



Minding the Gap: Retailer Caught in Logo Fiasco

By Christine Birkner, staff writer
cbirkner@ama.org

In a scenario that shows the power of social media and of consumer feedback on brand choices, San Francisco-based Gap Inc. swiftly reversed its decision to change its logo on Oct. 11 after the change prompted an uproar from consumers. About a week after it unveiled a new logo on its website and asked consumers on its Facebook page for comment and further logo ideas, Gap announced that it would go back to its iconic blue box logo—as online feedback on the new logo was overwhelmingly negative. Parody Twitter accounts slammed the new logo and a website, “Crap Logo Yourself,” allowed users to enter text to create an image that mimicked the new logo.

In a statement on its Facebook page, Gap said: “We’ve heard loud and clear that you don’t like the new logo. We’ve learned a lot from the feedback. We only want what’s best for the brand and our customers.” Gap did not return requests for comment for this story, but in a press release, Marka Hansen, president of Gap North America, said: “We’ve learned a lot in this process. And we are clear that we did not go about this in the right way. There may be a time to evolve our logo, but if and when that time comes, we’ll handle it in a different way.”

Chris Campbell, executive creative director at New York-based Interbrand Corp., a global brand management firm, says: “Something did go awry in the rollout process. There were no communications or press releases about why they changed the logo, so it was hard to understand what they were up to. [Gap] failed to recognize how iconic a brand they are in the marketplace and that if you go about such a dramatic change, people want to know why.”

Courtney Reeser, chief creative director and managing director of the San Francisco office of Landor Associates, a brand consulting and design firm, thinks Gap should have moved forward with the new logo regardless of customer response. “They made a change and they had a reason, whether it came from a brand standpoint or a business standpoint. They hired a tier-one firm [New York-based Laird & Partners] to do this work and they came to the conclusion that they had a viable solution. They over-responded to the negative feedback they were getting,” he says. “These types of projects always receive some negative response. In this age of social media, these responses take on a life that’s much larger than it once was. [Gap execs] bought into that negative criticism to the point where they became paralyzed and they backtracked.”

Stef Gans, CEO of EffectiveBrands, a marketing consultancy in New York, agrees: “As a marketer, you need to listen to your clients, but ... Henry Ford said, ‘If I ask my clients what they want, they will say a faster horse.’ So there are things you should listen to your clients’ opinion for, but there are also things that you need to carve out as being an essential part of your vision. If Apple would’ve asked its consumers if they wanted an iPad, they would’ve said no.”

Social media now allow customers to interact with corporations at lightning speed and companies must be prepared to deal with that. “Consumers absolutely have a say in a brand and consumers want to have conversations with brands, and it’s happening through social media. Organizations need to be prepared to have a conversation with consumers and it seems that Gap [was] ill-

prepared to have a conversation in a meaningful way with the consumer base,” Interbrand’s Campbell says.

But social media also create noise, allowing people with no connection to a brand to weigh in and sometimes affect a company’s decision. “It would be interesting to track how many of these people are loyal Gap customers. Perhaps 90% of these people don’t even go to the Gap, so who cares about their opinion?” Landor’s Reeser says.

Brand experts say that “Gap Logo-gate” will have little long-term impact on the brand. “Short term, it makes them look indecisive. Long term, little damage will be done. Americans have a short-term memory. This will blow over. When Coca-Cola changed their formula, there was a huge uproar. No one remembers that today,” Reeser says.

Gans agrees: “Some people will say [that changing back to the old logo] was a weak thing to do; others will say, ‘Finally, a company that listens to its clients.’ For a brand that’s strong, a mistake like this is ultimately not that big of a deal.”