

Companies seek to refresh brands with new looks

Branding companies say Internet has prompted changes and has made them easier to do

BY SCOTT ANDERSON
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The last time Chelsea Milling Co. changed the box of its Jiffy baking mixes, Richard Nixon was in the White House, M*A*S*h was in theatres and The Beatles had just disbanded.

Now in the Information Age, the local manufacturer turned to the Internet to redesign its retro-feeling brand – but the changes may be too subtle for most shoppers to notice.

“We couldn’t really get too radical,” said general manager Jack Kennedy. “When you only

change your package every 30 years or so, and you don’t advertise, you really have to respect word of mouth and recognize the importance of brand image.”

Kennedy said the company first explored a package redesign last year, when it planned on recognizing the 75th anniversary of its 40-ounce baking mix. But with new federal regulations requiring food companies to add notices of potential food allergens and trans-fats to their labels, the company figured it was time to do a complete overhaul.

They redesigned the boxes for all 22 products, took new pictures of baked goods and wrote up new ingredients lists per the regulations.

To make the change, Chelsea Milling contracted with a branding and marketing design company out of White Plains, N.Y. The two firms collaborated through a Web log – or blog – environment, allowing the designer and the manufacturer to make minor changes and share ideas about the design. Chelsea managers only went to White Plains to meet with designers.

“It turned out to be quite a lot of work – it would have been almost an incomprehensible amount of work if it hadn’t been on the Web,” said Kennedy, who estimated the online-based method cut the eight-month project by at least half.



A Jiffy baking mix box before the Chelsea Milling Co. changed its design.



The redesigned boxes should make their way to store shelves in the next few weeks.

Chelsea Milling had to tread lightly when tinkering with the nostalgic brand, which the company has worked hard to preserve. It’s but one example of a business attempting to refresh its brand without throwing away customer recognition – or what’s known as “brand equity.”

Some branding firms say the Internet has helped shrink project times and have prompted more businesses, as well as non-profit groups and schools, to refresh their looks.

“There’s a rush for people to change their identities and brands,” said Scott Hauman, director of planning at Ann Arbor-based Q Ltd., an

advertising, marketing and branding firm. “Small businesses face the same competition large companies do. And they see the need to differentiate themselves.”

Ann Arbor-based NuStep, which makes recumbent training machines, mainly for physical rehabilitation, recently underwent an image overhaul with the help of Q Ltd.

Steve Sarns, vice president for sales and marketing at NuStep, said it was the firm’s first major rebranding effort since changing its name from Life Plus in 1997.

It was also an opportunity for the company to examine its core philosophies and principles, he said.

“It’s internally showing who we are, and that’s what we project out in the market place,” Sarns said. “A lot of people may not notice the change, but it shows we’re evolving.”

Whether it’s a minor change or a major retooling, companies can’t expect rebranding to work miracles without buy-in from employees and a legitimate change within the company.

“It can’t just be, ‘Our numbers are flat, let’s see change our brand and see if it works,’” said Jim Hume, a principal at Phire Branding Co. in Ann Arbor. “There has to be a lot more thought behind it.”