or business desperately needs a rebrand, a reposition or a complete overhaul, an ego can prevent this from happening and sentence the business to despair. Whereas on the other hand, if a new owner takes over, decides they know best and then completely shakes the brand or business out of all recognition, that can also do just as much damage as failing to revolutionise.

When it comes to branding, egos need to be left outside the door and even more so if a rebrand is really just an excuse for a new owner, partner company, or Director to come in and try to make their mark.

Football team Cardiff City were another team who had a rebranding nightmare under their new leadership. When new owner Vincent Tan took over he decided that the team needed a complete brand identity overhaul. Known as the ‘Bluebirds’ for their entire legacy, Tan decided that could go and instead changed the entire team colours from blue to red to better represent Wales. He also removed the bluebird from the logo and replaced it with the Welsh dragon.

What he hadn’t planned for was just how much he was going to go against a fundamental rule of rebranding: Audience association and connection. Significant fan outrage led to the logo and team colours once again being reverted back to blue in a new, much more stylish design.
In the face of declining sales, reinventing your brand might seem like a wise idea. After all, it generates buzz, which generates curiosity, which may generate revenue by new audiences being enticed to try it, or existing audiences willing to see what’s different.

However, if nothing has changed under the surface: That is, if your image has changed but your mission hasn’t, or you look like you’ve repositioned when really you’ve just refreshed, those rebrands will become temporary highs and costly, addictive cycles of repetition.

Subway is one such brand learning that lesson. After the arrest of their spokesperson, Jared Fogle in 2015, and yearly declining sales since 2014 due to other fast food chains bringing out fresh sandwich options, they opted to rebrand. They released a new sleeker look in 2016 in conjunction with the Olympics, and it went well, renewing global interest and stabilising sales figures.

However, 4 years on and 2020 sales figures saw Subway close more than 1,000 stores in the United States, and only hold 24,798 stores globally - its lowest amount ever. In the wake of the COVID19 pandemic, Subway has closed 2,000 more stores and even took to selling grocery items at some locations to try and take advantage of consumer need when supermarkets ran short.

Rebranding in the wake of declining figures is a temporary, expensive fix: And not an advisable one.

To save floundering sales.