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Rebranding opportunity and risk in the spotlight as Pfizer launches new logo

- **Pfizer's new logo was meant to be released last year but was delayed due to covid-19**
- **Current visibility of company will boost awareness, but could have downsides**
- **Brand experts highlight communication challenges around identity changes**

At a time when the eyes of the world are on Pfizer and its development of a covid-19 vaccine, the company has decided to change its corporate identity. As rebrands are typically undertaken to improve the visibility of a company, *WTR* spoke to experts on what the pros and cons might be for undergoing a rebrand at such a pivotal moment.

"With Pfizer's increased commitment to breakthrough science, now is the time to update our identity to reflect that reality," says Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla. Therefore, the pharmaceutical company has replaced the oval, pill-like logo that it has used since 1948 with a simplified helix logo next to the company name. The new logo has been in development for the past 18 months, reports [The Wall Street Journal](#), although its rollout was paused during the 2020 pandemic. With the vaccine now approved by multiple regulators, chief corporate affairs officer Sally Susman states: "Once it was clear that we would be bringing forward this vaccine it was an 'Aha!' moment that it would be the great proof-point of our new purpose statement: that we want to be about prevention and more than treatment."

Rebrands of major pharmaceutical enterprises are of particular importance, as their products are oblique without the requisite trusted branding. "It is a big deal when a business like Pfizer decides to alter its branding," says [Hastings Guise](#), a partner at Fieldfisher. With the long gestation time of the rebranding project, "the fact that Pfizer is enjoying a period in the limelight following its successful development of the first covid-19 vaccine with BioNTech is fortunate".

The advantages of a media swirl around Pfizer mean that the company can save time and money marketing its new brand image to the public. [Linda Thiel](#), a partner at JONAS Rechtsanwalts-gesellschaft, says: "The advantage is clearly the huge publicity that Pfizer has at the moment that includes not just specialist circles but also the general public. Nearly everybody in the world at the moment knows Pfizer because of the vaccine developed together with BioNTech. This leads to an enhancement of their brand reputation."

With this raised profile, Bird & Bird partner [Uwe Lüken](#) adds that "it would not have been optimal to have a logo become more well known than before and to change it afterwards" – although he notes that "from an operational perspective, it might be harder to have a logistical challenge like the vaccine distribution and the logistical challenge of a logo change happening at the same time".

There are also potential risks to undertaking a rebrand right now. For instance, the entire project could be thrown into a bad light if any issues with the rollout of the vaccine were to arise, warns [Marc Cloosterman](#), CEO of brand consultancy VIM Group. "I sincerely don't hope so, but if anything was off with the effectiveness of the vaccine, or its distribution, criticsasters will be more than keen to point out that they should have better focused on their core business than on their appearance."

Guise identifies brand equity as another area of risk. The company could damage its brand equity by handling the new brand rollout improperly, he warns, making it essential to properly educate the market. "The fact that Pfizer is already in the public eye at present should make this job easier and help to mitigate some of the risks associated with changing a long-established brand," he says.

In terms of how to enact the education methods, Walter Brecht, managing partner of [Spirt for Brands](#), explains that specific communications for each target group are crucial. "For the medical community, the communication should be more functional, by telling the story but ensuring consistent quality and even more scientific rigour. For end-consumers, the story could be told more emotionally and focusing on the bigger purpose."

However, Brecht also notes that too big of a push on the communications side could lead to confusion and "the impression that Pfizer focuses more on advertising than fighting covid-19".

Commercial rebrands are an important tool in managing a brand's goodwill. When used to draw eyes towards a newly focused brand identity, it can work wonders. Therefore, as Pfizer is demonstrating, taking an opportunity in the spotlight to orchestrate a rebrand could be a canny move. However, with big reward comes risk, and balancing the push for a new brand identity with any challenges that come from heightened public pressure will be key to landing the move.

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