

Weston company's evolution leads to marketing makeover

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After three years in business, Platinum Mosquito Protection was in need of a marketing makeover.

Its message was dated and its look was growing stale. The brand had "run its course," executives said, and lacked a cohesive, corporate identity.

"We wanted a modernized brand with strong appeal," said Suzanne Bell, founder and president of the Weston-based company, which produces misting systems to repel mosquitoes.

So company executives huddled with their ad shop, Salomon Snow Advertising and, together, they sought to remake the company's brand and image. The goal was to put a new face on the company, as well as to better educate consumers.

There comes a time in the life of many businesses that marketing, advertising and branding run their course. The brand becomes old. The company evolves and needs a new image.

Platinum's was a tale of "typical small business expansion and success," said Manny Salomon, principal with the Hollywood ad agency. Early on, Platinum had used advertising created by magazine publishers or the media outlets where its ads were to run. Then, Platinum brought Salomon Snow in to create a holistic new look.

Three years later, the company sought a more refined, "corporate" appearance, Bell said. In discussions that began in mid-2006, agency and company execs sought a "clear, concise message," highlighting what Bell called a "lifestyle" product.

Together, they considered Platinum's key brand attributes - and those of the competition. Most competition uses "scare tactics" to position their products, Salomon said.

"We wanted a feel-good message about enjoying your backyard," Bell said.

Thus, product differentiation and consumer education were essential. Salomon and his team chose a "friendly" approach. The new look would focus on Platinum's automatic misting system that keeps bugs at bay without the need of citronella candles or sprays.

"It was important to convey that it was only dangerous to pests," Salomon said.

The result was iconic images of a house, a "mist" and a mosquito, each in circles, and the company name in bold typography. Below the name, the phrase "automatic misting systems" ensured readers know how the product works. Words and images were set against a green backdrop. By employing wordplay, typography, color and simple graphics, Platinum could "own" all elements of the messaging, Salomon said. That meant not having to rely on the stock photography the agency had employed in past work.

"Everybody uses the picture of a lady relaxing in a lounge chair," Bell said. "Our ads had looked like everyone else's ads, and we were making the campaigns fit the photos. We wanted something all our own."

Agency and company executives tested the new look with ad hoc focus groups. Bell would show the new logo to friends, associates and even strangers at her son's Little League games, she said. Initial feedback was positive, she said.

"The look is sophisticated, but represents the feeling of the company's culture and the service it delivers," Salomon said. "It's the holy grail of logos: You know what this company does through its name and graphic representation. That influences opinions, reasoning and actions."

Throughout the makeover process, Salomon, Bell and Mark Berger, Platinum's new VP of sales and marketing, pondered changing Platinum's name to something that spoke more directly to the company's service. Salomon and his team pushed for a change, believing the name "Platinum" was generic and did little to differentiate the service or brand. Bell disagreed. "Platinum" is descriptive and hints at quality, she said.

Though the name stayed, it wasn't an easy decision, she noted.

"We kind of tortured ourselves, going back and forth," she said. "Once you're with a name for a number of years, I was very concerned we'd lose the equity it had built up. I didn't want to invest what it would take to reposition it. Honestly, I didn't have the stomach for that."

In the end, changing the company's logo, look and messaging has reinvigorated Platinum's marketing efforts, Bell said. The new campaign, "Life without Mosquitoes," debuted several months ago. It included print and direct mail campaigns, and a new Web site design. Prominent in

the new work is the word "Life," which appears on ads and company apparel and T-shirts. Other marketing outreach included sponsorship of a local golf tournament for Comcast Cable and accompanying television advertising and on-site promotions.

Since much of Platinum's marketing efforts are branding and not direct-response driven, it's hard to measure the program's success. Each caller seeking product information is asked where he or she learned about the company. The company's Web site also asks, "How did you hear of us?"

Reflecting on her decision to rebrand the company, Bell said she believed it was the right move. But her initial concerns are common to small business owners: Will the rebranding build consumer awareness or sacrifice built-up brand equity?

"It was a difficult decision," Bell said. "You want to improve the business, but you don't want people to not realize it's the same company. You hire professionals you trust and you go with your gut."

ACCOUNTS & AWARDS

- Fort Lauderdale-based Zimmerman Advertising has consolidated creative services for Mattress Firm, a mattress retailer based in Houston. Zimmerman has handled a portion of the account for 18 months.
- RBB Public Relations in Coral Gables has won two Silver Anvil Awards and an Award of Excellence from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). The awards were for clients Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden and TracFone Wireless.
- 524 Creative, a boutique marketing firm in Lake Worth, has received four Communicator Awards for its work for clients Rio Mar Beach Resort & Spa and the Sheraton Old San Juan Hotel & Casino, both in Puerto Rico; and Lytal Reiter Clark Fountain & Williams LLP, a West Palm Beach law firm.

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