

So You Launched Your Startup – Now What?

The co-founder of Harry's on navigating your startup business's adolescent stage.

September 20, 2019 5 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

Harry's started with a simple premise: to provide guys with a great shave at a fair price, and a brand that they could trust to always give them the best experience possible. Six years later, we've expanded beyond shaving into other product categories and brought Harry's to major retailers like Target and Walmart. We are no longer a DTC shave brand, but despite this, we're still often referred to as an online-only shave club that exclusively offers men's razors. We've evolved as a brand, but some consumers still view us as the "old Harry's." How do we change that?

It's hard to equate company years to human years, but at six years old, I think it's fair to say we're out of the startup phase and have entered our "adolescent" phase. Our challenges now are different than they were in the early days (well, we still have some of the same challenges, along with a whole lot more). We've grown past our initial vision for the company and brand, and while our mission of "creating things people like more" is enduring, it's taken shape in different ways than we'd initially imagined. This stage brings up a classic positioning challenge that many companies face – one that can be solved once you reset your intentions and are honest and clear with your customers about what you're doing and why you're doing it.

Related: Successful Startups Have This One Thing in Common

It's easier said than done, but for anyone entering this stage of their business, here's what we've learned can help both new and existing customers understand the evolution of your brand's offerings and mission.

1. Embrace your startup founding story

As you grow, return to the reason you started: maybe that's to create a company that supports local communities or reduces food waste. Whatever your mission, continue to use it to inform your decision-making. At Harry's, we set out to improve the process of getting ready every day for millions of guys. We created new product lines for men's hair, body and skincare because those are the products our customers asked us for directly (for context, we expanded into hair because 43,877 existing customers asked for hair care products while 76,198 customers requested hair styling products). By embracing this approach, our positioning becomes easier to articulate and still feels distinctly "Harry's" as we grow.

2. Your messaging has to evolve with your company

We didn't stop our tried and true marketing, but as we grew we were deliberate in adding messages that we felt customers needed to know. We settled on two main messages: 1) we're a holistic men's care brand (not just a razor company), and 2) we're omnichannel: available to shop through both our own DTC channel and at mass retail within Target and Walmart locations across the country. We gave our retail partners tools to engage their existing customers and let them know that Harry's was available in-store. It seems straightforward, but determining those messages and their importance allowed us to

stay focused. From there, we could tailor our marketing strategy accordingly and allocate the right resources for influencer, paid social and other channels.

Related: Why Your Next Startup Should Be Purpose-Driven

3. Explain your “Why”

For every new decision you make, you need to explain the reasoning to your customer. That’s why step one is crucial: it gives you a clear understanding of what drives your decisions, which in turn makes it easier to articulate this to your customer. Recently, we had the incredible, and equally challenging opportunity to announce plans to combine Harry’s with Edgewell Personal Care. This decision wasn’t made lightly, and was the right one for us because it will allow us to accelerate our mission of bringing customers the great product and brand experiences they deserve – and more of them. As founders, we communicated this directly to our customers through an email that reiterated our “why” for existence (our founding story) and how combining with Edgewell will allow us to continue our mission. On our homepage, we even added a message from myself and my co-founder, Andy. It’s a small detail, but we think it matters because it allows our customers to remember why we exist and also builds a stronger, more genuine connection to our brand and product as we grow.

Related: To Succeed at Business You Need a Startup Mindset

Even though the “adolescent phase” comes with its own struggles, embrace the challenges because they mean your brand has reached a pivotal moment of expansion. While we’re still facing our own challenges and don’t have all the answers, we’re working to better communicate who we are as a company and looking forward to refining our evolving brand story as we grow.

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/339596>