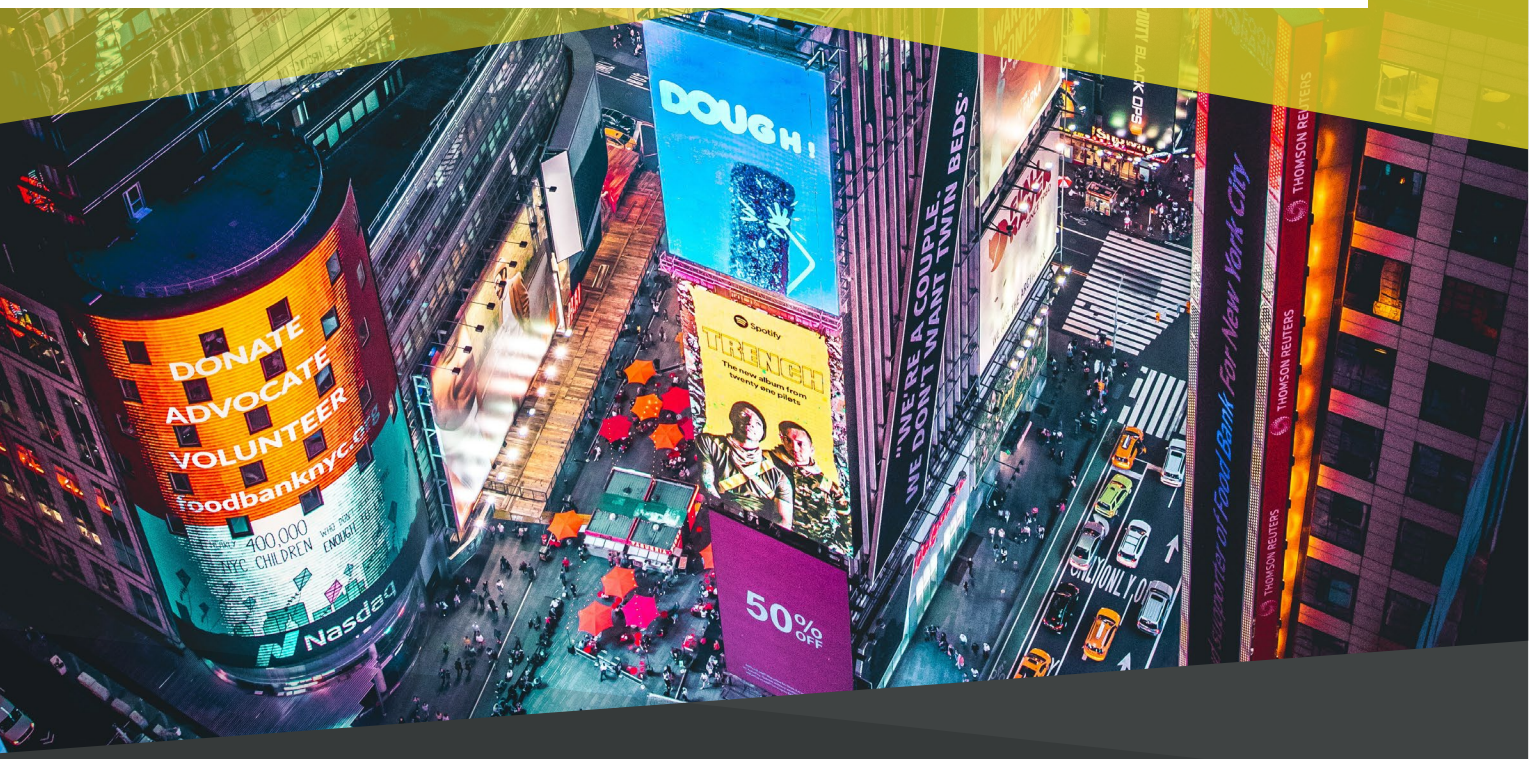
Rebranding Guide

for Professional Services Firms

Everything You Need to Know About Rebranding Your Firm



Second Edition

Hinge®

Rebranding Guide for Professional Services Firms: Everything You Need to Know About Rebranding Your Firm, Second Edition
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Table of Contents

4 Getting Started

5 Chapter 1
Why Rebrand?

14 Chapter 2
A Process for Success

22 Chapter 3
Planning and Budget

27 Chapter 4
How to Select Your Branding Partner

32 Chapter 5
Making the Case for Rebranding

37 About Hinge

Getting Started

Your brand, if properly understood and carefully managed, is perhaps your professional services firm's most valuable asset. It is the key to accelerating growth and profitability and building long-term value. Yet branding a professional services firm is often misunderstood and mismanaged.

We developed this Rebranding Guide with your needs in mind. It will:

1. Help you understand how a great professional services brand works.
2. Provide tools you can use to evaluate your own brand.
3. Equip you with the knowledge and confidence to lead your firm through a successful rebranding process.

This guide supplies everything you need to navigate a rebranding program — from selecting a branding firm to getting critical internal buy-in when your new brand is ready to launch. Rebranding your firm doesn't have to be an ordeal. It can be an exciting journey in which you explore new frontiers, discover hidden strengths and make the most of your market's opportunities.

Rebranding your firm doesn't have to be an ordeal.

Who It's For

This guide is for anyone who will lead or participate in a rebranding program for their professional services firm.

CHAPTER 1:

Why Rebrand?

Why go to the trouble and expense of rebranding at all? The answer is simple and compelling. Your business environment is always changing, and you can't afford to be left behind. New competitors, evolving customer tastes, disruptive new technologies and many other factors alter the dynamics of the marketplace. The firm that fails to adapt loses.

Most of us in the professional services are so busy doing our work that we don't have the time, patience or energy to monitor changing market conditions. That means every five to ten years any firm will find itself out of synch with the marketplace and, if it waits too long, struggling to compete and stay relevant.

Rebranding offers a cure.



Rebranding offers a cure.

What Your Brand Can Accomplish

What does it really mean to have a strong brand? And what benefits are you likely to see for your investment? Here are a few answers:

1. **Attract core customers more easily.** A powerful brand will help generate leads and close sales. And when core customers are ready to make referrals, your firm's brand can provide the credibility to back up their enthusiasm.

2. **Attract business partners.** These can be teaming partners for specific contracts, promotional partners for joint marketing efforts or even referral sources.

3. **Attract top talent.** In the war for talented professionals, firms with strong brands have the clear advantage. The best people want to work at the best firms.

4. **Command higher fees.** Studies have shown that brand leaders in a specific niche can charge higher fees than their competitors. In fact, the average premium is a whopping 32%!

Industry	Pricing Advantage
Consulting	20%
Marketing, Advertising, and PR	33%
Architecture, Engineering & Construction	8%
Accounting & Financial Services	49%
Law Firms & Legal Services	50%
Average Price Premium	32%



Figure 1. The Brand Leader's billing advantage. Average difference in billing rates between brand leaders and non-brand leaders. Adapted from *Professional Services Marketing*, by Mike Schultz, John Doerr and Lee W. Frederiksen, PhD.

What a Brand Can Do	What It Impacts		
	Competitive Strategy	Recruiting the Right People	Delivering on Promises
Communicates your "promise" to potential customers	✓		✓
Differentiates you from your competitors — creates a competitive advantage	✓		✓
Communicates an enticing and inspirational vision for the future	✓	✓	
Communicates your business values	✓	✓	✓
Increases awareness of visibility in the relevant marketplace	✓	✓	

Figure 2. A well-executed brand offers a wide array of benefits.

What Is a Professional Services Brand?

Before you undertake a rebranding program, it's important to understand what a brand is all about. Let's start with a broad definition:

> ***Your brand is the totality of how your audience sees, talks about and experiences your firm.***

While you can influence and shape your brand — in fact, that's the whole point of this guide — in the end it is the way people *think about* your firm that really matters. You can point to your firm's logo, handle your business cards, browse your website and deliver your elevator speech. But without an underlying strategy that aligns these elements and propels your business forward, you'll never have a brand of any consequence.

Your Brand has Many Parts

Every professional services brand is a mosaic of ideas, strategies, words and visual elements. The two most obvious elements of your brand — your name and logo — are only a small portion of a much larger picture.

In fact, a multitude of touchpoints affect people's perceptions of your firm. Every time you send an e-mail, hand out a business card, discuss your firm with a prospect, place an ad, send a letter, leave behind a brochure, deliver a speech, write a proposal or give someone your web address you are shaping your brand.

So how do you wrap your head around something so broad and diffuse? It helps to look at your brand from another angle. Every brand has two parts:

1. Reputation
2. Visibility

Let's look at these in turn.



1. Your Brand is Part Reputation

Remember our broad definition of a brand above? Much of that definition is speaking to reputation. Put simply:

> ***It's what people say about your firm when you aren't in the room.***

There's a lot of truth to this statement, and it speaks to the power of reputation. In the professional services realm, a firm's reputation and the referrals it produces are of tremendous value.

Reputation is built in part on past performance and clients' experiences. But there are many tangible but subtle dimensions to your brand that affect the way your firm is perceived. The words, imagery and colors associated with a brand can evoke a range of emotions. Your brand's visual components can support (or detract from) your firm's credibility and help separate your firm from otherwise similar competitors. In fact, the way your firm fits into its industry's ecosystem — your positioning and degree of differentiation — can radically affect perceptions.

Reputation is built in part on past performance and clients' experiences.

But that's not the end of the brand story.

2. Your Brand is Part Visibility

While reputation — how people react to your brand — is of critical importance, it's only half of the equation. The other half is visibility: how well exposed is your brand in your target market? Memorable, well-known brands have greater visibility and reach in the marketplace. The more people who have heard of a firm, the easier it is to get new clients and grow.

Measuring Brand Strength

Together, these two factors become a convenient way to assess a brand's strength:

Reputation x Visibility = Brand Strength

A firm with a great reputation and a lot of visibility packs tremendous potential. But if a firm's outward brand does not support that potential, all the visibility in the world won't budge the needle. Like running in the wrong direction, it's a waste of energy.

So you have to start by getting the brand right.

Get Your Brand Right

Your brand is built on four levels:

1. **Strategy** — Strategy is the vision, clearly stated, that explains how your firm will attract customers and talented employees. How are you different? What powerful need do you fill in the marketplace? Strategy provides answers. A good strategy makes everything else easier.

2. **Messaging** — The words you use when you write and talk about your firm and its services are critical to communicating your firm's value. The ideas and tone they convey should come directly from the strategy. Your messaging must be easy to understand, relevant to your potential clients and believable.

3. **Visual Identity** — Your visual identity comprises all of the visual components of your brand, including color, shapes, images, typography, and layout. A brand's visual tone and attitude should align with the strategy. The visual identity can create a strong emotional reaction. Potential clients will be attracted to your firm even if they can't articulate why.

4. **People** — In a professional services firm, your people are your product. How they behave has a profound impact on your brand. Selecting the right people is an important first step, but the way they comport themselves and the decisions they make can make all the difference. A strong brand can help employees understand what is expected of them.

In the construction industry, a strong foundation is built in layers: sand, gravel, steel and concrete. Your brand foundation is no different. Skimp on any of the ingredients — strategy, messaging, visual identity or people — and your brand is likely to be weak and unstable.

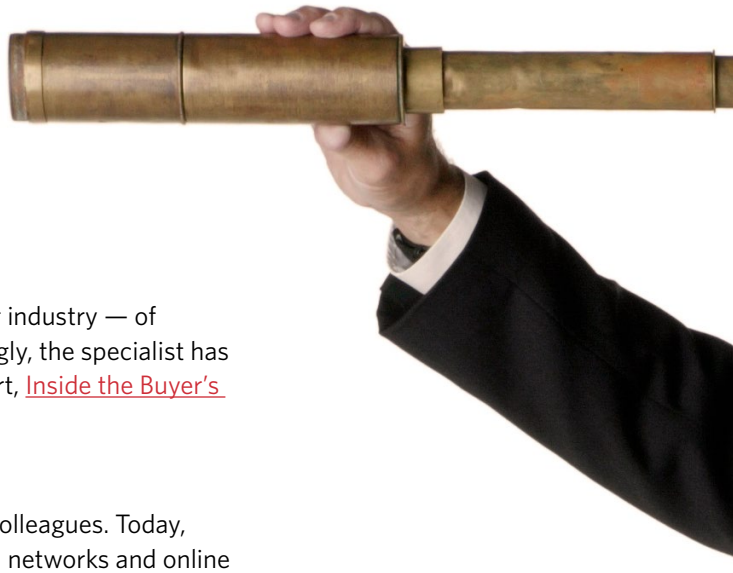
Your brand is likely to be weak and unstable if you skimp on any of the ingredients.



How Professional Service Buyers are Changing

Professional services buyers are changing. And the changes are not small.

These changes are already having a profound impact on the entire industry, and the longer you wait to address them yourself the harder it will be to catch up.



Five trends that will likely shape the future of your firm:

1. **Buyers want relevant experience.**
   Buyers want someone who has a track record — in their industry — of solving the exact problem they are facing. Not surprisingly, the specialist has the advantage. (Find out more in our free research report, Inside the Buyer's Brain.[1])

2. **Buyers are changing how they search for solutions.**
   Yes, referrals still matter, but not just from friends and colleagues. Today, referrals also come from online resources such as social networks and online forums. In fact, buyers asking for traditional referrals have declined over the past few years. And then there's search. Increasingly professional services are being found through Google and other search engines. Buyers also look for convergence. Are you referred by multiple sources in multiple channels?

3. **Your website can make or break you.**
   Almost all buyers rule out some firms because their websites are not compelling or lack clarity. Confuse them and you will lose them. Even worse, you will never know that it happened. Have you ever had someone say they made a referral, but the person they referred to your firm never contacted you? The answer may lie in your website. (If you're interested, read more about high-performance websites.[2])

4. **Trust is being built differently.**
   Getting to know people through professional associations or on the golf course can still work. But who has time? More and more, trust is being built by educating people and sharing expertise online.[3] Here's how it works: Your buyer has a need. They research solutions online, get educated a bit and contact the experts who were most authoritative and helpful. This trend has fueled the rise of content marketing.

[1] https://hingemarketing.com/library/article/inside-the-buyers-brain-second-edition-executive-summary

[2] https://hingemarketing.com/blog/story/a-website-design-process-that-works-how-to-get-the-professional-services-website-you-want

[3] https://hingemarketing.com/blog/story/optimizing-the-b2b-content-marketing-funnel-turning-contacts-into-clients

5. **Geography is collapsing.**
With the rise of communications technology and the globalization of markets, having a local presence has become less important. Many buyers are more interested in finding the most qualified firm to understand and solve their problem, regardless of where that firm is located. Today's video conferencing technology often satisfies buyers' desire to meet face to face.

What does this mean for your firm? We imagine there will always be a place for the local generalist. But a variety of forces are shrinking that space and favoring firms with clear, well-articulated market positions. Specialists are on the rise. Trying to be everything to everyone or following the herd is becoming a risky strategy. Adapt or face the consequences.

Checklist: Twelve Signs You Need to Rebrand

So how do you know that it's time to rebrand? What warning signs might you look for? Here is a list of twelve common indicators that your firm's brand may no longer be doing its job.

Check all that apply:

- [ ] 1. Are you are getting fewer leads than in the past?
- [ ] 2. Are you are entering a new market?
- [ ] 3. Are you are introducing significant new services?
- [ ] 4. Has your firm's growth slowed or stopped?
- [ ] 5. Have new competitors entered the marketplace?
- [ ] 6. Does your visual brand look tired compared to the competition?
- [ ] 7. Do you struggle to describe how your firm is different?
- [ ] 8. Are you losing a higher percentage of competitive bid situations than in the past?
- [ ] 9. Has your firm changed significantly since you last adjusted your brand?
- [ ] 10. Are you struggling to attract top talent?
- [ ] 11. Have your customers changed significantly?
- [ ] 12. Are you trying to figure out how to take your firm to the next level?

_____ **/ 12**

Two or greater is a decisive indicator of a need to rebrand.

ONLINE MASTER CLASS

Find Your Competitive Advantage:

Differentiation, Positioning & Messaging



Lack of differentiation is one of the toughest challenges firm stakeholders and marketers struggle with today. In this online course, you'll learn how to uncover your firm's true differentiators so that you can give buyers a reason to pick you out of the crowd and choose you.

Hinge's Managing Partner, Lee Frederiksen will walk you through the process, step by step. You can even work through your own firm's differentiation and positioning as you go.

What You'll Learn:

- How to find out what your clients, prospects and staff really think about your firm
- How to research your competitors
- How to mine your research for true differentiators
- How to write an effective positioning statement
- How to develop your elevator pitch
- How to develop useful messaging for business development and marketing
- How to put all of these tools to use and start building a compelling competitive advantage

Learn More and Register

CHAPTER 2:

A Process for Success

Every branding firm has its own step-by-step approach to rebranding. While the details may differ, most follow the same basic approach.

If you were to analyze any of these processes, you would find that they generally fall into three broad phases:

1. Get the Strategy Right
2. Build the Brand
3. Roll Out the Brand

Let's go over these one by one.

Phase 1: Get the Strategy Right

As tempting as it may be, you should avoid jumping into the visual side of branding (logo, colors, website, etc.) without doing the due diligence first. You really need to do some research to understand how buyers perceive you, where the market opportunities lie and what changes you need to implement to make the most of them. Your branding agency will likely want to research some or all of the following key areas:

1. **Internal staff:** Your firm's management team and staff provide an internal perspective on your brand. This is particularly useful (and eye opening) when compared to the perceptions of external audiences.

2. **Current clients:** Existing clients will help you understand your strengths and weaknesses. Use this information to improve operations and client communications.

3. **Former clients:** Former clients can offer clues to building more lasting relationships. They can also illuminate weaknesses that you never knew existed.

You should avoid jumping into the visual side of branding (logo, colors, website, etc.) without doing the due diligence first.

4. **Prospects:** Prospective clients in your target audience will give you a general sense of your awareness in the marketplace, how you stack up against the competition and how people perceive your company and current brand.

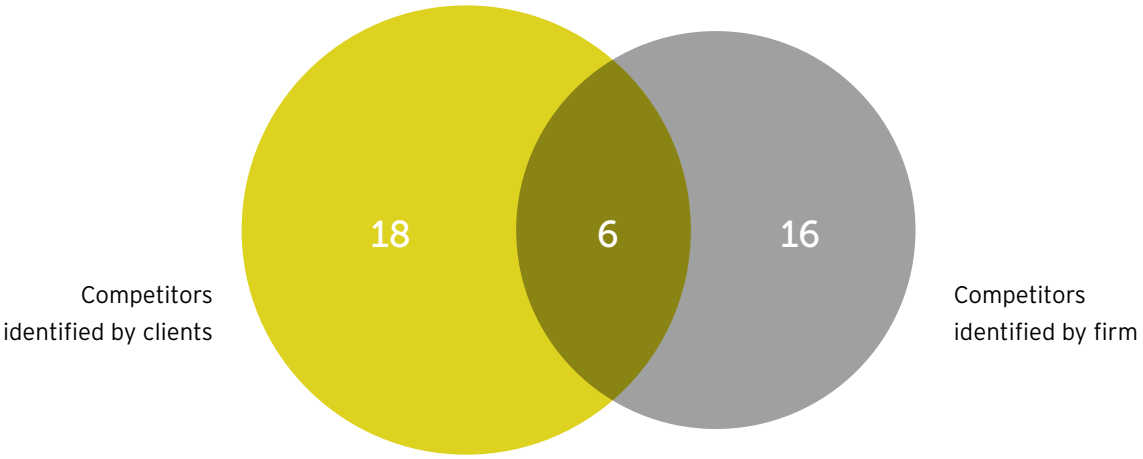
5. **Lost prospects:** Nobody will provide better insight into your perceived weaknesses in the marketplace than these folks.

6. **Influencers:** In some industries (such as A/E/C and government contracting), community leaders can be powerful influencers. They can provide a valuable perspective on a firm's perceived strengths and weaknesses and point out missed opportunities. In other industries such as technology, analysts or well-known bloggers can steer purchasers to certain firms and technologies.

7. **Competitors:** If you truly know your competition, you know how to succeed. Learn where opportunities exist to differentiate you firm, how to speak with more clarity and how to build competitive advantage.

For items 1 through 6 above, you'll need to conduct qualitative phone or in-person interviews. If you want to receive honest answers to your questions, however, use an impartial third party to conduct the interviews, preferably an experienced individual or firm that can handle the calls with skill and professionalism.

Competitive research can typically be conducted online by reviewing websites of key competitors. What constitutes a "key competitor," however, can be tricky to determine. Our own research into buyers of professional services[4] has shown that there is surprisingly little overlap between the firms you think are your competitors and firms your clients name as your competitors.



[4] https://hingemarketing.com/library/article/book-inside-the-buyers-brain

You Don't Know Your Competitors

Once you've drawn up a reasonably accurate list of competitors, you'll want to collect brand-relevant data on each, such as their logos, brand colors, taglines, positioning, key messages, key service offerings and visual stylistic characteristics.

Your branding partner will analyze this body of research and develop these deliverables:

1. **Brand positioning statement:** This brief paragraph describes your unique value proposition, differentiation attributes and market positioning. Ideally, this statement is intended for internal use and subsequent marketing message development.

2. **Key differentiators:** A list of the characteristics that set your firm apart from otherwise similar firms in the marketplace (especially your key competitors).

3. **Messaging architecture:** This document identifies your target audiences and provides customized messages to each. In addition, the architecture document presents potential barriers each audience may raise when considering your firm, as well as responses to overcome each barrier and evidence needed to support it. This document will become an invaluable resource to many people in your firm — from sales staff to marketing copywriters.

Some branding firms will add a fourth deliverable at this stage – a visual expression of your brand, which provides a preview of your visual brand.



Once you and your branding partner have finalized the deliverables, you are ready to take this brand platform and begin the building process.

Phase 2: Build the Brand

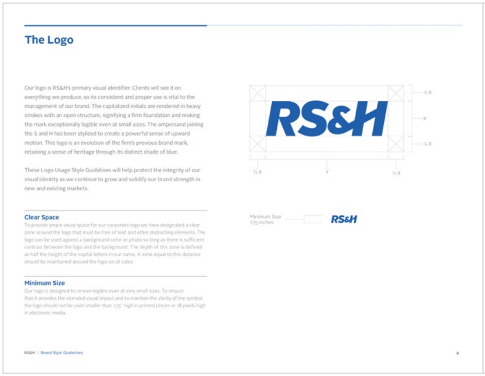
When people talk about branding, this is the phase most of us think of — logos, colors, type, design. It's exciting to see a new brand literally taking shape before your eyes.

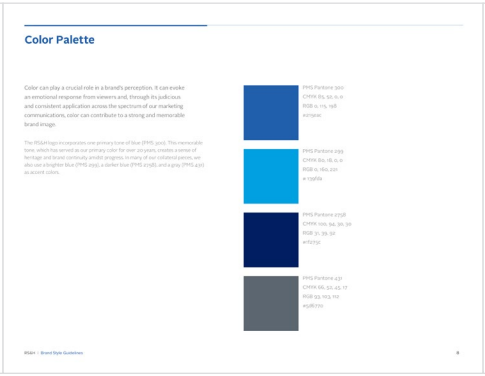
Just remember to stop periodically and check your progress against the roadmap documents you produced in Phase 1. Make sure the materials developed by your branding or design firm reflect your differentiators and your market positioning.

Build out your brand in a logical order.

1. If you are considering a name change, for instance, do that first. Everything builds in one way or another on your business' name.
2. Develop your logo and tagline next. These can be developed in sequence or in parallel.
3. From there, you can go in many directions — stationery, website, brochures, PowerPoint template, sales sheets, proposal formats, tradeshow materials — until you have a full set of business tools.
4. At some point in the process you may want to establish guidelines for your visual brand (also called your "brand identity") that impose some limits on your brand and protect your investment. Ask your branding agency to develop a set of brand style guidelines to govern your brand's implementation.

These guidelines, which can range from a single sheet to hundreds of densely-packed pages, ensure consistency across all your visual communications. They lay down the law regarding logo usage, typeface options, color palette and image style — some even go into exhaustive detail about grid layouts and other arcane aspects of design. For most firms, a modest document of 10 to 25 pages is usually sufficient.







Phase 3: Roll Out the Brand

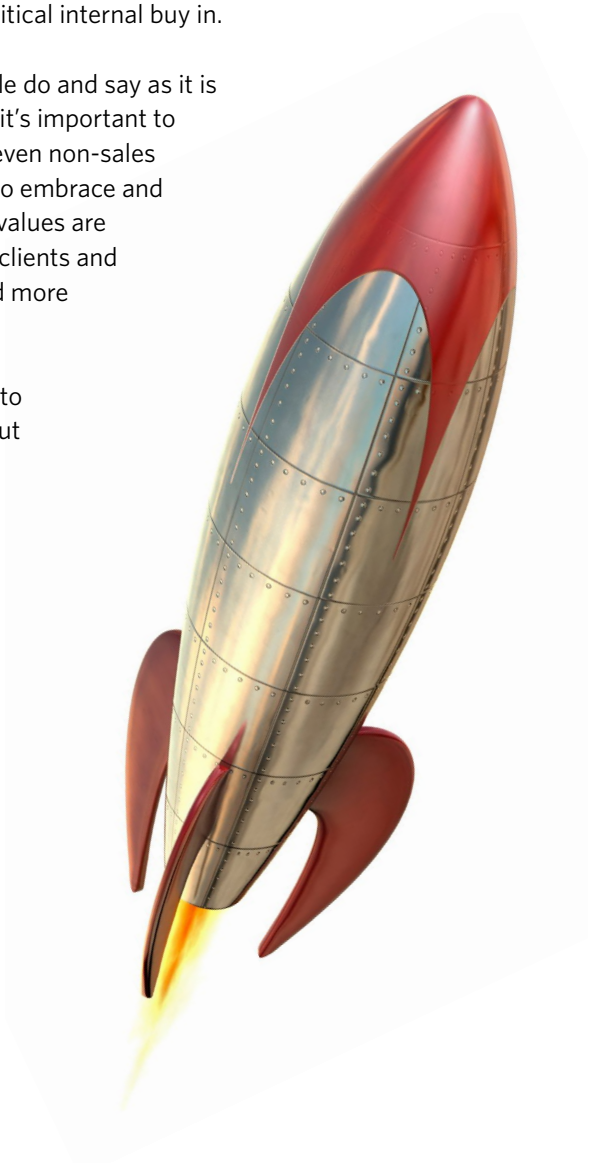
Once you've developed your new brand, it's time to take it to the marketplace. A brand rollout plan is a detailed roadmap that charts out where you need to go and the optimal route to get there. Any useful plan will include the following elements:

1. **Internal launch.** Before you can take your brand to the outside world, you need to introduce your new brand to your entire staff and get them excited about its implications and potential. The brand rollout plan will spell out the activities, materials and budget required to achieve critical internal buy in.

2. **Education.** A brand is as much about what your people do and say as it is about your new logo, tagline and website. That's why it's important to take your staff through a training program that gives even non-sales staff the understanding and talking points they need to embrace and articulate the new brand. When your staff and brand values are aligned, your message is more likely to resonate with clients and prospects. That means more leads, more referrals and more business.

   The brand rollout plan will lay out the steps you need to take to educate your employees — at all levels — about your positioning and brand characteristics. More important, it will teach them how to talk about the company and its services in a way that differentiates your firm from the competition. When everyone from the administrative staff to senior executives communicate these values in the same way, the brand becomes far more powerful.

3. **Public launch.** Your brand launch is a rare opportunity to command attention in the marketplace and make a bold statement. You'll want to make the most of it. The brand rollout plan will provide specific tactics and a detailed timeline to announce your new brand — targeted, as appropriate, to clients, partners, referrals sources, the media and prospects.





Five Keys to Rebranding Bliss

1. **Appoint a small group of final decision makers.** By limiting the size of your internal rebranding team, you can significantly streamline the process. Remember, you can always solicit feedback from others in your firm, but because most of the decisions to be made are subjective you need a small core of people to make the tough choices. Avoid the temptation to get consensus from the entire organization or your clients. That inevitably leads to greater confusion, anxiety and indecision. If key decision makers are not part of the day-to-day process, they cannot understand how the project evolved and why interim decisions were made. Frequently, these well-meaning individuals bring the entire initiative to a sudden, grinding halt very late in the game — frustrating everyone involved.

2. **Designate a single point of contact.** Put one person in charge of managing the flow of information between your firm and your branding partner. Everyone will be happier. (Naturally, your branding firm should do the same.)

3. **Vet your feedback.** When you collect feedback from your team, go through it and make sure it is organized. Any conflicting points of view should be resolved before sending it to your branding firm.

4. **Keep an open mind.** A rebranding initiative can produce a surge of new ideas and marketing approaches for your business. But "new" rarely feels comfortable or safe. Encourage your team to keep an open mind and keep the opportunities squarely in sight.

5. **Let your branding firm run the show.** Your branding partner (if you have selected wisely) has been doing this stuff a lot longer than you have, and they have developed a process designed to take you efficiently from point A to point B. So avoid the temptation to interject your own systems on the rebranding process. It will likely gum up the works and slow everything down.

Checklist: Rebranding Readiness

How prepared is your firm to rebrand? This checklist will help you assess your readiness and identify tasks you need to accomplish.

Check all that apply:

- [ ] 1. You have specific goals you want to achieve with rebranding
- [ ] 2. Your top management recognizes the need to rebrand
- [ ] 3. Your marketing staff recognizes the need to rebrand
- [ ] 4. You have made rebranding an important priority
- [ ] 5. You have set aside a budget to rebrand
- [ ] 6. You have identified your internal rebranding team
- [ ] 7. Your rebranding team has the authority to make key decisions
- [ ] 8. You have identified your external rebranding partner

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Start Building a Powerful New Brand



At Hinge, we are uniquely qualified to create distinctive professional services brands that make firms look, sound and act like leaders.

Our expertise is founded on a decade of independent research into the fastest-growing firms. And we have helped hundreds of firms like yours build well-differentiated, confident brands that deliver exceptional growth, revenues and profits.

If you are considering a rebrand, we invite you to speak with one of our branding experts today. We'll explore your current brand and discuss how you can take it to a higher level of sophistication and engagement.

Request a Free Consultation Today

CHAPTER 3:

Planning and Budget

Every rebranding team must consider two factors: time and money. As you plan for a brand overhaul, we recommend that you revisit these two factors again and again to ensure you are keeping the schedule and budget under control.

Your branding firm should be able to provide a detailed timeline, as well as a clearly defined scope of work. Don't be shy. Ask questions or request more specific scopes if you aren't sure what something will cost.

How Long Will it Take?

How long will your rebranding initiative take? That's a fair question, and one that can be a considerable source of anxiety. Unfortunately, this question doesn't have a simple answer. Many variables affect the equation, not the least of which is the scope of your program.

Here are a few areas that commonly introduce delays:



- The size of your organization (larger firms take longer)
- The number of decision makers (fewer is faster)
- The amount of research required
- The scope and number of marketing deliverables
- The scale of your internal launch
- Is a new name required? (naming can take a great deal of time)
- How responsive your team is (a common source of delays)
- How responsive the branding firm is (be careful in selection)
- Does everything have to be approved by a legal team? (a problem for highly regulated firms)

Another factor that affects overall timeline is how many individual projects can be run in parallel. Some tasks have to be addressed sequentially (for example: 1. research; 2. positioning; 3. tagline). Others can be worked on concurrently (for example: website, brochures, style guidelines).

SCENARIO 1

Scope: Brand Strategy Refinement

Firm Size: Small

Timeline:



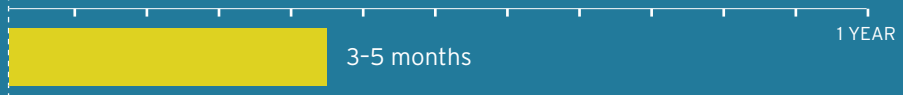
Needs: Research, positioning, messaging, tagline, messaging architecture

SCENARIO 2

Scope: Basic Rebranding

Firm Size: Small/Medium

Timeline:



Needs: Research, positioning, messaging, logo, tagline, website design & development, basic brand style guidelines

SCENARIO 3

Scope:	Comprehensive Rebranding and Go-to-Market Strategy
Firm Size:	Medium
Timeline:	1 YEAR — 4–8 months
Needs:	Research, positioning, messaging, logo, tagline, website design & development, multi-piece collateral design & writing, messaging architecture, expanded brand style guidelines, marketing plan

How Much Will it Cost?

How should you expect to spend to rebrand your firm? That number can be influenced by a wide variety of factors, especially the size of your firm.

Our research shows that the average professional services firm spends about 5% of revenues on marketing. Further, the average rebranding initiative requires about 10%-20% of their marketing budget.

For example, if your annual marketing budget is $500,000, you can expect to spend $50,000 to $100,000 to overhaul your firm's brand. Or if your annual revenues were $20 million, you can expect to spend $100,000 to $200,000 on rebranding.

Factors that can increase the cost of rebranding might include:

- Lack of pre-existing research
- Need for key branding elements, such as a new name or logo
- Scope and content of new branding elements, especially a complicated website
- Need for extensive internal brand education to launch
- Scope of external launch
- Need for staff "rainmaker" training and coaching



These ranges are only guidelines, of course. Branding a large, highly complex organization will be proportionately more expensive. And very small firms with relatively low earnings may pay a higher percentage of revenues just to cover the cost of the basics.

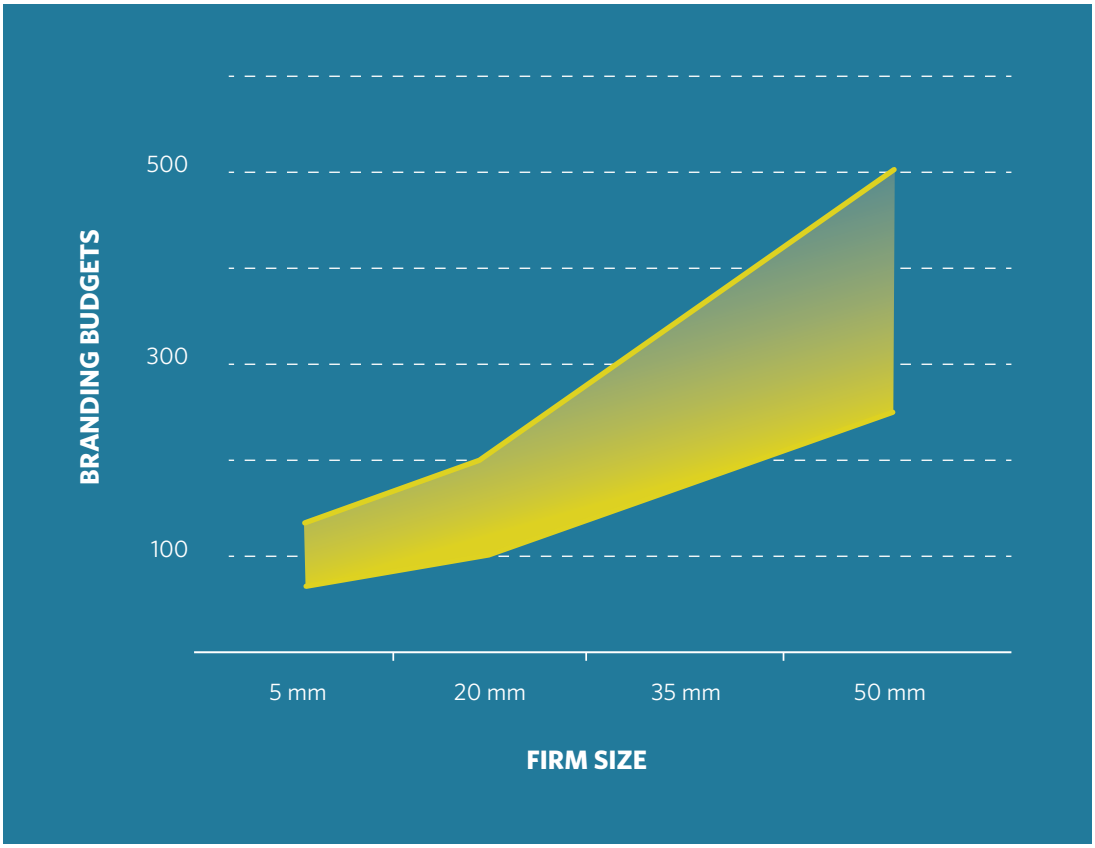


Figure 3. What firms of different sizes should expect to pay for rebranding.

Now, let's apply the budgets to the three sample scenarios described in the How Long Will it Take section. (Keep in mind that these are average numbers based on typical engagements. Your mileage may vary.)



	Scope	Firm Size	Timeline
SCENARIO 1	Brand Strategy Refinement	Small	8–12 weeks
Needs:	Research, positioning, messaging, tagline, messaging architecture		
Budget Range:	$20–30,000		
SCENARIO 2	Basic Rebranding	Small/Medium	3–5 months
Needs:	Research, positioning, messaging, logo, tagline, website design & development, basic brand style guidelines		
Budget Range:	$75–100,000		
SCENARIO 3	Comprehensive Rebranding and Go-to-Market Strategy	Medium	4–8 months
Needs:	Research, positioning, messaging, logo, tagline, website design & development, multi-piece collateral design & writing, messaging architecture, expanded brand style guidelines, marketing plan		
Budget Range:	$100–150,000		

CHAPTER 4:

How to Select Your Branding Partner

Choosing the right firm to lead you through the rebranding process can feel like a high-stakes gamble. Not only are you making a considerable financial investment, but your image and reputation are on the line.

To complicate matters, companies of ever stripe offer branding services, from graphic design firms to marketing consultants to global branding juggernauts. How do you narrow the field and choose a firm that will be a good fit? This chapter will provide some welcome guidance.



Choosing the Right Firm

When it comes to selecting a branding firm, you have an array of options. Here are the five primary options.

1. **Branding Specialist Firm:** These firms often have a regional, national or international reputation. They have researchers, strategists, writers and designers on staff, so they are well stocked with relevant expertise. The problem is that they may have limited experience with professional services firms. Service firms are very different from automobile or laundry detergent makers. The large international players can be very expensive — out of reach for all but the largest professional service firms.

   Bottom line: These firms are usually highly qualified, but look for professional services experience.

2. **Vertically Specialized Branding Firm:** These firms have the same advantages as the branding specialist firms, but with the added benefit of bringing significant experience in your industry to the table. That means less ramp-up time and a detailed understanding of your competitive environment. Pricing is similar to branding specialist firms.

   Bottom line: Because they already know your industry, its challenges and many of its key players, these firms are perfectly suited to position your firm in the marketplace and deliver an engaging brand.

Companies of ever stripe offer branding services. How do you narrow the field and choose a firm that will be a good fit?

3. **Graphic Design Firm:** Many, if not most, graphic design firms today offer brandings services. Typically, these firms are more focused on the aesthetics of branding than the discipline's strategic side, though there are some exceptions.

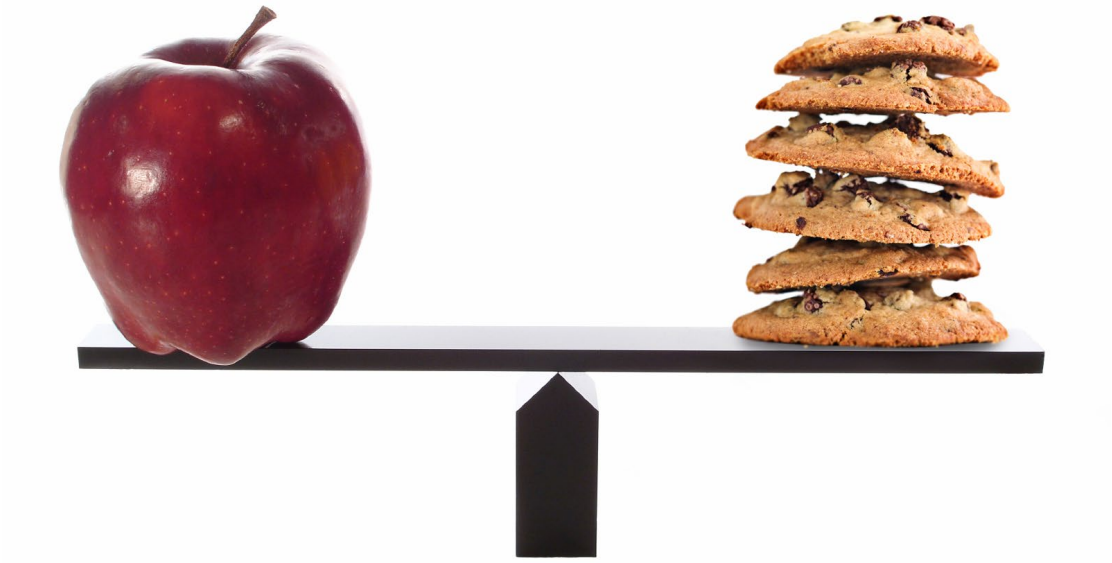
   Bottom line: These firms can deliver a great looking brand identity, but they may not have the research and strategy chops to recognize strategic opportunities in the marketplace.

4. **Independent Brand Consultants:** Consultants can vary widely in ability, but all come with the same caveat: they can't do everything themselves. That means they rely on contractors to do much of the work. These consultants are often very flexible with their time and their pricing, but the quality can be inconsistent.

   Bottom line: Unless price is your primary consideration, you can probably get a better result elsewhere.

5. **Marketing Consultants:** Marketing consultants, either independent or on staff, often have some experience with elements of the branding process and may be able to walk the talk. They can be helpful if you already have an existing relationship. The issue is that they can quickly get in over their head.

   Bottom line: Usually a risky choice.



Insider Tips for Selecting your Professional Services Branding Partner

Many professional services firms have lightly staffed marketing departments — or no formal marketing staff at all. Typically, they lack the resources to market effectively and they don't know how to select a marketing firm that suits their needs. The result is a lot of disappointment and too few results. Our research indicates that firms that grow the fastest and are the most profitable are more likely to use outside marketing resources.

Here are five practical tips to improve your odds of a successful experience.

1. **Be as clear as you can about what you want to accomplish and invest in the appropriate resource.**
   The bigger the desired outcome, the more sophisticated the resource you will need. The most common mistake is to expect a small project (such as a new brochure) to have a major impact, such as accelerating new business or repositioning the firm. By the same token, a solo marketing consultant is going to have a very rough time rebranding your firm. It's just too big a job and requires too diverse a set of skills.

2. **Does the marketing consultant or firm understand your problem well enough to solve it?**
   Do they understand your industry? Do they have an explanation for the results you are getting? Another way of evaluating this question is to think of it as a diagnosis. Do they understand what is wrong so they are in a position to recommend a workable solution? If you are not convinced that the marketing consultant has the right diagnosis, you are not likely to be happy with the cure. Our research shows that one of the important reasons that professional services buyers are unhappy with their provider is that they don't understand the situation and fail to solve the key problem.

3. **Has the resource done it before?**
   Past experience is a time-tested predictor of success in the professional services arena, so be sure to ask about it when searching for a branding firm. Past experience is easy to evaluate, so don't make the mistake of glossing over it. Professional services are much more complicated to market than most consumer products.

4. **Make sure the firm takes its own medicine.**
   We've all seen the marketing consultant with a weak website or unimpressive brand. Remember, they are in the professional services business too. If they don't do a good job with their own brand, what makes you think they'll do a good job with yours? If they make excuses about being too busy with client work to attend to their own marketing, don't buy it.

5. **Try before you buy.**
   Don't be afraid to sample a firm's work before you commit to a major, long-term relationship. Listen carefully to their analysis of your situation and recommendations for change. Read their blog posts, research reports or books, if they have them. Does their approach resonate with you? Try them out on a small project and see how they do. If they can't impress you in the short run, they are unlikely to be a good long-term fit.

Firms that grow the fastest and are the most profitable are more likely to use outside marketing resources.

Worksheet: 20 Questions to Ask Potential Rebranding Partners

1. What firms have you worked with in our industry?

2. How much of your work is with professional services firms like ours?

3. Why would I choose your firm over another?

4. Who will be on my team and what is their experience?

5. What services do you offer in-house and which ones do you contract out?

6. Do you have a process to ensure our employees will buy into the new brand?

7. What is an overall schedule and what are the most frequent causes of delay?

8. How do you price your projects? Are they on a fixed fee or hourly basis?

9. Does research inform your branding process? If so, what research do you use?

10. What will be expected of me, the client?

11. What are the most common pitfalls in rebranding and how can they be avoided?

12. How do you see the new brand being rolled out?

13. What happens after we launch our new brand?

14. What do you know about our industry?

15. Can you share some case studies of firms that have faced the same challenges we are facing?

16. How will we measure success?

17. What results can I expect from rebranding, and how will my firm be impacted?

18. How will you manage the project and what reporting can I expect?

19. Can you show me examples of identity design you have done for companies like ours?

20. How would you leverage the web to increase the value of our brand?

CHAPTER 5:

Making the Case for Rebranding

Before you commit to rebranding your firm, every decision maker at your firm need to understand and support the investment. If any stakeholders are uncertain or skeptical, now is the time to convince them that rebranding is more than a new suit of clothes. It's about bringing new clarity and focus to your entire business — and that has powerful implications.

In this chapter, we give you the guidance and tools you need to make your best case for a rebrand.

How to Overcome Internal Reluctance

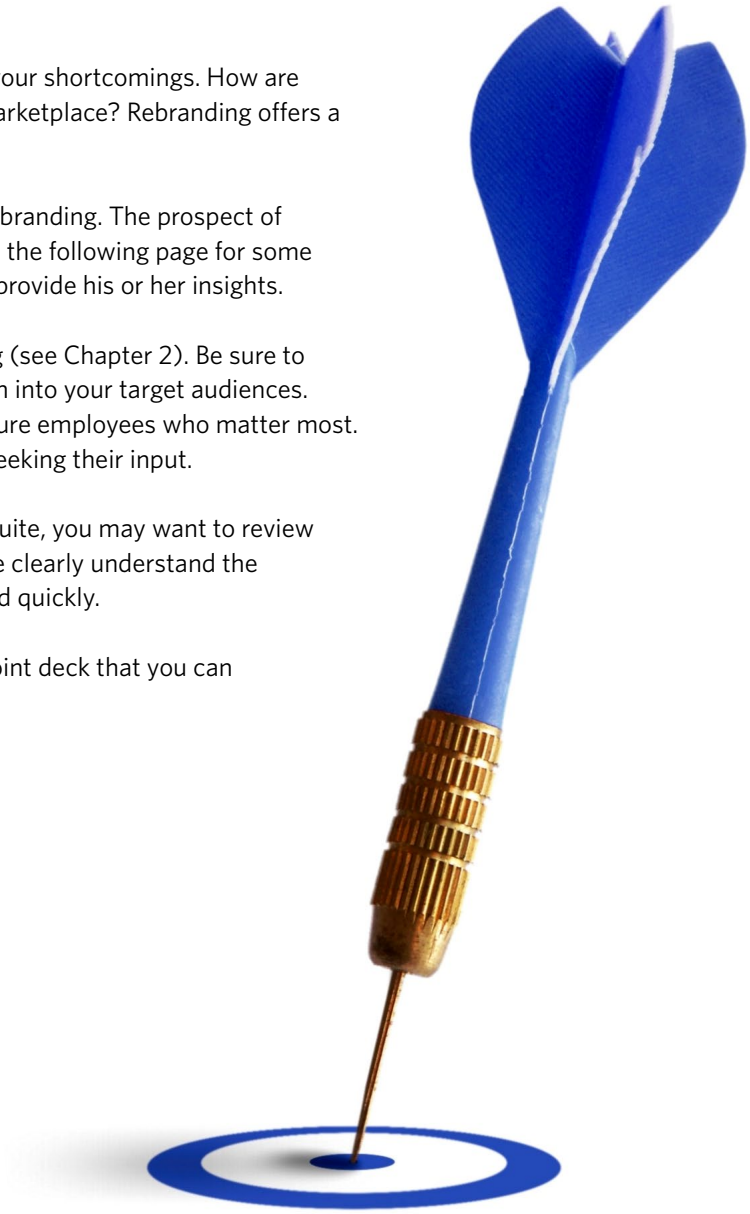
Does this scenario sound familiar? Everyone recognizes that your firm's brand is stale and overdue for a refresh. But a couple of key stakeholders don't want to spend the money, dislike change or simply don't recognize the value of a more focused brand. Without their support, rebranding is a non-starter. How do you help these individuals see the issue differently?



While we don't have magical answers that will work in every situation, we do have some general advice that you can adapt to your situation. First of all, bring all of the decision makers together in one room to discuss the issue. Once they recognize that their point of view is in the minority, holdouts will often change their minds and join the majority.

While you have everyone in the room together, try to objectively assess what is wrong with your current brand. Common brand problems include:

- Outdated brand collateral that no longer accurately reflects what you do
- Lack of awareness in the marketplace
- Difficulty getting new leads
- Low win rates in competitive situations
- Over-reliance on referrals
- You don't know how to talk about your firm
- You are no different than other firms in your industry
- Trouble attracting quality job candidates



Ask yourselves if you have a realistic plan to address your shortcomings. How are you going to change perceptions of your firm in the marketplace? Rebranding offers a compelling answer.

Most important, talk about the potential benefits of rebranding. The prospect of positive change is a fantastic motivator. See the list on the following page for some typical benefits. Or ask an outside branding expert to provide his or her insights.

Finally, lead the group through the process of branding (see Chapter 2). Be sure to stress that your new brand will be founded on research into your target audiences. After all, it's your prospective clients, partners and future employees who matter most. You can't possibly make informed decisions without seeking their input.

Even if you already have buy-in from your leadership suite, you may want to review some of the benefits with them, anyway. When people clearly understand the goals, they are more likely to move the process forward quickly.

At the end of this unit, you will find a link to a PowerPoint deck that you can download and adapt for your presentation.

Twenty Benefits of Rebranding

How do you sell rebranding in your organization? As with any form of selling, you will have the most success if you play up the benefits. Here is a list of twenty common benefits that result from rebranding. Most people find them pretty persuasive!



20 Reasons to Rebrand Your Firm

1. Your firm looks and sounds more sophisticated and contemporary.
2. You are no longer ashamed to send people to your website or read your firm literature.
3. You are finally able to explain not only what you do, but how you are different.
4. People actually understand what you do and how you are different.
5. Referrals come more easily because people know how to talk about you.
6. Prospective clients perceive you as bigger or more credible than before.
7. Your website becomes a powerful lead generation tool.
8. Top job candidates seek you out and want to work for you.
9. You win a higher percentage of contracts.
10. You are considered a leading contender even before the RFP goes out.
11. You can charge more for your services.
12. You have more authority in the marketplace. People seek out your advice.
13. Your firm's leaders are asked more frequently to speak and publish.
14. The condition of the economy becomes less important to your success.
15. You can spend less time networking and more time building your firm's reputation.
16. Your firm is more visible in the marketplace.
17. Prospects find you through online search or on the basis of your reputation.
18. You have a clearly defined target client group, so marketing is more efficient.
19. Staff morale is stronger.
20. Your firm can command a higher valuation.

Bonus: Five Unexpected Consequences of Rebranding

In over a decade and a half of rebranding professional services firms, we've noticed five common consequences of taking their firms through corporate rebranding — positive byproducts of the rebranding process. All that introspection can generate heightened awareness and transformation within an organization.

1. Rebranding forced them to look much more closely at who they were as a firm and where they wanted to take it in the future. It clearly went well beyond prior strategic planning exercises.

2. The rebranding process surfaced many core questions that had been ignored in the day-to-day hustle and bustle of serving clients. Some of these questions were painful to address yet essential to resolve.

3. All spoke about the surprising emotional changes they noted at their firms during and after the rebranding. Employees seemed more energized, aligned and excited about the firm. While not something they had anticipated, these changes in attitude were a welcome bonus.

4. While all expected to see an improvement in their ability to attract new business (which, by the way, all have experienced), they did not anticipate the benefits they found with respect to recruiting new employees and teaming partners. In addition, a clearly communicated brand helped them generate interest from relevant potential partners and prospects.

5. Clients took notice. They seem to be pleased that their firms were "taking care of themselves" and keeping up with the times. Rebranding boosted current clients' confidence in these firms.

These benefits shouldn't surprise you. After all, a well-executed rebranding initiative ought to replace confusion with clarity. It ought to help align the firm around a common vision and communicate that vision to prospects, partners and clients. And it should capture what is unique and exciting about a firm — and tell that story to the world. After all, that's what well-crafted brands do.

A well-executed rebranding initiative should capture what is unique and exciting about a firm — and tell that story to the world.



PowerPoint Deck for Briefing Your Team: Why Rebranding Matters

To help you make the case internally, we've developed a PowerPoint deck that speaks to some of the key benefits of rebranding. You can download the deck here:

http://hingemarketing.com/why_rebranding_matters.pptx

We've intentionally omitted any design elements so that you can apply your own PowerPoint template or logo. Consider this deck a starting point. Feel free to modify or adapt the presentation as you see fit.



About Hinge

Hinge specializes in branding and marketing for professional services firms. We are a leader in helping firms grow faster and maximize value.

Our comprehensive offerings include research and strategy, brand building, award-winning creative, high-performance websites and marketing outsourcing. And at Hinge University, your team can learn all the marketing skills and strategies they need to take your firm to a higher level of performance.

In addition, Hinge conducts groundbreaking research on professional service companies. We have identified a group of firms that grow 9X faster and are 50% more profitable yet spend less than average to get new business. We can show you how they do it and implement their strategies in your firm.

To view our full library of research reports, whitepapers, webinars and articles, please visit www.hingemarketing.com/library.

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Help us make this guide even better.

We want to hear from you. If you have any suggestions to improve this resource, please drop us a line: info@hingemarketing.com.

Thank you!

How We Can Help

Visible Firm® Program

Designed to deliver more referrals, higher profits and faster growth, the Visible Firm® Program will build a powerful marketing platform to engage your audiences and build your visibility. Based on the most extensive research into high-growth firms ever conducted, the Visible Firm® Program will ground your marketing in science and leverage your firm's expertise to draw in the right audiences.

Branding Program

Our Branding Program is designed to carry your firm's reputation confidently into the marketplace by giving you a suite of powerful branding tools. Based on extensive research and analysis, our branding strategies increase your firm's credibility and visibility in your industry. The services will also differentiate your firm and provide clear, compelling messages for each of your target audiences.

High-Performance Website Program

The High-Performance Website Program makes your website into a lead-generating machine — bundling a gorgeous new design with a suite of powerful online tools. Designed from the ground up to attract the right visitors from search engines, a high performance site uses educational content, smart offers, and custom features to engage and convert qualified leads.

Visible Expert® Program

Designed to help individuals cultivate an authoritative online presence in their area of expertise, the Visible Expert® Program delivers the tools and strategy required to build personal reputation and visibility in the marketplace. Based on extensive research, the Visible Expert® Program helps experts become recognized industry leaders.

For more information, call 703 391 8870 or email us at info@hingemarketing.com.

To find out how Hinge can help your professional services firm experience faster growth, contact us!

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TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Start Building a Powerful New Brand



At Hinge, we are uniquely qualified to create distinctive professional services brands that make firms look, sound and act like leaders.

Our expertise is founded on a decade of independent research into the fastest-growing firms. And we have helped hundreds of firms like yours build well-differentiated, confident brands that deliver exceptional growth, revenues and profits.

If you are considering a rebrand, we invite you to speak with one of our branding experts today. We'll explore your current brand and discuss how you can take it to a higher level of sophistication and engagement.

Request a Free Consultation Today

ONLINE MASTER CLASS

Find Your Competitive Advantage:

Differentiation, Positioning & Messaging



Lack of differentiation is one of the toughest challenges firm stakeholders and marketers struggle with today. In this online course, you'll learn how to uncover your firm's true differentiators so that you can give buyers a reason to pick you out of the crowd and choose you.

Hinge's Managing Partner, Lee Frederiksen will walk you through the process, step by step. You can even work through your own firm's differentiation and positioning as you go.

What You'll Learn:

- How to find out what your clients, prospects and staff really think about your firm
- How to research your competitors
- How to mine your research for true differentiators
- How to write an effective positioning statement
- How to develop your elevator pitch
- How to develop useful messaging for business development and marketing
- How to put all of these tools to use and start building a compelling competitive advantage

Learn More and Register