

# Rebranding my own small business

*I've helped other businesses do it for years. Now it was my turn.*

By Dan Antonelli, President and Chief Creative Officer, KickCharge Creative

In the 22 years since I founded Graphic D-Signs, I've helped rebrand more than 1,000 small businesses around the globe. I've always understood why it's a decision that business owners don't take lightly. But now, I have an even greater appreciation for my clients' struggles, excitement and challenges—because I just experienced it myself. Here's what it was like for me to walk in my clients' shoes while I rebranded my own agency.

**Humble beginnings** In May 1995, I walked into a New Jersey courthouse and registered my business as a sole proprietor. I was young and still had a “day job” as a graphic designer in New York City. Like most entrepreneurs, I was full of ambition and energized about the possibilities.

I settled on the name Graphic D-Signs. I thought it was a clever play on words: My new company would create signs (mainly truck lettering) and do graphic design work. Two

years later, I incorporated the business and went full-time.

At first, many folks didn't really “get” the name or know how to pronounce it—let alone spell it. But, the name stuck. Thinking back now, on a deeper level I never really was proud to say, “I'm the owner of Graphic D-Signs...” As time went on, I become less and less enthused about it, but on the other hand, it didn't seem to be affecting the growth of the company.

**“Good enough” seldom is** I was like many clients to whom I recommend a rebrand for their business: I was afraid of change. Even worse, I was too complacent.

As someone who lives and breathes by the notion that nothing our company does today is good enough for tomorrow, I should have given more careful consideration to the challenges inherent in our name. I preach all the time the notion that success in spite of a poor brand is not a valid reason to perpetuate it. I literally have a 5-foot sign in our office engraved with that very saying.

Employees told me we should change our name. Even clients who love our work have said our name and brand are not reflective of the quality of our services and the vibe that makes us who we are. So, why should I ignore my own advice and the feedback from everyone else?

One of the single most critical things I preach to clients is the notion of never being satisfied. Yet, I was afraid to change what was working for us. There are hundreds of ways to rationalize sticking with the status quo. I say in *Building a Big Small Business Brand* [available at [www.signcraft.com](http://www.signcraft.com)] that old brands are like a warm blanket to their owners. That's right. And here I was: a textbook case.

But once the rebranding seed was planted in my head, it wasn't hard for me to accept that our agency's name doesn't fit us anymore and doesn't even remotely represent what we do. We are not a sign company at all, and we're not a graphic design company—so why



The lobby sign was fabricated and installed by crew at DGI Creative [[www.dgicreative.com](http://www.dgicreative.com)]. Roger Cox [[www.houseofsignsco.com](http://www.houseofsignsco.com)] and I worked together on the design for exterior sign. Both of these companies took rough sketches of mine and made them into something special. It was important to recognize that these guys were the experts here and to let them do their thing.

are we called Graphic D-Signs? At our core, we are a creative agency that builds brands and supports small business marketing, in both print and online. Despite all of this, I still wasn't committed to making a change.

**A building, a new beginning** For seven years, I drove past a piece of vacant land on my daily commute to the office. In my head I visualized our growing agency, one day, building a new office on that property. A couple of years ago, the plans fell into place to make that dream a reality. That's when I decided it would represent a new beginning for us—a new chapter in our agency's story. Finally, the time had arrived to adopt a name and brand that truly represents us, our culture and what we stand for.

When I announced to my team that we would be changing the name of the business, everyone was on board. Many had been advocating it for a while. But what would the new name be? Hey, we help clients figure that out all the time. It wouldn't be too hard, right?

Wrong. It was certainly challenging, I think because it's so close and personal, and I've known us as Graphic D-Signs for 22 years.

**Embracing our identity** A defining characteristic of our agency is our energy and enthusiasm. We're excited about our clients' successes and helping them grow and prosper. There's a certain energy in how we go about our work. Often, while we're working on a client's brand, we're more excited about it than they are. My anxiety during in this experience has helped me better understand why business owners aren't always giddy about rebranding.

And so, we began brainstorming names that connote our energetic, enthusiastic "roll up our sleeves and kick ass" mentality. After several weeks of pitching ideas, voting, debating the pros and cons, and lamenting the lack of available domain names, I chose KickCharge Creative.

As soon as I said the name aloud and then typed it out, I knew it was us. More importantly, I knew it would connect with our customers, who largely operate service-related businesses.

We trademarked the name and we are owning it (literally and figuratively). We love that it can be a verb or adjective, too: Get your brand KickCharged—KickCharge your marketing.

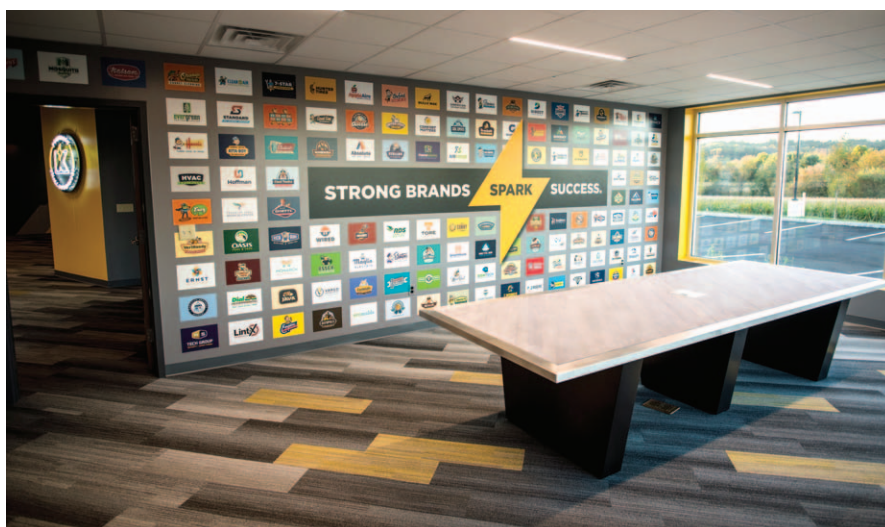
Like every brand we create, we needed to consider all the applications of the new logo—from the sign on the new building, to the web site and everything in between, including all of our marketing materials, as well.



Although it's hard to see in this photo, the background of the wall graphic includes copy that our entire team wrote out—saying what KickCharge means to them.



Our break room/kitchen, with a custom wall wrap our illustrator, Jeffrey Devey, designed. It not brick, but sure looks like it! We tried to imagine our new brand as it might have been 50 years ago.



For our conference room, I wanted clients to really get a sense of how important brands were to our central philosophy.



This is the team that makes up the foundation of the building they stand in front of. I couldn't have done it without them. Missing is Jeffrey Devey, our illustrator, who's been with me for over 10 years. The building is literally surrounded by cornfields, which creates a unique juxtaposition.



**Energized to move forward** Once our new name was decided and our logo was finished, all of us couldn't wait to NOT be Graphic D-Signs. It took a lot of time and effort to put all of the pieces together to be ready to launch, but despite the work it required, it has instilled a new energy in our agency. The team is excited to tell their friends and family, "I work at KickCharge Creative," and they look forward to moving into our new office, a custom-designed space that's been built just for us. And now, I'm finally proud to say, "I'm the president of KickCharge Creative."

This is an exciting time for this little agency of mine. From the humble beginnings in my basement with one employee, to the nearly 20 rock stars we've assembled, I take to heart the one lesson I had ignored for far too long: Nothing we do today is good enough for tomorrow. We will never stop providing the absolute best service and solutions for our clients, and helping them KickCharge their businesses with *Powerful Marketing Solutions*.

Having lived with the new brand for almost 3 months now, the response has been overwhelmingly positive, leaving me with the question: Why didn't I do this sooner? All I can say is, if your name isn't who you are at the heart, then consider choosing a new name that is YOU. **SC**



Our lobby features a custom desk. The use of angles through the space and in the flooring was meant to work in harmony with the angles in our new brand.



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