

SmartBlog on Restaurants » So you want to try a new concept?

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Denise Lee Yohn has been inspiring and teaching companies how to operationalize their brands and grow their businesses for more than 20 years. World-class brands such as [Sony](#), [Frito-Lay](#), [Burger King](#) and [Jack in the Box](#) have engaged Yohn, an established speaker, author and consultant. Read more by Yohn at www.deniseleeyohn.com.

Are you considering jumping on the new concept bandwagon? Perhaps food-cost increases and consumers' changing value expectations are causing you to think about going up or down market. Or perhaps new real-estate options seem ripe for a new store format. Or perhaps you've realized that your existing concept's growth potential is limited in today's current saturated markets.

A new concept can indeed stimulate new growth. It can add excitement to a sluggish business and generate a new revenue stream. But it also requires an extensive investment of people, money and systems. Make sure you're getting all the growth out of your existing concept first.

If a new concept still makes sense, start with a test.

Strategy. Carefully evaluate your options before jumping to the most obvious.

- A **rework** on your existing concept (Starbucks' more locally-themed concept, 15th Avenue Coffee and Tea)
- A **new format** (Subway Café and IHOP Express)
- A **co-brand concept** (UFood Grill just announced a new co-brand concept with Euro Café)
- An **entirely new concept** (Chipotle's ShopHouse Kitchen)

The best option depends on your target audience and how much equity you want to try to borrow from your existing concept. Do you want more or different occasions from your existing customer base, or are you trying to reach new customers who may not be attracted to your existing offering? Are you trying to reposition or grow your current brand by delivering a similar brand meaning and communicating a similar brand personality in a new format or with a new menu, or are you interested in creating an entirely new and different concept?

Also take a close look at your existing resources. Some strategies require more new skill sets, staff and systems than others. How much change are you willing to invest in?

Brand Identity. Once you've defined your strategic intent, you'll want to select a brand name and logo that supports it. If you're testing a modified concept and your existing brand has strong equity and elasticity, highlight the ties between the two concepts. You can simply add a modifier to your existing name and logo, as in Chili's To Go or Steak 'n Shake Signature. This approach conveys a strong tie to the existing concept — and banks on it for success.

For a looser tie between concepts, consider using your existing brand as an endorser brand, as the Marriott hotel company does with its chain Courtyard by Marriott. This allows you to draft off the awareness and trust of your existing brand, while highlighting the differences between the two concepts.

Creating a new name and brand identity might be the best approach if you want to break from the past and try something entirely new. Just remember, seeding a new brand takes far more time and advertising and promotional dollars than extending an existing one.

Learning. It's important to remember this is a test — so hope for success but design for failure. That is, design the test so you can fail cheaply and quickly. Figure out the core elements of the new concept and build your test around those first. You can always expand and enhance the concept if it proves to be a hit.

Borrow a page from the world of technology and consider doing a beta launch. Invite friends, family, and if appropriate, customers from your existing concept to visit your new store on a test basis. Plan for a period of

learning and making changes before you invite the public and do a grand opening. This will allow you to figure out what works and what doesn't so you can work out the kinks before you jeopardize your brand by providing bad customer experiences.