



Vodafone and Airtel logo

CORPORATE LOGOS



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This article examines the changes to the Airtel logo and the ensuing fallout.

Airtel, now; has a new identity, complete with a drastically changed new logo and, for the first time, a separate symbol. A new television campaign, shot in Prague with models fresh out of acting school, is on air; its international look and feel is unmistakable. The old Airtel logo has more or less been replaced at all shops and billboards in the country, television shows, cricket fields et al.

Airtel has established itself as one of the



Old Logo



New Logo

world leaders in mobile telephony. It offers services in 19 Asian and African countries where, truthfully speaking, it has not yet reached leadership status though it's on that path. Through their current rebranding and repositioning exercise, with a budget of Rs 300 Crore, they aim to achieve international appeal and high brand recall not just with customers in India but across the world.

Airtel's previous logo was one of the

most recognized logos in our country. Every person, be it an illiterate or a CEO, recognised the Airtel logo. One of the reasons the Airtel name reached generic brand status was its easily identifiable logo.

According to Kapoor, CEO of Bharti Airtel, the new symbol, is an interpretation of the A in Airtel and shows the company's willingness to embrace anything new. The curve with the red highlights makes it more inviting and warm. It looks like a living object and represents the dynamic force that exists in our lives.

The Airtel logo is now in lower case, which is an attempt to show the humility that is required in a service brand. And the red colour is part of their heritage, not only because it is auspicious in the Indian environment, but also because it's truly vibrant and has played a role in their success thus far.

How They Did It

Earlier in the year, Bharti Airtel called for a pitch from the world's top brand specialists. Four of them made elaborate presentations. Finally, Bharti Airtel selected Brand Union. The company was no stranger to Brand

DR RAVI RAO SPEAK



The top two telecom service providers, Vodafone and Airtel, have had their bouts of logo changes, but for different reasons and perhaps with different results. Earlier, I had emphasized the dominance of the colours red and blue in the telecom sector and here, we see this feature in full play.

The changes in the Vodafone logo were occasioned by takeovers. We had Cellforce which became Hutch! And now is Vodafone Essar, each ownership change engineering successive changes in the company logo. Here, the logo changes were compulsory and part of a massive exercise to assert the new name and management.

The Airtel logo, on the other hand, was the epitome of "enhanced connectivity" that had a super combination of balance and harmony using the colours Red, White and Black to the maximum effect. What has made them tinker with this marvellous design remains a mystery. Maybe they were spooked by logo changes in the market and felt they had to follow suit. May be impending issues like number portability or the introduction of 3G in India drove them to make changes in the logo. Or it could even be introduction of new players like Uninor, Aircel and Tata Docomo.

Further, the current makeover exercise is a poor attempt by Airtel to target the international audience at the cost of its Indian customers. In an attempt to please the international audience, they have forgotten about their home country itself!

My own take on the new Airtel logo is that firstly it has destroyed all the power and consumer 'connect' that was associated with its earlier logo. The font used for the letter 'a' is too esoteric and small. In fact, it has not received positive feedback from market circles either.

I think that with this new logo Airtel has married trouble. The brilliant use of red colour is its only saving grace. In African as well as other markets you see that companies have used blue, purple or green as important telecom colours and have miserably failed. The red colour will definitely help them out in a big way but this help will not be sufficient and the company will have to work twice as much, or even more to retain its current market share eventually burdening cash resources and having negative impact on the balance sheet.



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Union, the two had worked together on some projects since 2005. In mid-April, Brand Union, for the first time, met the five-member Bharti Airtel Brand Council led by Kapoor. The agency was given the makeover brief but with the caveat that the red colour should be retained.

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The World’s Most Valuable Brands as identified by Forbes Magazine.

	
 Microsoft®	 CISCO
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	 ORACLE®
	 LOUIS VUITTON
	
 NOKIA Connecting People	 Disney



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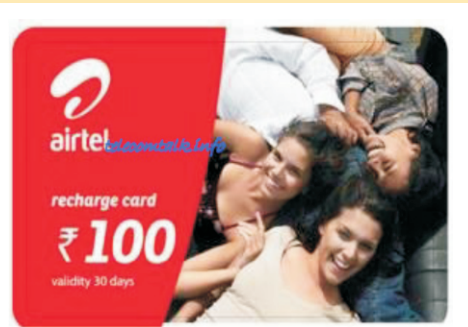
Trade circles have seen the makeover exercise as a poor attempt by Airtel to target the international audience at the cost of its Indian customers. In an attempt to please the international audience, they have forgotten about their home country itself!

The next task was to find a symbol — an element that Airtel lacked. “We were looking for one that was young, dynamic and warm. We wanted an identity beyond the way Airtel was written. The earlier logo was slightly older,” says Beotra of Brand Union. The task wasn’t easy; in its attempt to connect with the youth, it could not afford to alienate others. The logo and the brand had to be inclusive.

“We got huge inspiration from the name Airtel. We played a lot with the thought of air and bubbles, openness, though in the end we got to something that we call the air-curve — it is abstract,” says Bolton.

Brand Union presented close to a hundred symbols to the Bharti Airtel Brand Council. Two were short listed and shown to Mittal who selected the one in use. For further validation, a large set of customers was shown the two symbols. “We were hoping they would select the one we are using, and that’s what they did,” says Beotra

(This article is based partly on research materials available on the net and also on interviews with players from the advertising and media publicity spheres) ■



The New Airtel Recharge Cards