

Rebranding

NEW NAME, SAME MISSION

Rebranding helps publishers reach new readers, keep loyal ones

BY HENRY L. CARRIGAN JR.

With a steady erosion of traditional audiences and the rise of new markets, as well as the growth in electronic publishing and self-publishing, some religion publishers have decided to refresh or reimagine their brands. In some cases, that means a more up-to-date name, in others a return to a historic identity.

Some rebranding seeks to more effectively reflect the expanded range of a company's books and formats; in others, the focus is narrowed to create a more distinct identity. Some rebranding has the goal of creating a "stickier" image, bringing in a name or word that speaks more powerfully to the consumer. Sometimes rebranding is about distancing a company from an outmoded or no-longer-desired identity. Whatever the goal, several religion houses have recently launched major rebranding campaigns.

Reaching Beyond the Pews

According to Heidi Toboni, president of HeLT Consulting, which focuses on branding, profound changes in traditional religion publishing—and in religions themselves—have prompted companies to rebrand. Many of these publishers started out as ministry organizations that added publishing to serve a specific audience. As they sought broader readerships, they discovered that consumers outside their denomination or faith tradition did not recognize them or have a clear idea of what they did.

The age base of the audiences also began to change, and religion publishers sought to reach younger customers, whose reading and buying habits differed from the older customer base. "The mission of the company doesn't change, but the way you present yourself changes, and this is where brand research really helps," says Toboni, adding that rebranding is crucial because a strong, focused brand increases customer awareness, differentiation in the marketplace, perceived quality, and a customer's likelihood to select and stay loyal to a company or product.

A New Mantle for an Old Company

In 2009, St. Anthony Messenger Press began strategic changes to clarify and strengthen its brand. According to Barbara Baker, division director of marketing, sales, and Internet, "We realized that our name was our biggest obstacle. We are really a media company, but our name identified us as a book publisher only." St. Anthony Messenger Press hired Toboni to lead the company through a rebranding process that would help it identify ways to respond more effectively to customer needs and compete more successfully in the market. Online surveys of customers and consumers clarified how the company needed to change its brand strategy to reflect its strategic advantages. "The feedback we received was incredibly freeing," says Baker.

SAMP renamed itself Franciscan Media and launched the new brand in October 2011. According to Baker and Toboni, the decision to rebrand was based on significant shifts in the religious literacy of the target market—the words and sym-

bols used to present the company were now confusing at best and a hindrance at worst. The company also had grown beyond its previous identity, which had focused on an older sub-brand that is now one of many sub-brands. The company's leadership wanted to position the organization for stronger growth, and the old name was cumbersome, potentially confusing, and lacked sticking power in the consumer's mind. Finally, it failed to convey the organization's central role as the largest English-language Franciscan communications company in the world. "We found," says Baker, "that St. Francis is more widely known than St. Anthony. His name and identity resonate with a younger and broader audience. There's a certain way we can own a name that has a positive impact for Christians and non-Christians."

Baker says that the rebranding has "freed us to look at new products and helped us define ourselves better as we service our accounts."

Franciscan Media operates a national magazine (*St. Anthony Messenger*, with a subscriber base of more than 180,000), two book imprints—St. Anthony Messenger and Servant Books—one of the Internet's most visited Catholic Web sites, a syndicated radio program, a parish-resources division, and an e-card business. It also produces audiobooks, videos,

apps, and other digital resources, and as part of the rebranding, Franciscan Media launched a new online video streaming product, *Catholic Update on Demand*. "The rebranding helped us address our core principles—love, live, and grow in faith—as we develop and begin to focus on our customers and their needs," concludes Baker.



Rebranding

Using Name Recognition

Charisma Media is the new name for the company known for the past 30 years as Strang Communications. The February 2011 debut of the new brand reflected changes within the company, including relaunching *Charisma* magazine and renaming the company's book division to Charisma House.

Founder and CEO Steven Strang started *Charisma* magazine in 1975; it grew so rapidly that in six years he founded the company now called Charisma Media, which publishes charismatic/Pentecostal content. "*Charisma* is our strongest brand," Strang says. "It refers not only to spiritual gifts but also to our calling and passion to serve God and the church. *Media* signifies the diversified ways we can communicate—not only in print through magazines and books."

While Charisma Media is best known for its magazines—*Charisma*, *Ministry Today*, and *Christian Retailing*—it is moving into digital products that include a free Charisma News app, e-books, e-newsletters, a robust Web site, and digital editions of its magazines that have readership in the top tier of digital magazines nationally.

Reflecting a Broader List

In 2007, Harper San Francisco became HarperOne in conjunction with the company's 30th anniversary; the decision to rebrand the HarperCollins division had been made a year earlier. "We made the decision because our publishing program is not derived from our San Francisco location nor based on West Coast or regional books," says Claudia Riemer Boutote, HarperOne's senior v-p and associate publisher. "Since HarperOne's publishing program is focused on topics and authors that are part of the larger national conversation, we felt that removing the location from our brand name would make our focus clear."

The rebranding helped HarperOne re-examine "our core categories of religion, spirituality, health, wellness, business, and personal growth, to acquire more titles in these arenas and build new pro-

grams that we call Healthy Living, and Business +," according to Boutote. The change was embraced by all the brand's constituents, she says, and "the 61 *New York Times* bestsellers in the past seven years indicate that our brand name and our business focus are aligning and thriving. We think we have retained the great equity and reputation for quality that our 30-year-old brand had with industry, booksellers, authors, and consumers."

A Historic Name Revived

For many years, Doubleday Religion published well-regarded books reaching across many audience segments, from evangelical Christian to Catholic to mind-body-spirit. Doubleday's Anchor Bible and its Anchor Bible Reference series garnered high praise from biblical scholars. Five years ago, Doubleday sold its Anchor Bible to Yale University Press, and about a year and a half ago, in the wake of a reorganization at Random House, the Doubleday Religion imprint was eliminated and Image Books became the imprint focused on Catholic books. (Random also has the WaterBrook/Multnomah evangelical Christian division based in Colorado Springs, Colo., and it publishes many of its mind-body-spirit books under the Harmony imprint.)

The 50-year-old Image imprint is well known to Catholic readers, and according to Carie Freimuth, v-p, associate publisher, of Image Books, "We saw an opportunity to more effectively match our books and authors with their readers by focusing our efforts on the Catholic publishing that has long been a hallmark of the Doubleday Religion line. We have now broadened the [Image] brand to apply to our publishing to this audience regardless of format." Image intends to reach a broader Catholic audience through this launch. "We hope to continue to contribute to the dialogue within the Catholic community and between the Catholic discipline and the

broader culture," Freimuth says. She adds that Image's editorial staff is invested in the full Catholic space, from conservative to liberal, and the marketing staff is working on better ways to serve Catholic authors and readers.

Defining Twin Missions

In 2005, Saint Mary's Press launched its SMP College Division to create a line of books for use in Catholic higher education, especially introductory texts in religion, theology, and ethics. SMP discovered that college teachers confronted broad religious diversity among their students, and they could not presume

any foundations in faith in students. Because SMP was well-known as a publisher of high school and catechetical texts, that identity diminished its ability to reach the college market. President and CEO John Vitek and his staff discussed rebranding the college division. "We wanted to

refocus our mission to provide clarity in critical thinking skills and to deliver content that was accessible, engaging, and relevant. We wanted our books to be written by the teaching scholar for teaching scholars," both Catholic and Protestant.

In September 2009, Saint Mary's Press launched Anselm Academic, and the rebranding was a turning point. "Almost immediately we started getting [classroom] adoptions," says Vitek. The rebranding, Vitek points out, now offers the new imprint more flexibility in developing books, attracting authors, and reaching diverse audiences. "We're reaching our audience better, and both our domestic and international sales continue to grow steadily."

In the ever-changing world of religion publishing, these publishers are actively seeking increased awareness of their name brand and differentiation from other publishers in the category, hoping that strong name recognition for a specific product will result in customer loyalty and marketplace success. ■



John Vitek