



BRAND CAMP

Kelly Childs renames her health-food business to avoid future potential trademark hassles before starting efforts to expand into other areas

Kelly Childs' switch to a vegan diet six years ago was a lifestyle change brought on by the discovery of two masses in her liver. In 2010, she decided she wanted to share her love of an animal-free diet and opened a vegan restaurant appropriately called Kindfood in Burlington, Ont. "I came up with that name because it meant kind to the planet, kind to your body and kind to the animals," Childs says. "And it was something that resonated so deeply with me."

The restaurant, which also sold groceries and baked goods, took root with a loyal clientele and was ranked among the top 25 vegan restaurants around the world by *Happy Cow Cookbook*, Childs says. But she hit a dead

end in 2012 when she wanted to branch out with franchises in other cities and tried to trademark the Kindfood name.

In the U.S., where Childs would eventually like to expand, trademark claims had already been staked to terms related to 'kind' by several companies including Kind LLC, a producer of healthy snack bars sold in dozens of countries. There may have been some wiggle room on the trademarking of kind-linked words, but Childs decided to make a name change and cut her losses. Better that than investing even more in intellectual property only to lose a legal battle later, she reasoned. Engaging a trademark lawyer just to file an application

would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars alone.

"It was hard saying goodbye to it. I cried for about a week. It was like a baby I had given birth to," Childs says. "Even though I knew it was the right thing and we had to move on, I had to suck it up."

Childs sought the advice of local branding companies to find a new identity for her restaurant. However, she didn't like the "strange names" they proposed. Instead, she locked herself into a room for a few hours to brainstorm. She came up with Lettuce Love Café — a play on the phrase "let us love." Childs hired the Faduchi Group in Burlington to develop the concept and branding, saving some money in the process by having come up with the new restaurant name herself.

In the lead up to the switch, Childs and her daughter, Erinn Weatherbie, began drumming up buzz through social media, including Facebook and Instagram. These efforts were aimed at generating curiosity about what was in store ahead, but also to ask their existing clientele to weigh in on what elements of Kindfood they would want to keep. "That's so critical, to keep your fan base engaged and to keep them part of it," Childs says.

In December 2013, they did a quick renovation and makeover in three days. They changed the storefront awning and launched a new website and social-media accounts (using the old Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts to promote the switch). In the end, they traded in Kindfood's "hippie culture" vibe for Lettuce Love Café's "more upscale" and "polished" look, Childs says. With its vanilla-cream walls and bright orange awning, Lettuce Love Café appeals to a wider demographic, she says.

Childs now plans to open up multiple locations of Lettuce Love Cafe, potentially in Toronto and Oakville, either with a partner or via a franchise model.

In all, the rebranding cost about \$35,000 — a hefty amount for a small business owner but worth the expense, she says. Since the relaunch, the restaurant has "exploded with the new name," with its numbers doubling in January, February and March compared with Kindfood, Childs says. "It's like Kindfood was kind of holding us back."

CHANGING BRANDS

Building a small business brand can be tricky, even more so if you decide to rename your existing business in order to take advantage of potential future opportunities. Here are three tips to keep in mind from Kelly Childs, who successfully rebranded Kindfood restaurant to Lettuce Love Café.



TRADEMARK EARLY

Even if you don't know what the future holds it's important to stake a claim for your current business. Back in 2009 when Childs came up with the Kindfood name, she wasn't looking at a long-range forecast, she says. "Make sure that your business plan incorporates doing that trademark if you're planning on multiple locations and growing your business beyond a one-off."



PREPARE FOR PAIN

Short-term pain equals long-term gain. Childs could have moved forward under the Kindfood brand, as there was some room for interpretation on the "kind" trademark, but it would have been a risk. "For us it was rolling the dice. Do you cut your losses now? Or do you move forward and, say, five years from now, something happens. You've generated all that goodwill in the business and you won't even be able to own it in five years time? You're better to cut your losses now and start fresh."



TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

When Childs began searching for a new identity for her vegan restaurant, the various branding companies she hired didn't bear any fruit that she liked. In the end, she came up with a name herself. "You need to trust your own instincts and intuition," Childs says. "After all, the business you are building is all about you and your passion and, sometimes, branding companies don't quite understand our deepest desires." **FP**