6 Ways to Subtly Refresh Your Brand and Can Keep Your Business Relevant

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Many brands undergo a formal refresh every few years, updating their look and feel to ensure they stay relevant to their market. It keeps guests coming back. People like consistency and familiarity but also want something fresh in the experience. It’s not something you can leave on the shelf and pull out for tweaking every few years or even every few months; it has to be a daily concern, an ongoing process designed to enhance the guest experience and uphold the brand’s high standards every time someone walks through your door.

A refresh differs from a rebrand, creating an entirely new identity. At Ford’s Garage, we see it as a tune-up rather than a complete engine overhaul. We talk daily about performance, examining whether we’re fueled up to take our guests where they want to go. Our goal is for guests always to feel a sense of improvement and freshness so they do not have a “Been there done that” feeling. They may not be able to put their finger on it, but they feel the difference and say, “I’m not sure what it is, but I sure do like it.”

Here are ways to revitalize a brand to feel new and familiar.

1. Make it continuous

Unlike a complete rebrand, a brand refresh is about moving things along with subtle and dramatic changes — from updated

photographs and menus to remodeled interiors and new social media strategies – that collectively enhance the overall guest experience.

Examine how your staff interacts with guests; do they keep your promises about service? Make the process strategic and steady to ensure you can carry out the changes you conceive. Consider setting aside money yearly for a regular remodel or updates to the building and parking lot.

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2. Balance innovation and consistency

Refresh the details but stay faithful to your fundamental identity to keep your overarching brand standards consistent and true to your origins. Introduce small updates frequently to keep your brand modern and appealing; you might bring in new glassware and tweak the tone of voice used in marketing materials. However, the overall message shouldn't change; the new additions should still conform to your brand standards guide.

3. Think about the whole experience

Refreshing the brand isn't just about paint and decor. Look at the products you offer and how you deliver them. We added brunch, for instance, to help our guests enjoy the brand in a different, noticeable and memorable way.

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4. Keep guests at the core

One of the critical elements of a successful brand refresh is involving guests in the process. Use surveys and other feedback mechanisms to gauge their reactions to new initiatives. They have no problem giving feedback, and you should welcome both positive and negative responses. It helps the team make necessary adjustments and ensures that changes align with their expectations.

5. Adapt to regional preferences

If you operate in multiple regions, keep your core offering consistent within the brand while accommodating regional tastes. For instance, if you're going to add a restaurant in Maryland and you add crab cakes, you'd better be sure they're killer crab cakes. Showing you know local tastes allows you to maintain your overall identity without feeling like a chain where everything is rigidly the same.

6. Communicate actively with teams

A brand standards guide is a must, especially if you have franchises or multiple locations. But don't just issue the guide and expect franchisees to understand and follow it. Visit all your locations regularly to coach them and keep them updated on standards. For example, take a lot of notes about the interior and exterior of their buildings and work with them on potential remodels.

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Don't be timid: Go for it!

A critical misstep to avoid during a brand refresh is not going far enough. That can happen if you haven't thought

through the change and made sure it will work, so you must pull back a new product or service. (And the bigger the splash you made in announcing the change, the more attention you'll get if it flops.) To avoid this, test your big ideas. Get internal and external feedback; if you have multiple locations, test it in one of them and roll it out to others as it succeeds.

A brand refresh should be a holistic process that involves continuous improvement, structured planning and constant guest engagement. By regularly making subtle, thoughtful changes, you can make the experience you offer up-to-date and appealing to those new and returning to your establishment. This keeps it relevant and reinforces its commitment to quality and innovation.

A successful brand refresh is not about dramatic overhauls but constant, incremental improvements that make a significant impact.

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