Rebranding: Building trust in your utility

The idea of rebranding a public utility has become a common practice among wastewater and water utilities throughout the country. Public utilities can no longer afford to remain static as simply providers of essential services. We are the stewards of our communities’ valuable resources and protectors of our environment. Sanitation agencies and districts must work to maintain the trust and support of their customers, especially when the time comes for needed infrastructure investments and corresponding rate adjustments.

Why rebrand?
Robust communications and a commitment to transparency build customer satisfaction and trust. Rebranding allows your organization to clarify your organization’s core messages and communicate them with a refreshed visual identity.

- Research shows that customer satisfaction is greater for utilities that communicate regularly with their customers and demonstrate investment in improving infrastructure.
- Are you a forward-thinking District? Does your District’s brand express that innovative spirit? Alternatively, does your District’s brand look like a preserved dinosaur that might be featured in a Jurassic Park movie? What do you think that ‘historical look’ conveys to your customers when they receive a rate increase notice or when they read an article about modernizing your facilities?
- Revisiting your brand allows you to tell your story and increases awareness and understanding of your mission.

How much effort is involved in rebranding?
The extent of the rebranding effort depends on a number of factors, including the size of your agency and the budget available. Often, a consultant is used to conduct the research, and develop the organization’s new visual identity and the various communications tools and templates.

- The process of rebranding involves several steps, including research and interviews with staff, key community stakeholders, and possibly local elected officials to gather information necessary to develop a successful visual identity.
- Using this research, the consultant or branding team will develop a branding platform that represents the organization and a set of guidelines for use in a uniform branding platform.
- The platform can include a new logo and its variations, new templates for communications, such as letterhead, forms, flyers, brochures and PowerPoint templates.

How long will this take? How much will it cost?
Developing a visual identity can take years to fully integrate into an organization’s communications program. But initial development and use of a new logo and brand can be accomplished in 6-9 months. Costs will vary, but agencies should be careful about spending too much on rebranding. The last thing you want to do is erode the confidence in your organization as you are working to build and broaden trust in your community.