

# Rebranding a medical center 101

How a rebrand affords impressive power, rare opportunity  
and effective means to unite people and vision



**Where brands come true.**

We're a national design company on a mission to help brands transform what is — to what could be.

# Invest in your future.

Not so long ago, hospitals were tall buildings filled with sick people. They were staffed by a small army of nurses and run by a handful of different religious orders or faith affiliations. Medicine was reactive. Doctors made their rounds early in the morning and returned from their private practices only in an emergency. Specialists were physicians who had offices across town and appeared at the hospital on the day of surgery. Research was conducted by men and women in lab coats at the nearest university-run medical school. Rarely did the scientists who devised treatments and the physicians who employed them ever meet.

Today, that singular hospital has most likely been absorbed into a health system. The name “medical center” has been adopted to indicate the wide range of care and specialty services available, along with elements of teaching and research. Physicians and specialists collaborate as part of comprehensive teams. Their offices are on campus and, in the best of cases, just down the hall from the research labs. Medicine is both proactive and reactive, with treatments, therapies and preventive programs that consider the whole person down to their microscopic genes.

How do you communicate these incredible changes? How do you take the separate departments and disciplines that compose the concept of “medicine” and bring them together in a manner the organization will support and the public will understand? How do you tap into the historic equity you’ve built, incorporate it into the extensive role of medical centers today and share a glimpse of their wondrous vision for tomorrow?

## **Rebrand.**

Rebranding represents a tremendous investment in the future. Systemic institutional rebranding – when used as directional positioning and culture motivation – can be one of the most effective tools available to a transformational leader. It can be the power, opportunity and the means to unify healthcare entities along with thousands of employees.

If you understand how.

CHAPTER 1

# Identity Crisis

Across America, traditional healthcare institutions of all kinds and sizes are being challenged to respond to profound and rapid changes in their social, technological, financial and especially regulatory environments. In many cases, consolidation offers the best promise of sustained, enhanced service excellence, as well as satisfying the urgent need for cost reduction. In others, there exists a desire to remain independent yet emphasize that all the resources available through a large health system can also be offered by a singular entity.

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Whether you run a newly integrated enterprise or a well-established independent facility, each requires a branding strategy to definitively establish a unique presence in a competitive, crowded marketplace. More importantly, each requires an identity that will best support its leaders' intentions – their vision, in effect, for all things to come.

Leaders want a culture united in a shared passion for clinical service excellence to be sustainable at an expanded scale. The need to establish an identity and build unity can be powerful drivers of a significant rebranding.

Keep in mind that rebranding is more than a new logo, symbol or tagline. It is the most powerful way to communicate a fresh vision; a transformation story both true and compelling, meaningfully introduced by a new identity.

## CHAPTER 2

# Why Rebrand?

Being the closest hospital isn't good enough anymore. People will go out of their way for what they perceive to be "better" care – and that perception begins with your brand.

Healthcare brands share similar goals. Each brand:

- **clearly delivers an accurate message,**
- **confirms credibility and expertise in a given field,**
- **connects emotionally with a target audience,**
- **motivates and inspires action, and**
- **solidifies loyalty among patients and the community.**

When a brand becomes weakened by time or vagueness of message, rebranding will effectively communicate and illustrate every facet of a healthcare organization, from the standard of quality it symbolizes and the pride of the physicians and employees who believe in it, to the satisfaction of the patients who trust in it and the generosity of the community that supports it.

For a longstanding organization now under new leadership – or a reorganized enterprise resulting from a merger or consolidation – rebranding is a bold, definitive action that signals change. It sets an organization on course to meet the challenges of a rapidly-evolving marketplace, and fosters loyalty by removing the "invisible" barriers and political boundaries of formerly separate organizations.

In the next five chapters, we will discuss the key objectives of a healthcare rebrand.

## CHAPTER 3

# Elevate and leverage a collective brand

Fragmentation fosters confusion. Is ABC physicians' group part of ABC hospital? Then why do they have a different logo? Is ABC hospital part of ABCD medical center? Then why are they across town from each other? And if they share a campus, why do they have different names? Different symbols? Can my doctor practice there? Where do I go to find the answers?

To the consumer, a shared entity that has four different names, three logos and six taglines isn't sharing anything at all. And, if this is the case with your healthcare enterprise, even the doctors and staff may be confused. Or worse, feel as though they are in competition with each other rather than working toward the same goals.

An effective rebrand simplifies complexity and leverages a cohesive design across all touchpoints. Designing a pattern of visuals enables you to promote a pattern of behavior.

## **A rebrand will create a connection, encourage collaboration and educate the community.**

If you have a multifaceted healthcare group, a rebrand can clarify individual purpose within the organization by providing the substantive differentiation that links and highlights each unique aspect. For example, a healthcare entity with four elements: inpatient care (its hospital), education (its medical school or nursing college), outpatient (its clinics) and research (its laboratories and institutes) can be united by a logo, symbol, typeface, color palate and tagline and/or brand promise.

**Unifying these elements and the people they represent with a strong, compelling rebrand will elevate and leverage the collective brand in the eyes and minds of its audience.**

## CHAPTER 4

# Drive patient volume to key services

The effort to streamline is constant and pressing, to do more with less and meet certification requirements along with the ever-changing insurance industry and federal and state regulations. But in that push, promoting the qualities that distinguish the care you provide can become muddled in the minds of your audience. The effort to excel is still there; your people live it every day. But to excel at what? Is orthopedics your specialty? Oncology? Neurology? Urology? Pediatrics? Transplantation? Rehabilitation?

If the public is uncertain what you're good at, a rebrand will provide that clarity in the form of brand positioning. One place. One brand. My doctor thinks I may have cancer? Well, there is really only one choice for the best care in the region. Positioning is the quality of a brand that makes it iconic. It is focus.

Brand positioning acts as a funnel to drive patient volume to key services by first identifying those services, and second, by recognizing those services as the best available. Did your organization earn accreditation? A higher level of designation than your competition? Recognition from U.S. News & World Report? J.D. Powers and Associates? Does anyone beyond your building know? Tell the world. And tell it why. We are recognized by our peers for this service and this service and this specialty. And we are proud.

**Brand positioning creates a place in the market that only your brand can occupy. It won't eliminate your competitors. It will set you apart.**

## CHAPTER 5

# Link patients and services

Consolidation, relocation and mergers have turned once easy-to-navigate hospitals into mammoth complexes complete with acres of parking and mazes of walkways. How can you present an image of comfort and accessibility when all the public sees is the imposing behemoth you've become?

Put yourself in your patients' shoes and make it easier for them to get where they are going. The best ways to link patients with services is visually and electronically.

A rebrand will examine every web page, app and portal to be certain the path to services is as short and as easy as it can be.

Whether it is finding a doctor, making an appointment, tracking an account or paying a bill, empower your patients with electronics and technology that is logical and simple to navigate.

**The less frustration,  
the greater the satisfaction.**



## CHAPTER 6

# Reinforce relevance and reputation

A proud history is something to be noted and celebrated. But if your brand looks like it belongs in a museum, the public will have the impression your services should be there with it.

Brands that you see in the rearview mirror are doomed to stay there and eventually fade from view – unless you take action to reinvigorate them. Not reinvent. Revive. Brands that have gone stale may still have some life left in them. They are like a failing heart that will function if only we jolt it back to sinus rhythm. If a brand strategist can tap into the legacy, then the history that once gave the brand in question prominence and market share will again serve as an asset.

A rebrand will carry over elements that evoke your historically impressive foundation while also emphasizing your reputation in the community and the medical world. Are you the only healthcare provider in the region with a specific service or expertise? Have you partnered with nationally-recognized medical entities on research, procedures or techniques? These are the factors that erase the tarnish from an aging brand and position it for a bright future.

In a rebrand, not every element of a current brand needs to be completely discarded. Take a look in that rearview mirror and decide what elements you like. A color? A word or two? An image? Then take a good hard look ahead. And don't forget to listen to what your patients – your customers – are saying about your brand. They are smarter than you think.

**Use what you've put together to reestablish your relevance for today and for tomorrow.**

CHAPTER 7

## Empower transitional leadership

There are so many “what ifs?” that accompany transformational leadership. Uncertainty not only detracts from productivity, it also has an impact on morale. Rumors, misconceptions and incorrect information can be extremely damaging to an organization if allowed to spread uncontrolled.

A rebrand signals change more than any other single communications tool for a new leader. It proclaims strength, direction, vision and focus. Like a spring rainstorm, a rebrand sweeps the sky of dark rumor clouds and washes away misinformation, clearing the pathway to a fresh, hope-filled future.

**Rebranding is much more than changing the signs on some buildings. It is about leading the people inside those buildings in a courageous new direction – along with the people they serve.**

## CHAPTER 8

## Begin the process

**How well do you know yourself?**

It is not as simple as looking in a mirror. Even then, your view is limited. Nothing more than a one-dimensional reflection. And many of us see only what we want to see. To learn what motivates you and why, you need to look deeper, beyond the surface and the obvious highlights and flaws.

**That is why the first step in the rebranding process is one of discovery.****Interview key leaders**

Even a marketing genius cannot articulate a vision if it is not clear. Thoughts that went into the writing of a mission statement years ago are not the same thoughts on a CEO's mind today. Begin with a list of key questions that will define where leadership – the chancellor and CEO, board chairs, divisional heads and department chiefs – think the organization needs to be tomorrow and where they want it to be in 10 years. Then compile the answers.

**Clarify vision, strategies, goals and values**

Healthcare entities are light years from where they were two or three decades ago. The challenges have changed – and so have the people who face them every day. Talk to them. Ask them some of the same tough questions that were asked of the leadership. Harvest ideas as well as answers. These are the people interacting directly with your patients and the public. Their opinions are important.

**Research customer perceptions**

What do Joe and Jane Public think about your logo and brand promise? Do they recognize it? Most importantly, do they connect with it? If either answer is no, you have much work to do. Determine where the connection was lost and what it would take to restore. If their perception is not an accurate reflection of your business and what it stands for, that misperception demands correction.

**Conduct an existing brand(s) and brand architecture audit**

Now is the time for the professionals to insert their opinion. It is similar to having a preliminary diagnosis and going straight to the specialist. Ideally, you have professionals leading you up to this point. If so, they likely have formed their own list of questions that will help them gain a greater understanding of your brand and where it should be. Let them dissect your current brand to determine, piece by piece, what is working and what is not.

**Conduct an Archetype Discovery™**

At Daake, we believe that every person, corporation and healthcare organization has a unique archetype. We have developed a method of identifying that archetype and what it means. It goes beyond determining likes and dislikes. It is the very soil where your values are planted. Distinguishing the core principles that drive your organization will lead to a rebrand that truly represents who you are and what you value.

## CHAPTER 9

# Define & plan

There is a huge difference between knowing information and understanding it.

The second phase of the rebranding process takes the information gathered in the first phase, deciphers it and then organizes it in ways that emphasize the aspects most relevant and useful.

### Synthesize learnings

Just as an orchestra synthesizes musicians and their instruments, a rebrand takes many opinions and combines them. Think of the surveys and focus group findings as the strings and the woodwinds. The patient feedback is the percussion section, the physician surveys are the strings and the staff questionnaires are the brass. The CEO and leadership interviews serve as the conductor. Combine it all and listen closely. What do you hear?

### Clarify brand strategy

What is it you really want your brand to accomplish? Attract new patients? Establish your medical center as a premier institution? Highlight a particular specialization? Defining your brand strategy will refine the direction of the rebrand. Your strategy has to be rooted in what you do best and nurtured by why you do it. Are you truly out to turn the world into a better place? Help people live healthier? Longer? Then your brand should have the power to make us see, feel, know

– and believe it.

### **Create a naming strategy**

Words are among the most powerful tools available as you build a rebrand. Whether it is a brand name or a tagline, every word should be chosen carefully to incorporate who you are, what you stand for and why you do it best. A naming strategy takes into account how you want people to think

**– and how you want them to feel.**

### **Develop a brand brief**

This is a step further in the organization of the thoughts and concepts that are helping refine your rebrand. The brief gives everyone with an active role in the project a formal document against which they can weigh decisions and help determine which ideas and concepts add value – and which ones dilute the image and marketing strategies. This report, developed for and presented to leadership and key stakeholders, details progress and keeps people informed and involved. It is the kind of meaningful collaboration that helps eliminate surprises three months down the road.

### **Keep the ball rolling**

Leaders who are committed to the betterment of the entire institution will remain dedicated to the rebrand goal.

They will keep the various committees on task no matter the distractions. They will insist that deadlines be set and met in order to keep the process moving. They will assign responsibility and require accountability. Their courage, toughness, firm belief, presence and decisiveness will help everyone involved stay on task.

# CHAPTER 10

## Create

### A brick and a vase both start as clay.

You have listened, gathered, sorted and compiled information. That is your clay. Whether you start with your current brand or a blank slate, the time to craft something meaningful is now.

#### **Design the brand identity**

Four words that represent so much. There will be hours of “What about this?” and “How about . . .?” Drawings on paper and screens and white boards. Lists of words and taglines that are whittled down to a select few. Debates. Meetings and late nights and emails and phone calls. All intended to ultimately bring an idea to life. What happens here is difficult to describe. It is not magic and it is not easy, but creating the perfect brand identity will make it look like it was both.

#### **Eliminate the noise**

Over time, brands accumulate noise. They spin off their axis a bit and develop all kinds of creaks and rattles. Enter the rebrand. A rebrand will replace the noise with a clear signal. It purges your brand’s system of all the outdated updates and quick-fix patches that have been applied since its conception. It is a reset button for your brand.

### **Test trademark availability**

Great ideas can be dead in the water if someone else already had them and trademarked them. And while the mere existence of a trademark on a potential healthcare brand does not preclude its use, it does throw a wrench into the machine.

### **Examine applicability**

How clear is the new identity, does it truly reflect what you have learned and will it fit every intended use? Try it out on a select group. Examine it up close – and then from a distance.

### **Finalize brand architecture**

Brand architecture is the logical structure of sub-brands or units within a healthcare organization. A thoughtful and organized brand architecture makes tactical marketing decisions quick (less time and money), diplomatic (greater unification) and precise (administrative enforcement declines). Do the sub-brands reinforce the brand purpose? How will they be managed? This is the foundation of the rebrand and all sub-brands.

### **Catalog the touchpoints**

There are literally hundreds of times and manners in which people will interact with a brand. Each of these interactions is called a touchpoint. They include building signage. Lab coats. Business cards and stationery. Billing applications. Department identification signage and directional signage throughout the structures and parking facilities. Websites. Employee badges. Vehicles. Large and small, each of these touchpoints must be developed and approved in a manner that uniformly applies the new identity to ensure consistency of message. Each must also be identified prior to launching the brand to be completely certain none falls through the cracks.

Build it strong, because a solid brand architecture makes it clear which brand is dominant. Internally and externally, it signals ownership.

## CHAPTER 11

# Implement & Launch

The final phase of the rebranding process is where the future begins. The idea of a rebrand has been building in intensity and excitement since Day One. Talk has spread, likely both on campus and off. It is time to harness that adrenaline and use it to your advantage.

**Finalize identity solution**

From the top leadership through the rebranding committee and the board of directors, everyone should be apprised of the new brand identity and called on to speak now. This is the time for objections to be heard – not the day before the unveil.

**Initiate trademark protection**

Protect your ideas and your investment. Get the attorneys involved. Follow the proper regulations. Do not wait until the last minute, because the wheels of government often move by the inch, not the mile.



### **Develop a launch plan**

A bold rebrand deserves a bold unveiling. Whether it is a gathering of leadership, physicians and staff in one place, or an online event uniting departments locally and clinics across the region or around the world, treat it like the surprise party that it is. A launch event is a powerful one-time event. This event literally and figuratively brings people back together for one purpose – to share the vision. The unveiling creates energy that permeates all layers, from management to the newest hire. People love knowing they heard it first and that they can now be the ones to tell others. They get to hand out new business cards, point to the new signs, and wear the new lab coats and scrubs. Celebrate the new identity internally and have a plan ready to share the news with the media. The better you manage the launch, the clearer your message will be.

### **Create online and printed brand standards**

Because of their significant value, the newly-acquired assets that comprise a rebrand must be managed in an effective and thorough manner that maximizes the return on investment. Basically, it's a form of stewardship. You need rules as to the use and abuse of your new brand identity. Protecting it is important to ensure consistency across all channels of communication. The only way for people to know they are using the logo and tagline correctly is to show them how it is done. Make the guidelines readily available online, as well as printed copies for reference.

### **Keep listening**

Listen to comments and feedback and track any public reaction. And keep listening. The work on a rebrand doesn't end with the launch. A brand has a life of its own. It has energy. It has power and a physical presence. It conveys movement, status and vision. It can be taken wherever you go and shared with everyone you meet. And because it has life, a brand needs to keep learning and doing.

**It needs to advance or risk stagnation, loss of identity – and purpose.**

# CHAPTER 12

## Move the needle

Rebranding is not something any organization – large or small – does on a whim. It represents a major investment of time, money, thought, creativity, strategy and hope. A rebrand is your greatest one-time communication opportunity.

Once it is revealed, a rebrand has to make a powerful difference. It has to demand attention and inspire use.

Repeated use. Meaningful use.  
Today, and tomorrow.

Ultimately, a rebrand must move a healthcare organization forward. If it is designed to underscore the new vision of a transitional leader, so be it. If it is to build upon the past while signaling a new direction, then it should set the course. If it is designed to wow, then move the needle all the way. Let those within the organization and the rest of the world realize that a significant change has taken place.

■ **And that it is a change clearly for the better.**

# Considering a rebrand?

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