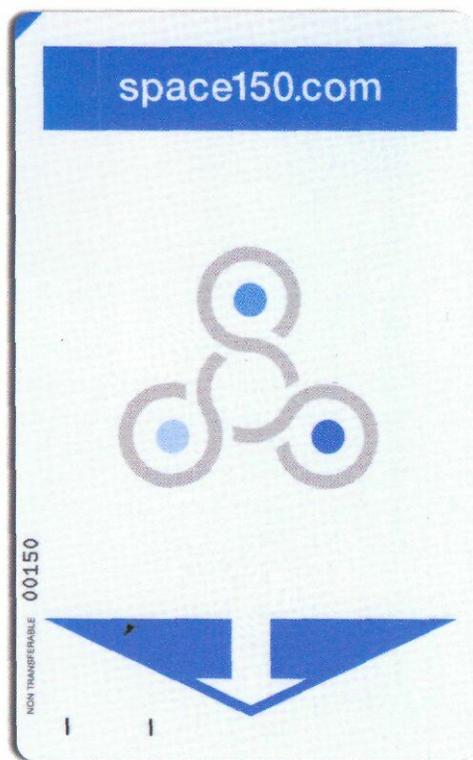


BUSINESS

RE-RE-REBRANDING

Crafting your firm's identity is a massive, often painful, project. This Minneapolis digital design studio reinvents its I.D. every 150 days. Are they crazy? Try strategic.

**VERSION 1**

Space150's first identity featured a logo of interlocking circles representing the company's creative, technical and strategic focus. It also reflected William Jurewicz's fondness for numerology—the lucky number 3.

While a typical company might hold its breath and launch a rebrand once or twice in its lifetime—then live with the results for better or worse—Minneapolis interactive firm space 150 undergoes identity overhauls with unprecedented speed, devising an entirely new logo, website, business cards and bevy of self-promotional swag every 150 days. At first blush, it seems the off-the-wall hijinks of a free-spending startup without a business plan. But space 150 is not your typical company, nor is its CEO/creative director, William Jurewicz, a man without a plan.

In early 1999, Jurewicz—computer whiz, astronomy junkie and entrepreneur—bought a home. It wasn't a nesting impulse. Rather, with a mortgage to borrow \$20,000 against, he launched space!50 in March 2000—just as the dot-com crash slammed into the fragile bubble of the U.S. economy. "Those were the freaky-sweaty times," Jurewicz says. "[I thought,] I have nowhere to go now. Open a window, and let's jump."

Jurewicz, whose father distributed video games and electronics in the early 1980s, had grown up on a steady diet of computers. By the late '90s, as a copywriter at Minneapolis' Fallon, Jurewicz saw the potential of digital marketing when others dismissed it. His mission in forming space 150 was to debunk the prevailing notion that the internet was merely a platform for repurposed television and print ads.

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF CHANGE

Jurewicz knew space 150's edge would be its ability to respond to the continually morphing landscape of the digital age. Software companies tend to issue new versions every six months; using this timeline



VERSION 6

New York City designer Alan Leusink gave Version 6 an anime aesthetic. The companion website features iconography inspired by Japanese letterforms and a cartoon astronaut who hurls himself amusingly—addictively—against the edges of the frame with a click of the mouse.

as a cue, Jurewicz decided space 150 would launch an entirely new identity every five months, sending a clear message that the company isn't merely in step with technology, but one metaphorical month ahead of the curve.

The choice to rebrand every 150 days also carries personal significance. In addition to being a student of astronomy (the 12 versions of space 150's websites—archived on space 150.com—are full of planetary references, including hidden links to NASA's astronomy picture of the day), Jurewicz is a fan of lucky numbers, particularly those divisible by three. The 150-day over-

hauls, he says, have brought the company an "insane amount of luck"—and an impressive client roster. Under the creative leadership of Jurewicz and associate creative directors Todd Bartz, Riley Kane and Jason Strong, space 150 has devised innovative solutions for such clients as The Discovery Channel, the NBA, American Express and Target.

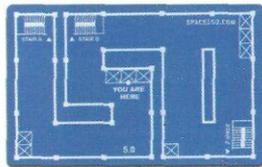
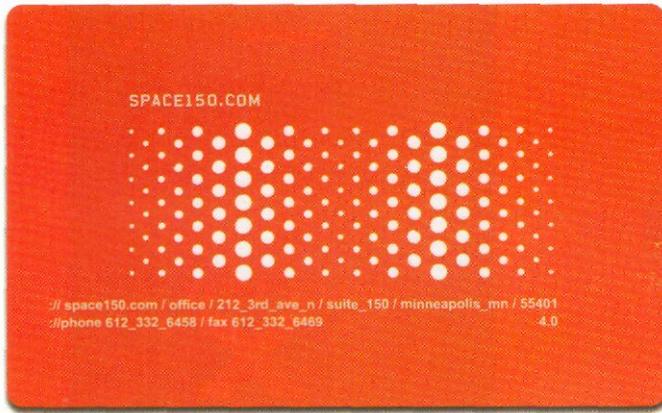
Even more daring, space 150 often hands the rebranding effort over to outside creatives. Jurewicz approaches designers whose work he admires, often people the agency has worked with, when he's ready to assign a new identity. "It's kind of like asking them to the prom," he says.

While it might seem risky to put one's own identity in the hands of an outsider, Jurewicz doesn't see it that way. "In a lot of ways," he says, "you're your own worst client, so if you outsource things that are usually internalized, you get better services. If you contract outside designers, you get a fresher perspective and a better spin off your creative brief."

Jurewicz likens the process to a band that brings in other musicians to guest star on an album. "We also guarantee the designer's work will be produced without traditional client restraints," says Jurewicz, "so this attracts creatives who want a showpiece."

To date, designers in New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Minneapolis, lured by the creative freedom space 150 offers and the industry awards that follow almost as a matter of course, have devised 12 distinct identities on a pro-bono basis. The job involves

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FROM THE TOP

Version 4 (designed by Sida Phungjiam, Minneapolis); Version 5 (Kobe Suvongse, New York City); Version 8 (Kumars Gourki, Los Angeles); Version 10.0 (Jason Strong, space150)



a new logo, letterhead and business cards, note cards, note pads and website. Each is vastly different from the one that came before, but—in an industry that espouses consistency of brand—linked by way of message and material. Business cards are screen-printed on plastic, while letterhead is produced on the same paper stock each print run.

The resulting body of work is unlike most design-firm self-promotions, because people actually want to keep it around. That includes the agency itself. It hurts every time they do away with an identity. "It is a little bit masochistic," Jurewicz admits. "But you never feel bored, and boredom more than anything is the reason creative starts to get bad." (To assuage their angst, the staff hosts a launch party for each new I.D.)

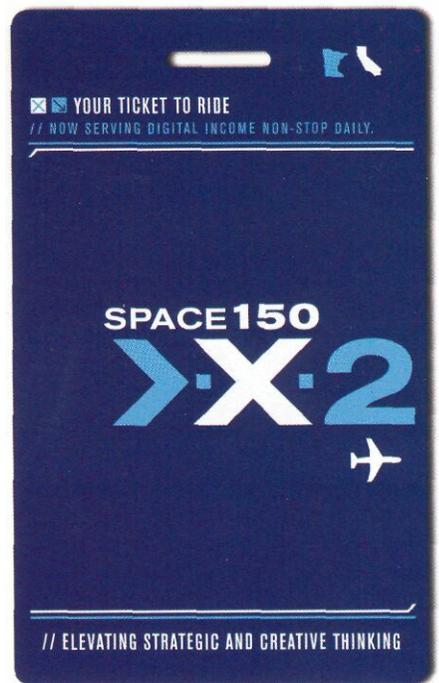
SUCCESS IS IN THE NUMBERS

Given the time and expense most companies pour into a rebrand, the 150-day plan might seem prohibitively expensive and traumatic. On the contrary, says space 150's strategic director, Rohn Jay Miller. Space150 devises each identity in no more than a month. And because the stock remains the same for each type of printed material, costs are similar to that of ordering a new run of company letterhead. "Our creative just happens to change out," Jurewicz says.

Miller considers the rebrands to be the company's central marketing exercise, both a public and private expression of brand. "It's an old way of thinking to say that your brand is an outward presentation, and then there's a private self that needs to be reconciled with that," he says, "If you live it, that's what you are, and

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VERSION 10.2

"Now serving digital income non-stop daily," reads the tag for Version 10.2, which also launched space150's Los Angeles outpost. Designed by staffer Jarrod Riddle, the identity uses the visual language of air travel to communicate space150's aim to elevate clients' online strategies. It features die-cut business cards that double as luggage tags and note cards that form paper airplanes.

it's something we prove not only to our clients, but to ourselves every day—and every 150 days. It pulls us into a proactive, ongoing process of looking at what we're doing."

Clients are looking, too. If Jurewicz is a day late posting a new identity online, he says his phone starts ringing. The rebranding strategy seems to bolster new business, as well: space 150's revenue has grown steadily since its 2000 inception to \$4 million in 2004. And the company, which launched with a staff of two, is now a 38-person digital-marketing force—recently short-listed for Fast Company's "Fast Fifty"—with plans to increase its staff to 50 and double its revenue by the close of 2005.

The identity overhauls have also become increasingly linked to space 150's strategic blueprint. In its November 2004 identity, Version 10.2, the agency touted its concept of "digital income," or a previously unrealized digital revenue stream that the firm helps clients identify and leverage. For the Minnesota Timberwolves, space 150 created a sponsorship opportunity out of the time it takes to download game highlights from the client's website. Sponsorship messaging turns an otherwise blank screen into an income source for the Timberwolves, whose annual website revenue jumped from \$10,000 to \$300,000 as a result.

And it stands to reason that an agency with such a nontraditional approach to its own brand would attract clients predisposed to innovative thinking. Last fall, space 150 created a holiday "Egg Nog Blog" for Best Buy, featuring Kevin Kringle, a sad-sack kind of fellow



VERSION 7

Minneapolis design firm SPUNK devised a "lucky seven" theme with the sensibility of early playing cards, creating a decorative crest for the new logo.

who lacks the gift-giving finesse of his better-known brother Kris. The concept is accessible enough, but the few references to Best Buy are buried so deep in the site that Kevin's connection to the retail outlet is easy to miss. That, in part, is the point. Best Buy tapped space 150 to help them tap into the viral power of the web, not to issue the typical hard sell.

GROWTH THAT DOESN'T SUCK

As space 150 scales up, its April 2005 identity (in development at press time) will be a mindful nod to the challenges that accompany growth. "We're getting a lot of process," Jurewicz says. "Things are getting heavy. We're having a lot of meetings about meetings." Version 10.3, based on early street carnivals, will be christened with a circus party—complete with clowns—for clients, staffers and their children. "Version 10.3 is all about remembering the fun," says Jurewicz, "so that growing doesn't suck the living fun out of you."

Fun and growth, as it happens, don't have to be mutually exclusive. In fact, the success of space150 seems to hinge on the interaction of Jurewicz' creative and business sensibilities—a mix of lucky-number magic and firmly grounded business principles. In a similar blend of dichotomies, the rebrands themselves reflect a dedication to creativity and strategy. "It's also our own," Jurewicz says. "It's not like [another] firm can call themselves space 160 and change their identity every 160 days. This is our story." **HOW**

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