

When evolving's just not enough: Research company KLA rebrands

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Undertaking a rebranding process is no small quest. So you have to have an exceptionally good reason for doing it, and it's usually one of these:

1. You're changing your company's name.
2. You're merging with another company, under a new name.
3. You want to improve consistency across touchpoints.
4. You intend to refresh or reposition to remain relevant.



But it's rare that a rebrand happens at the *end* of a journey of reinvention. Seldom is a new brand required to ensure that the outside of a business – its public face – matches an inside – a core – that has already dramatically changed.



Your brand's not only about you: The role of research in a rebranding process

Tessa Nowosenetz and Christine Nyatsambo, KLA 30 Mar 2021



Typically for KLA, a South African market research company long known for doing things entirely differently, the latter is what happened. And it turned out that brand evolution wasn't enough: the KLA brand required a total revolution.

Retaining the magic

In August 2018, when Stephanie Matterson, Caitlin Bauristhene and Jenni Pennacchini bought out their large corporate partner of six years, they felt “very deeply” that KLA had to remain independent. This seemed to be the only way to retain the strong magic inside the business: a thread of passion-backed power that the trio didn't have a formal name for, but knew was there.

The magic, combined with the DNA, legacy and existing market equity of the 25-year-old business, called to the partners for revolution.

Jenni Pennacchini, partner and business solutions director, explains: “Ultimately, we bought KLA to safeguard our autonomy, our deep-seated commitment to our people and our love of culture and environment. With passion as our fuel, we needed KLA’s new brand to embody purpose and clarity, to demonstrate bravery and to manifest visually the changes that had already happened in our business.”

Targeting the objective

How does a research company carry out the research required for its own rebrand process? Very, very seriously. And with expert outside help, for perspective.

Caitlin Bauristhene, partner and research director, advises: “Know your overriding objective and be relentless about using it as your driver. Conduct internal research, external research, brand audits – all rooted in that objective. Otherwise, rebranding becomes a ‘that’s pretty’ exercise. A cosmetic endeavour. Think of rebranding not as a way to look better, but as a way to bring to life who you truly are.”

On whether there’s anything about the rebrand process that she would change, partner and MD Steph Matterson admits: “I was going to say, I wish we’d done it faster, but in retrospect, you need to sit with these things. As a business, you need time to evolve to a revolutionary place. So I wouldn’t change anything. Rebranding is a *big* decision. A massive undertaking. And you’d better make sure that you understand exactly who you are, before you try to alter the way you express it.”

In this instance, it seems that rebranding is not always about striving for change. Occasionally, it’s about unleashing an energy that is already there.

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