

Weight Watchers: Dieting is out, Healthy is in

MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

The authors prepared this case solely as a basis for class discussion and not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. Although based on real events and despite occasional references to actual companies, this case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

Weight Watchers: Dieting is out, Healthy is in

Spring of 2018

In early 2018, Weight Watchers decided to change their mission: “*To inspire healthy habits for real life, for everyone*” and their vision to “*Make Wellness Accessible to All, not just the few*”. Neither the new mission nor vision was externally communicated in their channels except for a press release.

Summer of 2018

In an attempt to create awareness before the rebranding, Weight Watchers launched their first Global Summer Marketing Campaign, “Summer of impact” and a global social impact campaign, “WW Good™,” that aimed to make wellness accessible to everyone. This was enforced by donating \$650 000 to non-profit organizations to foster wellness for everybody. Weight Watchers had never before launched a fully integrated marketing campaign worldwide that found a core at the central idea of the corporation and was communicated similarly to all markets and aimed to make healthy habits accessible for everyone. The campaign brought the possibility of freedom for everyone to live a healthy life and enjoy summer through the Weight Watchers’ community. The marketing campaign featured DJ Khalid in the US, and the brand ambassadors were Kevin Smith and Chef Eric Greenspan. As a tribute to Fathers Day, June 19, 2018, DJ Khalid, Kevin Smith, and Eric Greenspan participated in a commercial, addressing how their families were the reason they wanted to be healthier. A clear shift from only targeting women to including all in an attempt to drive male memberships. The inclusion of male spokespersons and influencers was a home-run, and the interest for Weight Watchers from young dads increased. It was resulting in increased awareness and positive associations towards Weight Watchers (see **exhibit 1**).

In addition, during the summer of 2018, Weight Watchers also tried including another new target group - teenagers. They offered a free weight-loss program for teenagers between the ages of 13-17. The initiative was received very poorly, people were furious about teenagers being pushed and encouraged to get healthier and foster bad relationships towards food (see **exhibit 2**).

24 September 2018

On September 24th, 2018, Weight Watchers CEO Mindy Grossman announced the change of company name and logo on the most-watched morning program in the United States - NBC Today's show. She declared that Weight Watchers, or now WW, had evolved to this day to have an increased focus on wellness for all people.

Simultaneously, WW spread their new visual identity through channels like their new Instagram, Youtube, Twitter, and the website via a new marketing campaign to reinforce their new mission (see **exhibit 3**). The advertising dropped the word *'weight'* even though it was still talked about in similar terms. The rebranding was viewed by many audiences as contradictory as WW was closely associated with previous values. Therefore, audiences did not perceive the change to be genuine (see **exhibit 4**).

Their current customers were also confused with the changes since the previous visual and brand identity was closely connected to weight loss. The old Weight Watchers brand was nowhere to be found from one day to another, and the logo WW did not even stand for Weight Watchers. In addition, confusion arises as to why everybody needed to be served instead of their core audience.

In addition to the name and logo change, a press release was sent out on the 24th, stating that an updated version of WW:s App would be launched on October 4th.

4 October 2018

The new version of the app was constructed to meet consumer demands for a more personalized, social, and digital experience. The app enhanced the digital experience through several updates and new features:

- **Partnered up with Headspace**, a mindfulness and meditation company, to incorporate more wellness.
- **New Member Rewards Program "WellnessWins™"**, a new program that ensures healthier habits by rewarding members for their everyday healthy behaviors, small as big.
- **Fitpoints 2.0**, an updated version of their fitpoints that now is personalized for the individual to encourage activities that will have the most impact on their health and wellness.
- **Connect people**, in the updated app, people can now connect with similar individuals through the app, fostering the feeling of an online community.

October 2018

On the 15th of October, WW changed their exchange listing from New York Stock Exchange to Nasdaq. This change was done with the hope to reach people interested in health and wellbeing as well as increase marketing opportunities and brand visibility.

During the month after the name change to WW from Weight Watchers, the stock price fell 30%.

December 2018

In the middle of December, two new brand ambassadors were announced - Kate Hudson and Robbie Williams. The inclusion of a male ambassador can be seen as an act on their latest mission to include all people instead of their previous target group of women. However, this inclusion was overshadowed by the criticism against Hudson (see **exhibit 5**). The famous actor had never been perceived to struggle with weight or wellness, in contrast, she was often seen posing in athletic clothes and known for her slim figure.

At the end of December, WW ran a winter campaign to spread awareness of their new visual brand identity, as earlier stated by the Chief Brand Officer in the press release from September, 24th:

*"We will communicate the new articulation of the WW brand
in many ways, one of the most important being our visual identity"*

- Gail Tifford, Chief Brand Officer, WW

The new visual identity stretched beyond the logo and color to a new palette (blue, orange, white) and photograph style. In addition, the hashtag #wellnessthatworks was introduced in various languages, however, the word wellness was never translated to allow the hashtags to be connected.

At the end of the year, it was clear that the company had lost a lot of subscriptions, in Q3-Q4 WW lost 600 000 subscribers. In addition, the worldwide winter campaign did not recruit as many members as expected. The low number of subscribers made WW realize that some improvements needed to be made in 2019 which they addressed in a press release stating that they would focus on optimizing media mix and stronger call-to-action.

Q1 & Q2 of 2019

In January 2019, three months after the rebranding, WW continued implementation efforts regarding its new brand identity, such as updated products, new partnerships, and recruitment of new people for high managerial positions. First, the products that WW offered were now more aligned with wellness as the products were stripped from artificial sweeteners, color, and flavor. Second, WW initiated a partnership with Kohls as there was a shared passion for empowering everyone to be more healthy. Third, the new recruitments included positions as Chief Business Development Officer, Chief People Officer, and Board of Directors.

In February 2019, WW issued a profit warning, meaning that the corporation announced to shareholders and investors that they were not able to meet their initial profit targets as they had not gained as many subscribers as initially planned. The profit warning did not come as a surprise, everyone already knew that WW was not performing at its best. Nonetheless, WW announced in a press release that they still stood behind the rebranding and that the CEO Mindy Grossman looked bright into the future. She was convinced WW would pull in a large number of subscribers during the spring as Oprah Winfrey would play an essential role in 2019 and 2020. Oprah is a very important figure of WW as her connections to the corporation are viewed by stakeholders as genuine since she has had problems with her weight. In addition, her good reputation and trustworthiness have a positive impact on WW.

During the first quarter of 2019, WW's operating profit was down 50% compared to the same period the previous year.

13 September 2019

Almost a year after the rebranding announcement, WW changed its legal name from Weight Watchers International Inc to WW international Inc.

3 January 2020

At the beginning of 2020, WW's top executives acknowledged that many shareholders did not recognize their new name and logo. In order to create awareness, the hashtag #ThisIsMyWW was promoted on Twitter. However, the hashtag clashed with another ongoing hashtag: #WWII (World War II) which created confusion and bad associations. WW got huge backlash from the public and was portrayed as tone-deaf and insensitive (see **exhibit 6**).

Exhibits

Exhibit 1. Twitter post regarding #WWGood



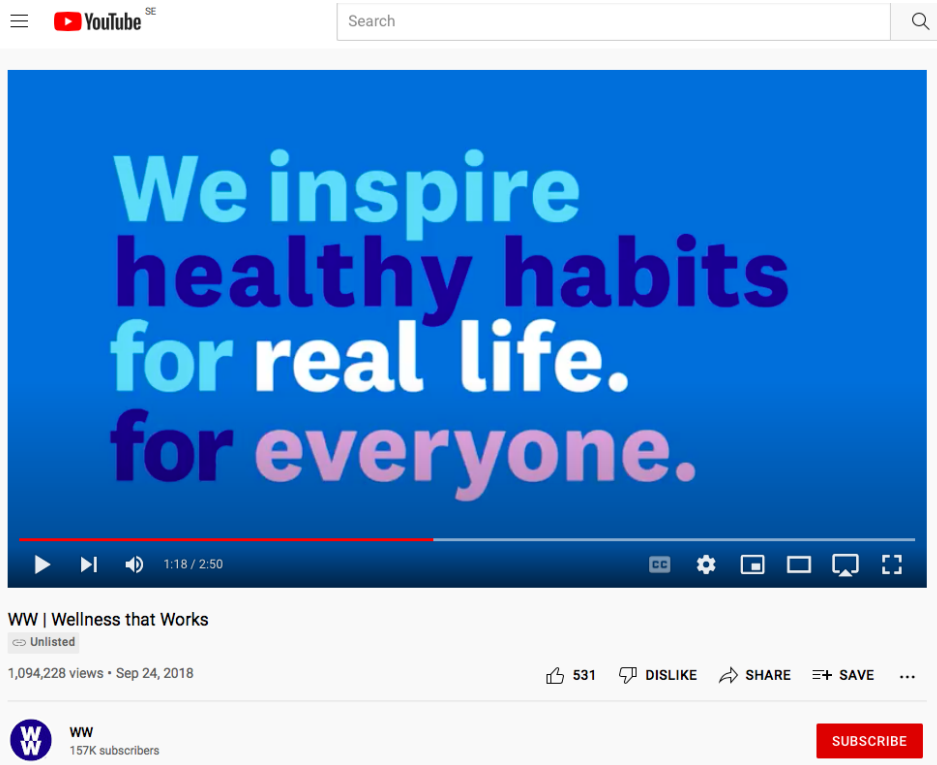
Exhibit 2. Twitter post regarding the free weight-loss program for teens



Exhibit 3. WW Communicating the rebranding across channels Sep 24, 2018



The image shows a Facebook post from the official Weight Watchers (WW) page. The post features a large blue graphic with the text: "We inspire healthy habits for real life. for everyone." The word "everyone" is in orange. The post text reads: "Our mission is to inspire healthy habits for real life—for everyone. We'll always be the global leader in weight loss. Now we welcome anyone who wants to be healthier: eat better, move more, develop a positive mindset... or all of the above! So we're moving from Weight Watchers to WW, to reflect that we're becoming the world's partner in wellness. And we'll be launching exciting tools, rewards and experiences to bring that promise to life. Tap the link in our bio to learn more. <http://weightwtch.rs/wellnessthatworks> #WeAreWW". The post has 177 views, 96,914 likes, and was posted on September 24, 2018.



The image shows a YouTube video player for the video "WW | Wellness that Works". The video content is the same blue graphic seen in the Facebook post: "We inspire healthy habits for real life. for everyone." The video has 1,094,228 views and was uploaded on September 24, 2018. The channel name is "WW | Wellness that Works" with 157K subscribers. The video player shows a progress bar at 1:18 / 2:50 and includes standard YouTube controls like play, volume, and full screen. Below the video are like, dislike, share, and save buttons, and a red "SUBSCRIBE" button.



WW International @ww_us

Weight Watchers is now WW. We have a mission: to inspire healthy habits for real life—for everyone. We'll always be the global leader in weight loss. Now we're becoming the world's partner in wellness. Learn more: spr.ly/weareww #WeAreWW

Watch on Twitter

WW
Wellness that Works™




WW.
Weight
Watchers
reimagined.

The name WW reflects that we're becoming the world's partner in wellness. We will always be the global leader in weight loss, but now WW welcomes anyone who wants to build healthy habits—whether that means eating better, moving more, developing a positive mindset, focusing on weight...or all of the above! In the coming weeks and months, you'll see great new developments from us.



Exhibit 4. Twitter-posts regarding rebranding 09-24-2018



Noah Kinsey @thenoahkinsey

Weight Watchers: We are changing our name to WW

Me: Are you also gonna change the point system to something that empowers people to understand nutrition instead of making them stay dependent on you & your fuzzy math for fear of leaving & gaining all the weight back?

WW: LOL no.

8:47 PM · Sep 24, 2018

195 Likes · Reply · Share

[Read 14 replies](#)



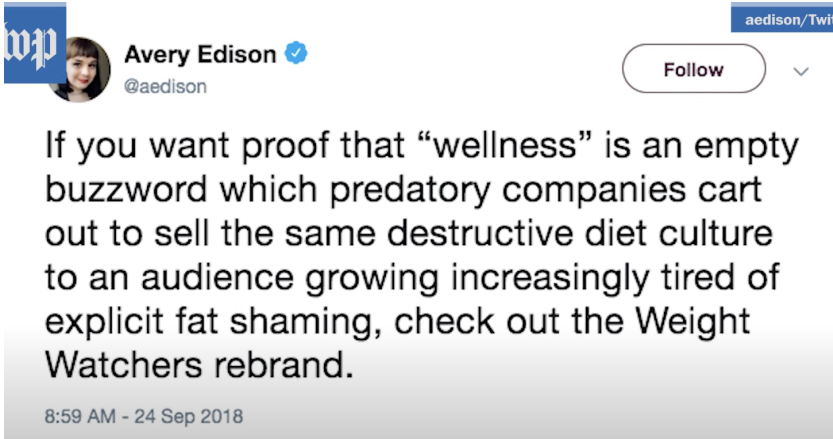
Vincci Tsui, RD 徐詠芝 @VincciRD

The diet industry is listening, but instead of recognizing the harm that they're doing, they're simply co-opting weight-inclusive language and disguising dieting as "health and wellness". I see you. @ww_us #WakeUpWeightWatchers

CNBC @CNBC · 24 sep. 2018
Weight Watchers is renaming itself "WW," shifting its focus to overall health, and launching a new app. cnb.cx/2xDhcmB

7:49 em · 24 sep. 2018 · Twitter for Android

4 Retweets 10 gilla-markeringar



Avery Edison @aedison

If you want proof that "wellness" is an empty buzzword which predatory companies cart out to sell the same destructive diet culture to an audience growing increasingly tired of explicit fat shaming, check out the Weight Watchers rebrand.

8:59 AM - 24 Sep 2018

Exhibit 5. Critic against Hudson



Exhibit 6. Twitter-posts regarding #ThisismyWW

