

Blending two identities into one:

Rebranding and the healthcare merger

Retaining some elements and unleashing others can benefit a newly merged enterprise by building upon existing equity and taking the brand to the next level



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What's the trick?

Healthcare entities merge in order to take their combined enterprise to a new, higher place in the market and society. Rebranding gives that new place a stronger public connection, one built with the past in mind and looking toward the future. And, while the pre-merger period is often a very anxious time marked by rumors and uncertainty for employees, rebranding will renew pride among the now combined staffs and create the unity to move forward.

There's no trick to doing it right because rebranding isn't magic. It is a process, consistent in desired goals and elastic in how to achieve them for each unique entity.

There are, however, plenty of questions to be asked and answered. What do we call the new entity? How do we retain the brand equity of both organizations? How fast do we want to transition? How will our new name and brand identity communicate our values and principles?

Answering these questions – and others that arise during the rebranding – is all part of the process.

1 What do we call the new entity?

There are basically three answers to this question. You can retain one of the two current names. You can combine the two names into one mega name. Or, you can create a new name that replaces both.

When American Airlines merged with US Airways, the combined airline retained only the American Airlines name and its holding company was renamed American Airlines Group Inc. Though the name remained American Airlines, the merger was accompanied by a new logo, something that had not changed in 45 years. The new logo kept the idea of “American” by utilizing red, white and blue and the airline’s familiar use of the eagle, stylized in a sleek new symbol. Instead of a merger, we witnessed a wedding of sorts: something old, something new, something borrowed and something red, white and blue.



When United Airlines and Continental Airlines merged, United became the common brand name and the company became United Continental Holdings. Rather than adopt the United logo or create something new, the brand illustrated the merger by incorporating the Continental globe logo, placing it against the United blue background.



Clearly, none of the entities in these mergers wanted to redesign the wheel. Considerable thought (and likely some lively debate) went into deciding which name to use and how to handle the logo. The results retained brand equity and yet signified the dawn of a new period for each airline.

What to name two healthcare entities that merge is an extremely significant decision. Retaining only one of the two entity names is risky as it threatens the loss of the abandoned brand's accumulated equity. Combining the names into one mega name is a possibility, but is difficult and can result in an awkward name that fosters more confusion than loyalty.

Creating a new name takes advantage of several opportunities.

It immediately signifies a change in leadership, direction or both. It makes a bold statement about the new entity. To the consumer, a shared entity that has different names, logos and taglines isn't sharing anything at all. A new name will foster loyalty both internally and externally by removing the invisible barriers and political boundaries of formerly separate organizations. Evolving two brands into one master brand promotes unity – giving everyone in the organization a new flag to salute.

2 How do you build a new brand identity?

Strategic brand expression transforms a clearly defined strategy into an authentic expression of your organization. Establishing your brand strategy requires identifying and understanding the intention of your organization's leadership.

That means asking more questions:

What is our positioning?

This question is where the introspection starts, particularly concerning a merger. In the global marketplace, how do you want your new entity to be known? Are you the most comprehensive cancer treatment center in North America? Are you the most experienced pediatric specialists in the region? You don't have to be the biggest. You do have to determine what sets you apart. Brand positioning means that all brand activity produces a singular positive result. It is what you want the consumer to think of first. It is focus.

What is our purpose?

Defining your purpose tells the world your reason for being. It goes beyond public perception to what you want the public to believe. Is it medical research? Education? Specialized care? Ultimately, your purpose is to make the world a better place. How you will do that is what sets you apart.

What is our mission?

Say "mission" and people think "mission statement." That is unfortunate. Most mission statements are like party balloons – overinflated and there because people expect them to be. Your mission should be based on your purpose. It should be clear, concise and void of helium. It should tell a story in one sentence. What promise do you make? That's your mission.

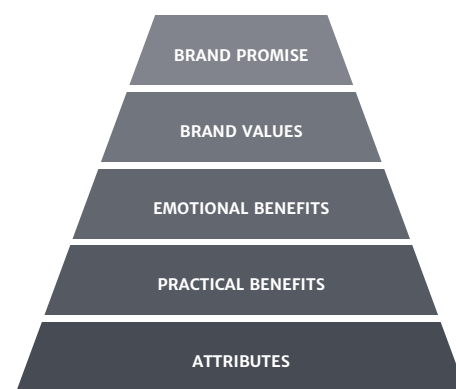
What is our brand's personality?

The different facets of your brand's character are the elements of its personality. Determining your brand's archetype – its foundational strengths – will help delineate its personality. Is your organization built on competence and courage? You are "The Hero" archetype. Do you value wisdom and rational decision making? You are "The Sage." Defining the core principles that drive your organization will reveal your archetype and brand personality.

The answers to these questions are the raw material for your Brand Platform – the fluid, vibrant document that serves as the foundation of your brand.

Each component of your Brand Platform should be carefully considered to best reflect what your organization stands for:

- **Attributes:** the defining qualities, characteristics and personality traits of your organization. These are not aspirational, but are actual and present such as Approachable vs. Institutional, Intentional vs. Reactionary, Courageous vs. Conservative.
- **Practical Benefits:** The functional value people get when they use your services – the rational reasons why.
- **Emotional Benefits:** Your brand’s ability to make people feel something when they use your services; the internal, experience-based reasons why.
- **Brand Values:** The behaviors that drive your organization. These aren’t showy statements on a wall but key motivators for how your healthcare organization is run, from the top management and board of directors to the front line staff.
- **Brand Promise:** The core essence of your organization, written as a true declaration of what will happen when people experience your product or service.



**Your Brand Platform
is the informational
base for naming
your new entity.**

3 How is a new name created?

Rebranding a merged healthcare entity does not mean starting from scratch. There is, presumably, a history to both former brands. With those histories comes equity in the form of three Rs: recognition, reputation and relevance.

Take a look at both former brands. What are the elements of the names and logos that you feel would add value to the new brand? What elements does the staff identify with? What does the public like? A word? A color? An image? Separate those elements and focus on what you have set aside. A rebrand will carry over elements that evoke your existing recognition while also emphasizing your reputation in the community and relevance in the medical world.

How do you create a new name? Start generating ideas. Hundreds of them. Your rebranding consultant has a creative team and it shouldn't work in isolation. Members of that creative team need to collaborate directly with your internal rebranding committee, whose membership should represent all levels and layers of your merging organizations, from management to marketing, surgery to social work.

The new name needs to be more than clever or catchy. It has to represent the new master brand. It has to be forward-thinking. It has to sum up and symbolize the values and principles of the new organization. It has to express the confidence patients search for when they are selecting a source of care. To them, the decision they make very well may be a matter of life or death.

Your new name has to provide the Reassurance that they have indeed come to the right place.

The name can refer to a city or a region (Cleveland Clinic, Massachusetts General, Nebraska Medicine), a founder or donor (Mayo Clinic, founded by William Worrall Mayo; Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center), or a historical figure (St. Francis) or place (Mount Sinai). For example, Cedars of Lebanon and Mount Sinai Hospitals in Los Angeles merged in 1961 to form Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. The key is to not limit a healthcare entity's global reach by pegging its name to one particular area.

A new name today can also be utilized to further a value or an ideal. Catholic Healthcare West in California rebranded to Dignity Health, a veiled reference to its Catholic principles without naming a specific religion. Likewise, North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System changed its name in 2015 to Northwell Health. The retention of "North" is a nod to its past, while "well" and "health" underscore its mission and goals.

Deciding upon a name for the new organization – whether it is a retention of a former name or something completely different – requires considerable thought, collaboration, introspection and reexamination.

4 How fast will we transition to a new identity?

Which is better, pulling a Band-Aid off slowly, or yanking it off in one quick jerk? One method can extend the pain for several seconds; the other is over in an instant.

With a rebrand, the reveal of a new identity is seldom over in an instant. The planning, design and creation of the new brand will likely take a year or more. And while the launch of the new brand may be accomplished in a grand ceremony complete with the raising of a curtain, the implementation of that new identity across all facets of an organization can take another year – perhaps longer.

Internally and externally, there are literally hundreds of times and manners in which people interact with your brand name. These interactions are called touchpoints. When a consumer sees your brand name on television, that's a touchpoint. Likewise, when an employee prints a letter on a sheet of stationery with your brand, that's a touchpoint.

Not every touchpoint carries equal weight. Some are more influential than others. Yet each must be identified prior to launching the rebrand to ensure none fall through the cracks.

These touchpoints include:

- **signage,**
- **vehicles,**
- **employee badges,**
- **invoices,**
- **stationery and business cards,**
- **forms,**
- **advertisements, and**
- **thousands of website pages.**

Applying the new brand to these touchpoints requires mountains of forms and applications to track to be certain the brand is used consistently.

Transitioning to a new name is a time consuming process, yet tremendously rewarding, as before your eyes the unlimited reach of your new brand identity becomes clear.

Considering a rebrand?

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