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## Maybe You Don't Need to Change Your Logo

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The graphic symbol representing your company has been in place since the early 1960s, when your great-uncle started the business, and your new advertising firm insists that it has to be replaced. You want to trust their counsel, but you're just not sure.

"You need a new logo" is one of the first things companies often hear after they've hired a new advertising agency or a graphic design firm. When the company presses for a reason, they're typically given a variety of reasons. The logo is old-fashioned. It may have reflected the business a decade ago, but it's not appropriate for what you are today. It's not "visionary." It's not "attractive."

Most of the time, companies give in to the request, whether eagerly or reluctantly. After all, these people are experts. We're paying them for their knowledge. They're looking out for our best interests, aren't they?

Sometimes, the answer is yes. But all too often, the reason that companies receive the recommendation is that logo design (and its frequent companion, the graphic standards manual) is a particularly profitable piece of business that carries a hefty price tag.

Developing the new logo is only the beginning of the investment. Now that your company has a new symbol, you'll have to replace all your signage, truck graphics, business cards, letterhead, brochures, the website -- even the shirts you hand out at golf outings. After all, they all bear that obsolete image.

The term "advertising agency" includes two elements. Everyone's familiar with the first: advertising. When you hire a firm, it accepts responsibility for your advertising, marketing, sales promotion, and similar activities. Less obvious is the second element, the word "agency." In its purest legal form, it obligates the firm to act in the best interests of its clients. If the client really doesn't need something, the firm shouldn't recommend it, no matter how profitable it may be.

We've worked with companies who have heard the "you need a new logo" spiel each time they've hired a new advertising firm, which may be every few years. Most assume they'll hear it from us, too -- some apologize for their logo early in the process -- and they're shocked when we recommend they stick with what they have.

Case in point: several years ago, we began to work with a manufacturer that sells its product globally. The company's logo was designed by a member of the sales team decades ago, and I can't imagine any graphic designer calling it a thing of beauty. Some would even say it's on the homely side (although our client is quite proud of it).

Our client is known for making equipment that's beyond durable. Equipment they manufactured in the 1960s is still at work every day in plants around the world. It may need a tune-up or a replacement part now and then, but the core product is solid. And every piece of that equipment bears that familiar identity. To people in their industry, from Thailand to Toronto, that logo is as recognizable as the symbols for Apple and Starbucks are to today's American consumers. They don't see it as an art element. To them, it's a symbol of toughness and reliability.

What do I think of that logo? Doesn't matter one bit. I'm not one of the customers who buys the company's equipment. My role is to keep that name and logo out in front of those customers and make sure our agency doesn't do anything to compromise that hard-earned reputation. Along the way, we have taken steps to standardize it, and we've recommended adjustments to make its color more powerful and less likely to fade.

Our client has built up tremendous equity in that logo, and changing it for the sake of change, or for our firm to earn a few more dollars, wouldn't be in their best interests. That's the definition of agency in action. We've built up significant trust with our client, and if I walked into the CEO's office tomorrow and said, "You really need to replace that logo," they'd probably give me the green light. But I wouldn't make that recommendation.

The next time someone insists that your logo or something else your company holds dear needs to be changed, ask them for a rationale. If the reasoning makes sense, it may actually be a good idea. But if the answers make you wary, ask yourself if there may be an ulterior motive.

*Deborah Daily is co-owner of Buckaroo Marketing.*

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