

Is It Time For Microsoft To Rebrand?

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The [announcement](#) of [Microsoft's MSFT -0.05%](#) plans to acquire [LinkedIn LNKD -0.02%](#) lead me to wonder, is it time for Microsoft to rebrand? The acquisition is the latest evidence that Microsoft is moving beyond its brand history and that the Microsoft brand name may have outlasted its value.

It's a crazy idea, I know. Forbes just valued the Microsoft brand at \$75.2 billion, the third most valuable in the world. It enjoys one of the highest brand awareness levels globally. Chief Marketing Officer Chris Capossela has said that Microsoft is the strongest brand in the company's portfolio of brands, including Office and Windows. It would make no sense to squander all that brand equity.

But I'm not suggesting that the Microsoft brand go away completely. It does seem, though, that its role should change. Instead of serving as the corporate moniker and the lead brand for the company, Microsoft could be used as a product or category brand and a business unit name. Just as [Google's GOOGL -0.22%](#) leaders adopted [Alphabet](#) as the parent company name and transitioned the Google brand away from entities "far afield" from its main Internet products, perhaps it's time for Nadella to limit the use of the Microsoft and adopt a new name for his company.

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In fact, the Google/Alphabet transition makes a good case for rebranding Microsoft. While LinkedIn will not operate as a separate company from Microsoft as Google does from Alphabet, it will "retain its distinct brand and independence," Nadella explained. And the company took a similar hands-off approach when it acquired Skype. So it's safe to bet that it will continue to add additional independent units.

Moreover these additions will likely be further and further outside Microsoft's historical footprint. Nadella has stated plans to grow the company through cloud computing, security, data, and analytics. The Microsoft brand has little equity in these areas and could hold back internal culture and external perceptions, the way Google might have for Alphabet's health-related businesses.

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In fact the Microsoft brand could be barrier to achieving the company's new mission which Nadella rolled out last year — "To empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more." Microsoft's brand essence is more tied to productivity than empowerment and negative perceptions of Microsoft being monopolistic, institutional, and conservative don't align with such an uplifting and progressive spirit. The company's own usage of the Microsoft name, or lack thereof, suggests it is a liability. Office doesn't use Microsoft in its URL or its messaging; the Windows brand has been elevated to a driver role; Microsoft doesn't appear on Surface hardware.

Despite substantive changes in the company's operations, products, and overall strategy, it still isn't perceived as innovative and exciting as it should be. Customers, employees, investors, and partners need to believe in a company's mission in order for it to be viable, but I suspect Microsoft hasn't achieved this yet.

In a word the Microsoft brand is old. If Nadella wants to signal clearly that it's a new day in Redmond — and the LinkedIn acquisition certainly supports this intention — then, perhaps it is time for the company to rebrand. Let Microsoft designate the products that most benefit from the brand association, but unshackle the rest of the company from the ties that confine it and signal its full potential with a new name.

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