

# Should You Refresh or Rebrand? Comprehensive Guide

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The last few years have reshaped both consumers and brands. Consumers have redefined their priorities around work, family, sustainability, and technology. We've also learned to expect brands to evolve with us. In today's marketplace, trust, authenticity, and cultural alignment matter just as much as price or convenience.

## Has Your Brand Evolved with the Consumer?

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We've been tracking these shifts closely. In 2022, we offered guidance on planning a brand refresh. In 2024, we explored the decision between refreshing and rebranding. Now, in 2025, that decision is more urgent than ever. Consumer loyalty is fragile, competition is fierce, and the pace of change is relentless.

This guide combines our past insights with the latest research and brand examples to answer the question: **Is it time for a brand refresh or a full rebrand?**

## Why This Matters in 2025

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In a recent [blog](#) about consumer loyalty, we discussed the fact that nearly three out of four shoppers switched brands in the past year. For Gen Z and Millennials, that number is even larger. It's not that people no longer care about brands; they do. But if their expectations aren't met, they'll move on quickly.

Research confirms that brands aligning with cultural trends in real time see stronger engagement and ROI. At the same time, digital-first behaviors and values-driven choices have shifted from temporary fads to permanent expectations.

Which leads us to this takeaway: **The status quo isn't a guarantee of brand growth.**

## Refresh vs Rebrand: The Key Differences

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### Brand Refresh

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Refreshing your brand means updating select elements, such as colors, typography, website, or messaging, without changing the core identity. A refresh keeps consumer recognition intact while modernizing the look and feel of your business.

## Rebrand

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A rebrand is a complete transformation. It's more than updating an image or changing a color palette. It involves redefining your strategy, positioning, and identity. Rebrands often include a new name, logo, tagline, mission, values, messaging, visual system, and communication channels.

## Reasons to Choose a Brand Refresh

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A refresh is proper when you need to evolve but still want to retain equity in your existing brand.

### 1. Modernization

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If your visual identity feels dated, a refresh can make it relevant again, without losing its personality. But modernization shouldn't erase what customers love. Take what happened with Cracker Barrel's infamous logo update. Many consumers criticized the new minimalist design as bland and corporate. In contrast, Pringles' refresh of its Mr. Pringle mascot modernized the design without losing its playful charm.



## 2. Adapting to Market Changes

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The market around you is changing faster than your brand identity. Shifts in consumer expectations, competitive pressures, or new industry trends can signal the need for a refresh that better reflects your business's direction. Starbucks' 2011 logo update, which removed the word "coffee," gave the company flexibility to expand into teas, food, and lifestyle experiences while positioning itself as a cultural hub.

## 3. Consistency Across Touchpoints

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When your brand appears inconsistently across different communication channels, it can confuse customers and erode trust. A brand refresh helps eliminate those disconnects. It's an opportunity to provide a reliable experience at every customer interaction, from your website and social media to sales calls and advertising campaigns. Airbnb's recent streamlined design system is a great example. It didn't replace the iconic logo. Instead, it updated the interface to ensure consistency across digital, mobile, and in-person experiences.

## 4. Incremental Improvement

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One way to update your brand without creating customer blowback is through a phased refresh. Instead of rolling out every change at once, you introduce updates gradually, starting with a single element like a refreshed logo. Over time, you update the typography and finally adjust the color palette or other design features. This step-by-step method gives audiences time to adjust and keeps the brand feeling familiar while still moving forward. Mastercard refined its logo over decades, simplifying shapes and fonts while retaining the iconic red and yellow circles. By the time it dropped the wordmark from the logo in 2019, consumers already felt a sense of recognition and trust.

## 5. Maintaining Recognition

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If your brand already has strong equity and recognition, a refresh is often wiser than a complete overhaul. Minor updates keep your identity current while preserving what customers already know and trust. For example, Coca-Cola's seasonal packaging and limited-edition designs create novelty without changing the timeless red script and ribbon.

## Reasons to Choose a Rebrand

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A rebrand is appropriate when incremental changes aren't enough.

### 1. Strategic Repositioning

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When your brand identity no longer matches your strategic direction, a rebrand can reset your positioning and signal a new path. It's an opportunity to realign consumer perception with long-term business strategy and show stakeholders that your company is evolving. For instance,

Facebook's transition to Meta in 2021 signaled a pivot toward the metaverse while distancing from past controversies.

## 2. Overcoming Negative Perception

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Sometimes, a damaged or limiting reputation makes it impossible to move forward without a reset. In these cases, a rebrand provides a clean slate and helps shift public perception. It can transform misconceptions into strengths and rebuild credibility with both new and existing audiences. For example, Phase 3 partnered with [Royal Food Service](#) to overcome the perception that they were just another “big box” distributor. The rebrand focused on the company’s authentic differentiators: being family-owned, sourcing organic and locally grown produce, and bringing specialized expertise to every partnership. Royal is now positioned as a trusted partner rather than a faceless supplier.



BEFORE



AFTER

## 3. Mergers and Acquisitions

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When multiple companies merge into one organization, a unified brand identity becomes essential. It ensures clarity, trust, and consistency for customers and internal teams. Phase 3 recently guided [ProMach](#) through consolidating 26 separate companies, each with its own logo and collateral, into one cohesive identity. The rebrand strengthened internal culture and presented a unified front to the industry.



BEFORE



AFTER

#### 4. Diversification of Products or Services

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When businesses expand into new products, services, or markets, their existing identity or brand strategy may no longer capture the full scope of what they do. At that point, a rebrand is a strategic reset that communicates growth and ambition. A classic example is Google's transition to Alphabet, which gave the company room to incubate ventures well beyond search, from life sciences to autonomous vehicles.

Read more insights into brand diversification and the importance of sub-branding [here](#).

#### 5. Mission or Vision Shift

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When a company alters its core purpose or values, such as prioritizing sustainability, inclusivity, or community impact, a rebrand can help make that shift more visible and tangible. It signals not only what you say, but also what you believe and how you want the world to perceive your business. Over the past several years, Abercrombie & Fitch has intentionally moved away from an exclusive, image-focused past to a more inclusive, value-driven brand identity. Alignment with these values has paid off. Abercrombie has seen both a growth in sales and an increase in operating profit.

#### 6. Legal or Trademark Issues

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Sometimes rebranding is driven by necessity or compliance, such as startups finding out that their chosen name is trademarked. A more extreme example is the WWF (World Wrestling Federation), which became WWE after a legal dispute with the World Wildlife Fund. While initially disruptive, the rebrand positioned WWE as a broader entertainment company.

For expert insights on selecting a [powerful brand name](#),

## 2025 Consumer Expectations: Trends That Matter

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Today's consumers expect more than good products or services. They want brands to stay relevant, reflect their values, and deliver consistent experiences across every touchpoint. A few themes stand out:

### Cultural Alignment Matters

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Brands that connect with what's happening in the world feel more authentic. Being slow to react or ignoring trends can be costly. Adapting messaging and content to our culture fosters deeper engagement, stronger awareness, and better ROI. A good example is Nike's "You Can't Stop Us" campaign, launched during the pandemic. By aligning its message with the global conversation about resilience and unity, Nike reinforced its brand values while also connecting with a cultural moment.

### Digital-First is Permanent

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Today's consumers expect every interaction with a brand (online, in-app, or in-store) to feel seamless. A clunky digital experience can make your business seem out of touch, even if your products or services are strong. And it's not just about the moment of purchase. Most people start their journey online, researching products, comparing options, and reading reviews before considering a transaction. Winning brands make digital easy, reliable, and in tune with customer needs at every step.

Learn more about generating customer engagement through digital marketing channels [here](#).

### Values-Driven Choices

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Today's shoppers, especially Millennials and Gen Z, tend to stay loyal to brands that have a meaningful purpose. They want to see companies reflect their values on issues like sustainability, inclusivity, and social responsibility. When brands take a clear stance and follow through with real action, they foster loyalty and advocacy. For example, Patagonia's "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign asked customers to consider the environmental costs of overconsumption. It suggested buying less, even if that meant purchasing less from Patagonia. The campaign turned Patagonia into a symbol of environmental activism.

### Emotional Resonance Counts

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A brand isn't remembered only for what it sells, but for how it makes people feel. Strong visuals and storytelling create emotional connections that last long after a purchase is complete. A powerful example is Apple's minimalist design. The company's consistent use of clean visuals, simple typography, and emotionally charged storytelling conveys innovation, elegance, and a sense of belonging to something bigger. Apple customers buy into a lifestyle and a feeling, as well as a digital device.

[here](#).

## Questions to Ask Before You Decide

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Deciding between a refresh and a rebrand isn't only a creative exercise. It's also a strategic one. To know which path is correct, start by asking the hard questions:

- Has your brand story grown stale?
- Has your differentiator become obsolete?
- Has your audience shifted?
- Have new offerings caused inconsistency?
- Does your mission still match your long-term strategy?
- Have you lost trust with customers or employees?

These questions should never be answered in isolation from the C-suite. Employees live your brand every day and often see disconnects that leadership may miss. Including them in your discovery process ensures authentic insights that guide your brand strategy with confidence.

## 6 Strategies for Planning a Refresh and Rebrand in 2025

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### Research and Discovery

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The first step in a brand refresh or rebrand is knowing your current positioning. This helps you see how your brand aligns with customer expectations and market opportunities. Conduct communication channel and competitive audits, stakeholder interviews, and in-depth customer conversations to uncover insights and opportunities.

### Define Strategy and Alignment

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Once research is complete, the next step is to define your brand strategy and ensure alignment with both your company's long-term vision and today's cultural expectations. Refine foundational elements, including your mission, vision, personas, tone, and visual identity. Then align them with cultural expectations, such as sustainability and authenticity.

### Timeline and Budget

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Allocating time and budget is an important consideration. Treat this as a strategic investment, not just a design exercise. In terms of timeline, refreshes can take 4 to 6 months and rebrands can take up to a year. Costs can be significant, depending on the scope of your project and whether

you bring in outside collaborators, such as Phase 3. A simple brand refresh can start around \$50,000 and a full rebrand of a large enterprise could be \$500,000 and up.

## Launch Internally First

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Your brand should resonate with both internal and external stakeholders. Staff can be your most ardent brand ambassadors when they feel like they're a part of the brand evolution. A strong internal brand can have a direct impact on your talent acquisition, retention, and productivity. Read more about the power of a strong employer brand [here](#).

## Digital-First Launch

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Then go external with an [integrated marketing strategy](#) that combines the strengths a variety of marketing tactics and digital channels. Revise all marketing and sales visuals and messages. Optimize for SEO, [voice, and generative search \(AI\)](#). Use storytelling to connect with customers in real time.

## Ongoing Engagement

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Treat your brand launch as a beginning, not an end. Incorporate the new brand into all marketing and communication channels, including print, PR, advertising, signage, uniforms, vehicles, and more. Continue to update, listen, and evolve to stay aligned with customer expectations. Read this [blog](#) for our thoughts on the best practices for nurturing customer engagement following a brand change.

## Final Thoughts

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Your brand is much more than just your logo. It's the feeling customers get when they encounter your business. Today, that feeling must reflect trust, purpose, inclusivity, and adaptability. Whether you opt for a refresh or a complete rebrand, the key is to stay aligned with consumer expectations and cultural trends, as well as your mission, values, and strategic goals.

[Brand Strategy & Design](#) services can help you build a brand that resonates with tomorrow's customers. [Contact us](#) today.