

The right time to update your concept?

By Yuri Bolotin, Principal, Design Portfolio Pty Ltd



Your store needs to be designed to support frequent and inexpensive change.



The amount of change required is proportional to the time elapsed since the last store update.

I have written many articles in the past about creating a new concept for your store and how it can dramatically improve the performance of your business. The question I am often asked that is related to this matter is how long will the new concept last, until a new series of changes must be introduced? Or to put it another way, when will be the right time to start thinking about updating the new concept?

The answer actually is – the time to start thinking about updating your new concept is the day when your new store opens its doors! I know this might sound surprising, so let me explain.

You see, it is about the difference between the Big Bang and the continuous improvement approaches.

The Big Bang approach is that you open the new concept store and then do nothing with it for as long as you possible can. When you have multiple stores, it means just plonking the same concept in each location.

I believe there are a few problems with this method. Firstly, when you update your store, your competition will soon try to do the same and at least match you, so your concept will quickly lose its leading competitive edge in the market. Secondly, when after 6, 8 or 10 years of doing nothing, you will finally realise you've got to change your concept, you will be so far behind that the changes will need to be extensive, and often you would have to start from scratch. In this case most if not all of your previous investment in building the concept and the

brand will be lost.

A much more intelligent approach in my opinion is the second one – of continuous improvement. To start with, this requires a change of mindset. You see, you must recognise that there are constant changes in customer profiles and preferences, products and services offered by you, competitive climate, retail and brand design techniques, available materials and finishes, print and screen mediums. These changes are more rapid now than ever before, and will only accelerate in the future. The opening of a new concept store is only the first (albeit very significant) step in a process of continuous improvement.

With this approach in mind, your new store needs to be designed to support change, frequently and inexpensively. If you have multiple outlets, then each time you open a new store or refurbish an existing one, the concept must be re-evaluated and adjusted, based on the factors mentioned above, as well as on the trading figures and operational feedback from previous concept stores, and the unique characteristics of the new site.

What is the amount of change necessary? It is usually proportional to the amount of time that has elapsed since the last change. When we are in a new store roll out process with a client, which sees multiple stores done every year, normally only a small amount of improvements from the previous store is necessary. With clients who have single stores, but are working

with us continuously, we might implement a small change each year (like a new graphic or a new product area or a promotional brochure). If several years have passed since the concept was last updated, the amount of change required will be bigger, but in all cases the investment in the original brand is being retained and strengthened rather than lost (like in the Big Bang approach).

I will illustrate the above points with two recent projects – Red Apple Chemist and Healthpoint Chemist. These are successful concepts designed by us in the past. In both cases, several years have gone since the last change, so updates had to be quite substantial, but certainly we were able to evolve the brands rather than start from scratch.

Here are some areas we needed to revise:

1. Products & services

Doing new stores was an ideal opportunity to re-examine existing product and services range. Several product areas were dramatically expanded, whilst many others were dropped altogether. The placement of different areas has also been re-evaluated. New services were introduced that required additional facilities to be designed in the store.

2. Logos

In order to maintain the contemporary edge so important for a pharmacy, the typefaces, the icons and logo colours were all modernised, whilst ensuring that the character of the original

logos and the brand recognition was being retained.

3. Interior design

Interior colours were updated, in line with the logos, and to take advantage of new cost effective materials and finishes that are available today. More efficient lighting was used throughout, and feature lights have been introduced.

4. Signage & graphics

This area was changed quite substantially, to reflect the updated identities and to take advantage of the significant past advances in sign making and print media. Essentially, a lot more impact and effect can be achieved now in graphics, compared with several years ago, for the same or lesser amount of investment.

5. Identity items

The identity items suite was updated, reflecting the updated logos.

6. Pharmacy operations

In this area the changes surprisingly were minor. This may be because in both cases initially we had spent a lot of time with the clients, finetuning the operational flows.

If you have recently opened a new concept store, the best time to start changing it is now!