




# A WORTHY INVESTMENT

A LOT OF THOUGHT—AND MONEY—GOES INTO THE PROCESS OF REBRANDING, BUT THE COMMITMENT IS NECESSARY TO GET AHEAD

By Lin Gensing-Pophal



Every company—indeed, every individual—has a brand. A brand is an indication of how they are perceived and might be thought of as a personality. People have them. Products have them. Companies do, too. Importantly, while a brand is often considered to be such visible elements as logos, signage, typeface, colors, and tag lines, it is actually the sum of all consumer and customer interactions. Those visual elements are important—they're a reinforcement and reminder of the brand, a visual way to tie subjective experiences to tangible products and businesses.

Consider such iconic brands as Coca-Cola. When you read that corporate name, chances are you immediately pictured an image of white script lettering on a red background. That's Coca-Cola's logo, a part of its brand, but really just a visual representation that becomes connected to experience.

That same thing happens in the manufacturing world.

## Changing With the Times

Howard Bertram is president and owner of Complete Design and Packaging, a company that he and his wife, Donna, started 16 years ago. Bertram was forward-thinking in the creation of his company. He wanted to create a company—and associated brand—that would stand the test of time. One that wouldn't be hindered by a changing environment that might be impacted by market changes, changing technology, and even changes in ownership. Choosing a company name was an important part of that and something he considered carefully, brainstorming ideas until an obvious moniker came to mind: Complete Design & Packaging.

"Design and packaging" because that's what the company does. "Complete"

because Bertram kept seeking a word that would encompass the completeness of the services provided.

"I wanted something that would tell the whole story," Bertram says. "I wanted something that says 'the complete thing,' 'the complete story.' I kept saying the word 'complete' and then said, 'That's it!'"

From the start, Bertram wanted to create a company that would be perceived as contemporary and timeless. "Even though we were a startup, I wanted a timeless name and timeless but traditional colors and a contemporary look."

Sixteen years later, Bertram is still confident that his brand conveys the personality of the company and has allowed it to shift and change with the times, "as we've evolved, we're a much different company now than back then—very cutting-edge and state-of-the-art as far as our market goes."

Rebranding over that time, he says, hasn't occurred as a single event, but organically. A shift to digital technology

**"Don't get too hung up on yourself. Don't take yourself too seriously. You've got to consider the direction the world is going, and you have to adapt. Put the pride aside."**

— Howard Bertram,  
president and owner,  
Complete Design & Packaging



Complete Design & Packaging's shift to digital is exemplified in its capabilities for clients.

Photo courtesy of Complete Design & Packaging.

was part of that process. “We own and installed one of the only digital printers in the world—the first one in the U.S.—not digital only, but in-line, single-pass digital printing.” The brand evolution, he says, has shifted to “incorporate a digital look, digital colors, more digital edginess, if you will.”

It’s likely that a company’s brand takes on some elements of its owner’s own personality. That seems to be the case with Complete Design & Packaging.

“The box business is pretty stodgy, slow to move, slow to adapt,” says Bertram. “People just don’t like change.” But, he adds: “I’m anything but that. We’re the opposite. My company is very contemporary.” While there are some “movers and shakers” in the industry, he says, he believes the 80/20 rule applies. “In our industry, for some reason, we’re slow to adapt—we always wait for the other guy to do it, or we like to wait and see.” Many, he says, take a “wait, wait, wait” approach to the adoption of new technologies and techniques. In such a fast-paced environment, that hesitancy can be risky from a business standpoint.

**“We’re not just here to make boxes. We’re here to provide packaging solutions.”**

— Richard Wheeler,  
CEO, Merrill Industries



Photo courtesy of Merrill Industries LLC

Merrill Industries’ new tag line, “Packaging Solutions Made Simple,” and three value statements: Mission, Vision, and Shared Values.

### Staying Attuned to Trends

While logos and look aren’t the entire brand, they are, as we’ve seen, important visual representations of the brand. As time goes by, those visual representations need to change and evolve to remain current, Bertram says. “Look at language in the late 1800s versus now, look at the words, the shape of the script, the colors.” Over the decades and centuries, things change, and companies need to change along with them.

Prudential is a good example of this. Their logo, while still including an image that reflects the Rock of Gibraltar, first introduced in 1896, has seen subtle changes over time—changes that were likely not dramatically apparent to the market, but that are obvious when looking at the original logo and comparing it to today’s more stylistic design.

Bertram’s advice for others? “Don’t get too hung up on yourself. Don’t take yourself too seriously. You’ve got to consider the direction the world is going, and you have to adapt. Put the pride aside.”

### Recognizing When It’s Time for a Major Change

Richard H. Wheeler is CEO of Merrill Industries LLC, a company that was started in the 1970s. He came to the company about a year ago and immediately identified an opportunity for refreshing the brand. “We really needed to step up our game,” he says. Wheeler contracted with a company that specializes in website development and marketing and began the process of updating marketing materials, beginning with print collateral.

“We want to get information in people’s hands that’s hard copy—that they can touch and feel,” says Wheeler. So, the rebranding process started with the development of a brochure that then became the foundation for everything to follow.

One big benefit of rebranding, or refreshing the brand, is an opportunity to reach out to make a connection with a market that may not have thought of your company for a while, or that may not have heard of your company.

With Merrill's rebranding initiative, the company did an email blast to announce the new website. "Within a matter of 48 hours, we had something like 20 different requests for information in the customer service portal," says Wheeler. "I guess it worked."

### Selecting a Marketing Partner

Wheeler knew that he would need to turn to outside expertise to give his brand the boost it needed. And, because social media and digital marketing are so prominent these days, he wanted a vendor or agency with expertise in that area. He didn't, though, feel that he had to select a partner that specialized in the corrugated industry. What he wanted most was marketing expertise. And, not just digital marketing expertise, but also the expertise to update print collateral.

"We ended up selecting a company that had not only done work in our industry, but for nonprofits, for state government, and for TV and radio stations around the area."

The marketing partnership is a collaborative one, says Wheeler, and requires conversation and interaction to help the agency understand your goals, objectives, and desired image or approach. It's important for the agency to understand your business and, in this case, the equipment used to provide services to customers. The final materials created must be a combination of technical information to answer potential customer questions while conveying a look and feel that is brand-supportive.

Conversations led to insights, which led to ideas about how to best portray what Merrill had to offer. "Somebody in one of the meetings said, 'Why don't you just put it in the form of a box?' and that's exactly what we did," says Wheeler. "The marketing brochure actually folds out like you'd see a box being made on a folding carton machine." Once the brochure was in place, it became the foundation for the development of the website, he says.

### Patience

The entire process took more than a year, says Wheeler, but it was time well spent. Time—and money—are two important factors that manufacturers need to consider in a rebranding effort, he says. "It is not inexpensive," he cautions. "There are always things you didn't plan on that are going to cost money—redrawing, photo shoots, things like that." It's important to budget adequately and to have a clear vision of what you want to accomplish, he says. That vision will drive all of the photos, and composition and content. Without it, he says, "you're going to be all over the place."

Budget, vision, and target audience, says Wheeler, are the critical components of a succession branding or rebranding initiative. And patience.

"I just can't stress enough having patience and an unwavering unwillingness to compromise. Know what you want to accomplish, know what you want to achieve, and stick with it." And, he adds, don't settle for less than what you want. "You're going to kiss a lot of frogs before you get there."

"The most important thing for us, as a company that's been around a while, is just showing that we're coming into the 21st century with the way we're approaching the corrugated industry," says Wheeler.

The big message: "We're not just here to make boxes. We're here to provide packaging solutions."

### Design Reflects, Delivery Supports

One important consideration to keep in mind with any branding initiative—whether establishing a new brand or refreshing an existing one—is that the brand is the sum of all customer and consumer interactions. A visually appealing website will ultimately fail to deliver the results expected if product service and delivery don't match the expectations the brand is establishing.

In boxmaking, where many players have years of experience serving customer needs, exceptional manufacturing service and customer support provide a solid foundation for creating and sustaining a strong brand.

The rest, as they say, is window dressing. ■



Photo courtesy of Merrill Industries LLC.

Merrill Industries placed corrugated chairs emblazoned with logo in their lobby for guests.



**Lin Gensing-Pophal** is a writer based in Wisconsin. She is a frequent contributor to BoxScore.