

Is your tech brand lost in translation? How to know when you need a new name (and what to do next)

Not many founders can predict exactly where their startup will be in ten years' time. Plans, products, people change, with plenty of growing pains along the way. But what if your name becomes part of that pain?

A year ago I found myself facing this dilemma. I'd just joined the UK team of CX tech business Critizr - easy for our French founders to say, less so for the rest of us (if you don't believe me, give it a go). Critizr suited the company's startup phase as a platform for managing customer feedback and critiques. But today we do so much more. The name our founders had conceived at their lightbulb moment had become a bit of liability, adrift from our modern business and hindering our growth.

Twelve months later and we are Goodays: a name that perfectly sums up the impact our technology has in commerce. Changing our brand has been hard, and a huge undertaking. We've had to make tough choices about what to keep and not get too sentimental about what to leave behind, (although we did throw a little leaving party to say farewell to the Critizr name and thank it for its service!) Here's what we learned along the way.

When to rebrand and where to start

Brand is not always top of a startups' agenda and this starts to show later on as you grow, meet more prospects, investors and customers and move into new territories. A brand should provide a direct route to understanding and trusting your business, so if you have to caveat it with an explanation, it could be time for a change. When the decision is made, begin by taking an in depth look at your company's ambitions and maturity. Speak to everyone in the business to get their views. This isn't a job for the marketing team alone. You need the whole company aligned around the goals and scope of the project, especially your founders who may be more attached than most to the original name. Then take these goals and insights and distil them into your starting point: a creative brief.

Pick your creative partners

Next, build your team. This could be an agency, great freelancers, your in-house experts or a mix of all three. Go out and meet good people: agencies that are recommended and ones you admire. People that you feel have relevant experience and others that don't, but you like their work anyway. A track record in your sector can be useful, but if you want to stand out, a fresh perspective and a bit of irreverence might be more valuable. From shortlist to selection, be aware that it can also come down to availability. Some of the best creatives are booked up well in advance. It's also about finding partners that are a good fit for you personally and an old-fashioned gut feeling that they get it. Before appointing or hiring, do a fair amount of due diligence before moving to a final choice and get recommendations from others you trust.

Get the roll out right

Roll out and launch are probably some of the toughest steps. Expect a monumental effort from lots of internal and external teams. It really depends on how much is changing, but in our case we changed a company that has 10 years of history behind it and there was a lot to get right and tweak at every level. From the internal systems and templates to the external customer and prospect facing material, the product and the website. It requires a lot of creative thinking, great collaboration and project management to get your new identity launched. From there once the brand is created it's about taking a great recipe and using it to create great things, improving and growing the brand over time and bringing it to life.

Avoid the pitfalls

Every project is different but some of the same challenges are likely to crop up. Being transparent internally, communicating often on progress, being flexible to feedback and having a solid agency partner or in-house team are all very important. Also staying positive and reminding yourself (and your team) that the result will be worth it in the end. Work with a specialist legal team to run searches and file and register trademarks to protect your IP. Test your new name with customer facing colleagues. Finally, your biggest challenge by far will be timing. You need to keep things moving but you also need time for revisions and thinking to get a good result. In my experience nearly nothing is perfect first-time round. But with the right balance of flexibility, creative and design thinking applied you can create great things. And the effect is almost always a positive one.

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