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Exposing Two-Face Brands

Posted on August 16, 2010 by [Steve Baird](#)

I'm not talking about brands that say one thing and do another. I'm not talking about brands that don't live up to their promise. I'm literally talking about brands with two faces. One face may be confident, complicated, technical, professional, and/or formal. Let's call him, Stephen. The other face might be friendly, simple, approachable, engaging, and/or informal -- perhaps, identified by a nickname or some other form of truncation. Meet Steve.

[A couple of months ago I blogged](#) about the clear trend toward truncation and informality in branding ([Coca-Cola and Coke](#), [Gatorade and G](#), [Bubblicious and B](#), [Stride and S](#), [Federal Express and Fedex](#), [Radio Shack and The Shack](#), [Pizza Hut and The Hut](#), [Vanderbilt and Vandy](#), [Villanova and Nova](#)), with at least one exception being General Motors, ahem, GM and its apparent interest in bucking that trend by moving away from the less formal two-syllable Chevy name and brand in favor of the more formal three-syllable Chevrolet name and brand.

Similarly, McDonalds' current billboard ad campaign confirms that the fast food giant prefers formality, i.e., Joseph over Joe, at least when it comes to selling its premium roast coffee in competition with the likes of Starbucks and Caribou Coffee:



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Capella Tower | Suite 3500 | 225 South Sixth Street | Minneapolis, MN 55402
Main: (612) 604-6400 | Fax: (612) 604-6800 | www.winthrop.com | *A Professional Association*

And, while I can't specifically recall the name of the advertiser and educational institution, moving in a similar direction, I do recall a recent billboard ad campaign in the Twin Cities metro area, where the college or university in question seemed to suggest that an entering student named Kate will acquire the tools to transform herself into Katherine upon graduation. So, I guess that's an improvement and worth the investment of time and money?

Meanwhile, Charles Schwab is now a.k.a Chuck:



Just wondering, had Charles Schwab started business as Chuck Schwab, would the financial giant be what it is today? Seems to me, at least in the financial services sector, starting formal and moving informal is an easier branding path than traveling in the opposite direction.

As I recall, and on a somewhat related note, earlier this year, Guest Blogger Anthony Shore of [Operative Words](#), wrote about the naming pendulum swinging away from arbitrary names and back toward brand names having an honest, straightforward, and even humble quality, in [Truth is Stronger Than Fiction](#). Might those principles be at work here too?

In the end, I suppose that brands, like people, may exhibit either or both faces, formal and informal, depending on their surroundings and the circumstances they encounter at any given point in time. It seems to me, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive faces, as evidenced by the fact that nearly all of the branding truncation examples above did not completely replace the more formal brand name from use, they simply introduced a fresh new second face of the brand.

My guess, as a trademark type, is that the less formal face of a brand creates an opportunity for creating a stronger emotional connection with consumers, but I'm happy to be corrected by someone who thinks about such things for a living.

