Radical Brand Evolution: A Case-Based Framework

The article highlights the importance of brand evolution as a necessary component of successful marketing strategy. In particular the article emphasizes the decision to revitalize the core brand. Three key constructs are used as a framework for analyzing rebranding decisions, namely brand vision, brand orientation, and brand strategy implementation. It is proposed that the key to successful rebranding is the need to build each of these three components as well as ensuring that they are tightly linked and coordinated. The normative framework was applied to a major Canadian retailer, Canadian Tire, and found to be helpful in analyzing their rebranding. Lessons have been drawn from the case study, including the important role of advertising.

All brands need to be revitalized on a regular basis in order for them to be kept fresh, vital, and relevant to the contemporary market. Aaker (1991) and Keller (2003) each devote a chapter to this issue, but the debate is broad, lacking specific principles or theories to manage different types of brand revitalization. It is useful to refer to brand revitalization as brand evolution, as the latter conveys the impression that revitalization is continuous over time rather than a one-off minor change. We wish to focus on a particular type of brand evolution, namely radical (or revolutionary) brand evolution. Thus while brand evolution is continuous, from time to time a spike enters the trajectory, which we call a major or radical form of brand evolution. The essence of radical brand evolution is the need to take a brand forward as part of a major strategic imperative. Importantly, radical brand evolutions enable a quick, large increase in the scale of the brand, say a growth of 10 percent or more in just a year or two.

Rebranding is a major aspect of marketing and is critical for growing the brand, but there is a gap in the literature on the subject. Two earlier paradigms to brand evolution are noted and a new framework developed in this article based on case study research of a major Canadian retailer, Canadian Tire.

BRAND EVOLUTION

One source of knowledge about radical brand evolution is case studies. Scott Bedbury was involved with the radical revitalization of two famous brands, Nike and Starbucks (Bedbury, 2002). Ironically, each of these brands had gone through a period where the brand owners simply relied on hope or intuition that other stakeholders would comprehend the brand essence meaning. The development of the Just-Do-It campaign was associated with greater definition in Nike’s brand mantra toward “Authentic, Athletic, Performance.” Similarly the initial fuzzy Starbucks’ brand identity was transformed into “Rewarding, Everyday, Moments.” In both cases Bedbury used unorthodox market research, including issues based research and monitoring for Nike and a 500-year history of coffee houses for Starbucks. The subsequent greater clarity of the brand mantra (vision) facilitated the brand alignment inside each corporation (Bedbury, 2002). Other cases could be added, but no one has used case material to formulate a general framework for brand evolution.
The academic literature includes the views of Aaker and Keller that brand revitalization is an important aspect of corporate success. However, there are not many explicit theories of brand evolution or rebranding. Kapferer (2001) offers more hope in his book on reinventing the brand and notes that “a brand can retain its aspirational qualities only if it continues to change and reinvent itself” (p. 222). The book does highlight the urgent need for brands to evolve, which could include consideration of relationships, values, distributors, and emotions. But no detailed blueprint for rebranding is given. Another major contribution is the work by McEnally and de Chernatony (1999) who build on the study by Goodyear (1996). A six-stage model of brand evolution is proposed, starting with unbranded goods and then evolving to “brand as reference” (with emphasis on functional differentiation), to “brand as personality” (with emphasis on emotional differentiation), to “brand as icon,” to “brand as company,” and finally to “brand as policy.” McEnally and de Chernatony (1999) suggest that brands can enter at different stages and may not proceed through to the final destination. Indeed, they suggest that stages three or four may be the apex for many companies, though the last two stages “represent the future for brands.” Ikea is given as a role model for stage 5 and the Body Shop for stage 6.

Their six-stage framework is contrasted to other dynamic branding models such as Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986), in which companies choose an initial branding position (functional versus symbolic), which is then managed over the brand’s life cycle. In the Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986) model, there is no shifting from one stage (in the Goodyear sense) to another. Both the Park-Jaworski-MacInnis and the Goodyear-McEnally-de Chernatony frameworks are recognized in Figure 1 as conceptual milestones in the development of our understanding about brand evolution. The six-stage Goodyear model will be used as part of the framework for our case study of Canadian Tire, where there is a movement from brand as icon to brand as company.

A major gap in the above models of brand evolution is that the “supply” side—that is, the role of management in designing and implementing the new brand strategy—is not as well developed as the demand side (consumer) aspects. De Chernatony and Riley (1998) have partially redressed this gap with their double vertex model that explicitly links the two sides together. Moreover, McEnally and de Chernatony (1999) do attempt to incor-

Figure 1. Evolving Conceptualization of Brand Evolution
Brand orientation occurs when the strategy is built around
the brand and all parts of the organization are tied into
the brand . . .

formulation of a brand, highlighting distinctive features and values (both func-
tional and emotional) and how the brand is positioned competitively (see de Cher-
natony and Riley, 1998). Brand strategy implementation is the implementation of
the brand strategy through the marketing mix, including advertising. Thus the in-
terlocking constructs of brand vision, brand orientation, and brand strategy implemen-
tation provide a new framework for tying together the demand and supply side of
branding, shown in Figure 1.

In summary, the brand vision-
orientation-strategy implementation frame-
work is proposed as a potentially useful
tool to evaluate brand evolution. Such
a framework builds on and can be used
in conjunction with the six-stage model of
Goodyear (1996) and McEnally and de Cher-
natony (1999). We propose to illus-
trate and “validate” the usefulness of the
Goodyear and the new frameworks with
an in-depth case study of the Canadian
tailer, Canadian Tire.

THE CASE STUDY
Canadian Tire is a major mass merchan-
diser in Canada, with annual retail sales
of over $6 billion. There are about 500
associated stores operated by slightly fewer
associate dealers in a relationship that re-
sembles franchising but is not franchis-
ing. The Canadian mass merchandise
market has become very competitive over
the past ten years, with the arrival of
Wal-Mart in 1994 (taking over Woolco),
Zellers taking over Kmart in 1998, and
additional pressure coming from the cat-

gory killers like Home Depot and other
home improvement retailers and depart-
ment stores like Sears and The Bay. It is in
this context that mass-merchandise retailer
needs to strengthen their respective
brands. About mid-2001 Canadian Tire
Retail (CTR) appointed a new marketing
director with management responsibilities
that include consumer research, retail
brands, quality engineering, and loyalty
programs (including Canadian Tire
‘Money™’). An additional responsibility
was CTR brand strategy and the integrity
of the Canadian Tire Retail market position
throughout the network.

It seems reasonable to conclude that
Canadian Tire did not have a clear posi-
tion in the market prior to 2001. This does
not imply that it was not a strong brand,
far from it. It had a strong Canadian her-
itage, with lots of Canadians growing up
with the brand and comfortable with it
(see McBride, 1997, for an internal per-
spective). It also had a number of well-
known product brands like Mastercraft
that were well received in the market and
contributed to the corporate identity. Flags
and insignia bear the classic red and white
Canadian colors. The sheer volume of sales
would also attest to its strength as a brand.
The author suggests that “brand as icon”
is a way of describing the nature of the
Canadian Tire brand prior to the rebrand-
ing, according to the Goodyear six-stage
typology. A major strength of the company
was its merchandising/advertising skills that included the powerful weekly
flyer with regular specials (part of a high-
low promotion strategy). Consistent with
a strong merchandising culture was the
belief that the company could be “all things
to all people,” which stands in contrast to the typical marketing approach of tight segmentation, targeting, and positioning. In short, the company had more of a merchandising than a marketing culture and strategy.

The new marketing director designed a brief to lead a small, five-person team to develop a new market position for the company and to guide the rebranding of the company. The team had representatives from consumer research, own labels, and advertising, with most having a marketing background. The process by which this rebranding was developed can be thought of as moving through three overlapping steps. The first step emphasized brand vision, that is, the creative research to arrive at the new market position. The second step emphasized brand orientation, that is, the need to get internal endorsement within the company from key internal stakeholders. The third step was brand strategy implementation, starting with launching the new brand, especially through advertising, and continuing to get additional internal endorsement. We will cover each of these phases in turn.

**Phase 1: Brand visioning**

The brand vision phase was of course crucial. The team was able to draw on past quantitative research that quickly pinpointed the target market. The primary group was parents with kids under 18 years and the secondary group was empty nesters (55 years plus). The team then turned to qualitative research, using in-depth interviews of up to two hours per consumer. A number of predetermined concepts were tested using one-line triggers to explore the nature of, meaning, and the importance that consumers attached to each concept. The exercise included the gathering of photos to elaborate on the meaning. The particular method used was based on the Zmet approach developed at Harvard Business School. Other academics have championed the role and application of in-depth qualitative research, including Zaltman and Holbrook. However, the application of the Zmet approach in industry does not seem widespread, or at least that was the opinion of the CBC TV program Marketplace seeking to interview Canadian Tire for their use of a novel method of research.

The final product of the research was the desire of consumers to get quality products and to start new activities or tasks, such as new season, project, sport, or life event, with confidence. This led to the new market position slogan or tagline: “let’s get started.” This process required two essential ingredients. First, having the right assortment of quality products and knowing that they meet consumer needs. Second, the product needed to be delivered through a caring and energetic in-store experience. *Product* and *experience* were the critical duo in the new market position. The market position was broader than the slogan and was not purely driven by the customer research. The consumer research interacted with intuitive desktop research using academic works that suggested how companies, especially retailers, could differentiate themselves. One particular study by Crawford and Mathews (2001) emphasized the need for retailers to be dominant on one of five broad attributes (price, product, service, access, and experience), to have a point of difference on another broad attribute, and to be competitive (at parity) on the other three attributes. The book shows that Wal-Mart’s dominance is price, with differentiation from product, while Home Depot is strongest on product with a lot of support from service. So the key point of difference for Canadian Tire was product (including its own brands), with experience the major support. In the words of the CTR president, “We love products and we love people” (Foote, 2002).

**Phase 2: Brand orientation process**

It is not enough to create a new brand position by projecting something different and exciting to customers. It is also necessary to get full support from all of the other internal stakeholders, including the senior executive, the dealers, the advertising agency, and the vendors. We can call this brand orientation or alternatively brand commitment, to the extent the new brand is recognized, understood, and acted upon throughout the organization and across the full gamut of business strategies. There are two main ways of involving the other internal stakeholders, either involve early or later. The later was the option chosen at Canadian Tire. A trade-off exists. Early involvement often brings with it more passionate involvement and support in the final decision, but at a cost of greater confusion about where the new brand is heading. In retrospect the correct decision seems to have been made, in that it was a lot easier to communicate and educate a well-defined rebranding position, rather than get into embroiled in debate about vague alternatives. Even as it was, it became necessary to carefully explain the new position.

By December 2001 there was enough detail in the new market position to ensure that the advertising agency was comfortable with it and was given an advertising brief for the new campaign. The process of developing specific advertisements also had some unintended ben-
entities in educating the executive about the
new position. Merchandising-oriented ex-
ecutives would naturally be skeptical
about a new marketing/branding-oriented
position. The concrete nature of advertise-
ments facilitated the collective understand-
ing of what the new brand really meant
in a language that nonmarketers could
readily grasp and act upon. Another key
milestone was a letter sent in the spring
of 2002 by the president of Canadian Tire
to the associate dealers, outlining and ex-
plaining the new market position and en-
closing a video (including a proposed
advertising) that illustrated the new
branding direction clearly. The associate
dealers were of course critical internal
stakeholders, so they could see that the
rebranding project had the support from
the highest level. Should the associate deal-
ers have been involved at an earlier stage?
There clearly was a danger of creating
chaos if too many versions of the new
CTR brand were rumored at the grassroots.

After the advertisements were launched,
there were other opportunities to con-
tinue to educate the dealers about the
new brand. For example, there were a
number of special committees that in-
cluded representatives from both the head
office and the associate dealers. There was
also an annual meeting of associate deal-
ers in September 2002 that continued to
highlight the new brand. Further, there
were specific marketing programs, such
as those designed to improve the “time to
market” of central policy changes. These
initiatives were seen as an integral part
of improving the “experiential” aspects
of the new brand direction. Allied to the
dealers being educated was a more ex-
plicit inclusion of employees into the Ca-
nadian Tire brand. Inclusion of employees
into the brand community has been suc-
cessfully done by organizations like Body
Shop and Wal-Mart. However, it is not as
straight forward in an organization like
Canadian Tire, where employees are em-
ployed by the associate dealer rather than
by the corporate office. Notwithstanding,
the company broadened its mindset so
that it reintroduced customer service
awards for high-performing front-end staff
and also included them in some advertise-
ments. Staff training also was strength-
ened through an e-learning platform.

Possibly the greater inclusiveness of
front-end employees could have come at
any time but may have been facilitated by
the need for a more consistent, inclusive
corporate “face” associated with the new
CTR brand. A final stakeholder (other than
the customer to be discussed in the phase
3 section) is that of vendors. Vendors in-
clude both suppliers of national brands as
well as those contracted to make CTR
retail brands. In October 2002 there was a
special conference in which the vendors
were briefed about the new brand and
the implications for suppliers and prod-
uct development. Vendors appreciated the
guidance to the future demands that would
be placed on them.

Phase 3: Strategic brand implementation
Launch. The official public launch of the
new (revitalized) brand came with the
spring 2002 television advertising cam-
paign. This was labeled “Let’s get started.”

The rationale of the campaign was the
repositioning of the company as the re-
tailer to help customers get started with a
new season, project, sport, or life event.
Related television advertising in the sum-
mer, fall, and Christmas seasons followed
the spring campaign. There were vari-
ations in the specifics of the advertise-
ments, but they were all linked to the
newly positioned corporate brand. The
linkages across the advertisements corre-
spond to an integrated marketing communi-
cation (IMC) strategy. IMC is a marketing
promotion tool recognized for its cost-
effectiveness, because it is able to get more
“impact (bang) for the buck,” partly from
reinforcement and synthesis between and
across media and partly from greater reach
(see Duncan, 2002; Low, 2000). In the case
at hand, the IMC was led by television ad-
vertising in each season but supported by
radio, magazines, and (later in November)
weekly flyers. IMC is usually discussed in
the academic literature in terms of product
brand campaigns, with less application to
corporate rebranding campaigns.

The sequencing of the media timing in
the case was important. Television adver-
sising was the lead medium, taking on
the weight of the campaign. Repetition
and modified repetition of the television
advertisements was important for getting
the new brand image across to consum-
ers. The other media supported, usually
with a gentle or subtle reminder of the
rebranding. Different media had different
roles, but all were linked to a common
purpose. Compared to purely product
branding IMC, corporate rebranding IMC
is more complex because multiple purposes
need to be co-managed. This point has not
previously been highlighted in the IMC
literature. Apart from the common pur-
pose of selling the new corporate brand,
there was also the particular purpose of
selling specific merchandise. At the begin-
ning of the campaign, with the television
advertising in particular, the former (brand-
ing) purpose was very dominant. Later,
and especially with the weekly flyers, the
latter (merchandising) purpose was dom-
inant. Thus all or most of the advertising
had to both sell the new brand and sell
specific merchandise.

A special case of comanagement of mul-
tiple purposes was the company’s demo-
mercials. Demo-mercials are 60-second
television advertisements that demon-
strate new products and represent a
hybrid between short television advertise-
ments and longer infomercials. Canadian
Tire had been innovative with demo-
Repetition and modified repetition of the television advertisements was important for getting the new brand image across to consumers.

...ercials over the previous two years, sufficiently so to motivate some of their competitors to follow suit. Demo-mercials were of special significance to Canadian Tire because the brand-selling and merchandise-selling purposes were about equal. “We are product; we can help you start your new project” is integral to the new corporate brand, but equally is aligned to selling specific merchandise. The new products in the demo-mercials were often new own-brand merchandise, designed for and made on behalf of the company, such as paint with tops that allow easy pouring. Additionally, the magazine advertising was also in the demo-mercinal format, reinforcing both the corporate brand and the merchandise. The comangement of brand selling and merchandise selling added complexity to the 2002 promotion campaign. However, it also added an opportunity. Multiple detailed messages across merchandise and across seasonal uses and other situation contexts added diverse applications to a consistent corporate branding message. Without this diversity of merchandise messages, the corporate message campaign might have become too repetitive and boring. The diversity of the merchandise messages required careful management, with regard to the different tempo, mood, and duration of each advertisement, as well as ensuring mental imprinting of the new corporate signature. The demo-mercials epitomized this approach to diversity.

Brand substance. Although advertising is important to communicating a new re-
branding position, it is also necessary to ensure that the new brand has substance. A new corporate brand has to be more than just a slogan. For the case at hand, the substantive underpinning for the rebranding was in terms of product and in-store experience.

Product dimensions. Appropriately Canadian Tire had a “flying start” to strengthen its product platform. For the year prior to the rebranding launch, it had been slightly extending the range of its own-label merchandise. This was in categories devoid of strong national brands, so the activity did not threaten its partnerships with the national brand manufacturers. Similarly the company had been strengthening the quality controls on its own-label product specifications. Also in the period preceding the launch, the company had initiated demo-mercials, as described in the phase 2 section. Demo-mercials continued into and through the launch phase. Such advertisements reinforced the company’s product strengths in the minds of customers. In sum, the company’s practices in product ranging, quality control, and demo-mercials proceeded from prelaunch to launch, continuing to build the product platform driver of the new brand position. The vendor’s conference in October 2002 was seen as a climax in this area.

Experiential dimension. In-store experience is a difficult branding component to manage for any organization. In the case of Canadian Tire, there was an added complexity, namely the reliance on execu-
tion through a diverse dealer network. One key element in creating a particular type of in-store experience is store design and to that end the retailer has introduced a new generation of store format, rolled out progressively from 2003. Notwithstanding, new store diffusion is a slow, long-term process. Priority in store reformatting was given to new stores and to major refurbishments, followed by the largest stores. A second element in creating a different in-store experience was the support given to and greater involvement of the staff. This matter was discussed in the phase 2 section and included customer service awards, e-learning platforms, and staff inclusion in television advertisements. A third element in creating a more positive in-store experience was the ready availability of merchandise as needed by customers, without excessive stockouts. New internal marketing programs have been put in place to deal with these issues. A fourth and equally important element is that the new brand should provide a spiritual force that united dealers and contributes to greater consistency across the network. This is what Bedbury (2002) calls brand alignment. Although subtle and intangible in nature, this new “masterbrand” (in the Upshaw and Taylor, 2000 sense or brand orientation in the Urde, 1999 sense) is more of a “visible hand” rather than an “invisible hand” in the Adam Smith sense of a market. The more the dealers and their staff treat the brand as a “living script” (in the Macrae, 1996 sense of brand chartering) then the stronger the brand will be.

On September 27, 2002 the president of Canadian Tire Retail, Mark Foote, gave a public luncheon presentation on his company’s rebranding strategy (see Foote, 2002). The audience included CTR staff, vendors to the company, the advertising agency, other retailers, the general public, and the author of this article. The presen-
tation can be interpreted as an explanation of the new rebranding strategy to a wider set of stakeholders. The presentation outlined the objectives of greater growth and more alignment. He emphasized the need for strategy to be results driven, incorporating culture, understanding that people buy stores not product, being clearly differentiated from your competitors, and drawing upon the capabilities of the company. The new Canadian Tire position was based on product as a dominant factor and in-store experience as a differentiating factor.

**INSIGHTS TO REBRANDING STRATEGY FROM PREVIOUS WORKS AND FROM THE CASE STUDY**

What insights would have been forthcoming from existing approaches to rebranding, and what new insights come from the new framework? The Figure 1 baseline work by Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986) provides a useful prediction that brand repositioning might arise in the case of Canadian Tire because of lifecycle reasons, namely maturity and competition. The emphasis of this perspective, reinforced by Aaker and Keller, would be on consumer brand associations of the company. The new Canadian Tire position was based on product as a dominant factor and in-store experience as a differentiating factor.

**LESSONS LEARNED: EVOLVING OUR KNOWLEDGE OF REBRANDING**

It is convenient to cluster the lessons in terms of the three components of the conceptual model, namely the front end (brand vision), the middle (brand orientation), and the end (brand strategy implementation). We also reflect on the lessons for the new brand vision-orientation-strategy implementation framework of rebranding, as well as the six-stage McEnally and de Chernatony (1999) model of brand evolution.

**The fuzzy front end (brand vision)**

Bob Cooper and others in the new-product development (NPD) field refer to the fuzzy front-end nature of NPD. That is, the role of the consumer is an uncertain, complex, and variable component that needs to be addressed at the front end of NPD, but often handled well only in the better companies. The same might be said for new brand development because in many ways it is a cousin of NPD.

For product brands it is a very close cousin, but even for multidimensional corporate brands it is still closely related. The case study highlights the importance of the creative process that clarifies and builds the brand vision. The approach at Canadian Tire combined both intuition and systematic qualitative research in a way that provided genuinely new insight into the nature and needs of their customers. It was not a “cookie cutter” quantitative market research project that was weighted toward the status quo of the brand. Instead there was a serious attempt to free thinking and reshape the nature of the brand.

Notwithstanding the transformation in the brand, there are limits in any rebranding design. In particular, although the core brand is being redesigned, the new formulation should ideally be sympathetic to the essence of the initial brand. That is, although it is necessary from time to time to radically update brands, the new variation of the brand must remain true to the initial brand. A commonly cited example of a brand that went too far was the...
Radical brand evolution framework

The reality test (brand strategy implementation)
The sharpest part of the execution for Canadian Tire was that of advertising, starting with the spring 2002 launch of the new brand and carrying through with the complete campaign over the next two seasons. In part the sharpness of the advertising campaign was closely associated with an IMC framework; that is, the campaign was tightly linked across advertisements not only in the same medium but also across media. This was particularly evident when the author viewed the total package of television advertisements in a single viewing and then compared that with magazine and other advertisements. Of course, when the theme of an IMC is a rebranding launch, there are much greater demands on the design of such a campaign, in particular the co-management of brand selling and merchandise selling. Substance needs to accompany communication, because the success of a retail corporate rebranding strategy depends on real people having real in-store experiences to buy real products for real activities. Further endorsement came from the multitude of “fan mail” from customers following the advertisements, appreciative of the changes. Evidence of the medium-term evaluation of the brand program is given below.

Implications for the brand vision

Goodyear Model

It is not possible to comprehensively test the Goodyear model with a single case study. Nonetheless, we were able to discern a situation of radical brand evolution with one company moving from one stage to the next stage. Specifically, we interpret the brand evolution in the Canadian Tire case as moving from brand as icon to brand as company. The former brand was strongly influenced by history and the special place the brand has in the Canadian community. That basis remains but is extended with the rebranding effort to a more relationship-orientated approach to branding. Relationships cover internal ones in particular, but also those with other stakeholders including vendors and customers. Thus our case study supports (is consistent with) the six-stage model in the sense that it is useful for interpreting the observed and planned brand evolution of a particular retailer. We are not suggesting that radical brand evolution necessarily requires movement to a higher stage in the six-stage framework.

Implications for the brand vision → brand orientation → brand strategy implementation framework

We emphasize that the “new” theory is not exactly new in that the three key constructs already exist in the literature. The novel aspect of the theory is the explicit inclusion of all three constructs into a single framework. It would be a rash statement to say that a new theory could be devised and tested from a single case study. That is not our claim, except to say that the Vision → Orientation → Strategy Implementation framework looks promising. At minimum the new theory has been helpful in organizing, synthesizing, and interpreting the myriad of rebranding decisions at a particular company. This of course is the role of theory, so we can say that the evidence from this particular case study is consistent with the new framework. Thus each of the three headings provided by the framework for each of the three constructs has facilitated our understanding of each step and alerted us to possible generalizations that may apply in each component. For example, we now have a new proposition about the
need to link customer research with a small set of management-directed options for the new brand identity. Like all good theories, it is also true that the whole is greater than the parts. That is to say, the linkages between the three components are critical and make a crucial difference to the success of the rebranding investment. All three components might be viewed as more or less of equal importance. In this respect, we can highlight the role of brand orientation because its role has often been omitted in most illustrations of brand evolution or treated in an explicit, but narrow way.

In short, the three components of vision, orientation, and strategy implementation offer a practical tool for companies to upgrade or revolutionize their brands. These three components or steps require different cognitive and relational capabilities. The first step requires clever creative skills that integrate consumer research with management intuition. The second step requires more sensitive and interactive negotiation and presentational skills. The third step demands attention to the details, particularly but not exclusively in the new brand’s advertising campaign. It is critical to leverage from one step to the next. Referring to Figure 1, it is clear that the new framework provides insights not fully forthcoming with the existing paradigms of brand evolution.

**EVALUATION OF THE CANADIAN TIRE REBRANDING STRATEGY**

In the three years since the new brand was launched, support has continued.Indeed, the Canadian Tire executives have embraced the rebranding program. Post-launch, a number of cross-functional workshops have been conducted across the company to introduce the new strategy, including with employees to help them in their current roles. New format stores have been progressively introduced, allowing more space to showcase products with high-impact merchandise and emphasize brand positioning, such as the start of a new season. Customer surveys suggest increased ratings in “great selection of new and different products” and “has great events that make you want to visit the store.” Thus the internal evaluation of the new brand program is very supportive. In terms of external metrics, sales have grown about 4 percent per annum, with profits growing at a higher rate. These financials can be considered as very satisfactory given the increased competition and slowdown in consumer demand. The share price has doubled to $60, also indicating success of the branding program. Both internal and external metrics are positive. Although the results are not startling, they are significant for building motivation throughout the company and for insuring that the company will survive the highly competitive environment and not be a casualty like previous major retailer rivals Kmart and Eaton’s. There is scope for the company to make further gains on brand orientation and brand strategy implementation.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The study highlights the notion of brand evolution as a key part of business strategy, which says that all companies should factor in the necessity to change the brand from time to time, but do so in a purposeful way. Brands can evolve in different ways, either by changing the core brand or through some type of brand extension. The current article emphasizes radical changes in the core brand so that we can better understand the essential elements of what is involved with such a change. Oddly, radical brand evolution has not received a lot of attention by academics, but the six-stage model of Goodyear has been used as a helpful starting framework. Supplementing this framework is a new framework, namely the brand vision → brand orientation → brand strategy implementation rebranding model.

Both of these frameworks have been put to the test in a single case study of a major Canadian retailer, namely Canadian Tire. The six-stage model is partially supported in the sense that it helps explain the upward shift in the Canadian Tire brand concept from “brand as icon” to “brand as company.” The new three-step model of brand vision-orientation-strategy implementation also proved helpful in synthesizing the process of brand evolution, ranging from brand concept design to internal stakeholder negotiations to the rebranding launch in the market place.

Together the two frameworks provide a practical platform for any company wishing to undertake a radical brand evolution, such that it becomes a step-by-step process. At the same time, the study highlights the special complexities and issues that are associated with each of the three major steps. The fuzzy front end requires the integration of management intuition with new creative consumer research. The reflective middle requires a delicate balancing of and negotiating with the interests, benefits, and costs to key internal stakeholders. Finally, the execution phase demands the best of integrated marketing communications that need to integrate corporate image and specific product offers, and ensuring that substance underpins the new brand.

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