

# Making the first impression count

Firefly's Shin says branding helps firms create an identity

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By Claire Compton - Staff Writer



Jiwon Shin says branding is particularly important in tough economic times. At right, four examples of company logos she helped develop.

Beyond a simple logo, branding creates an identity for a company, useful not only for marketing but for shaping future strategies. In the Czech Republic, the idea was a new one when Jiwon Shin set up European headquarters in Prague for her branding consultancy firm Firefly in 2006. Shin has worked on teams that developed the brands for Microsoft, UPS and Samsung. In the Czech Republic, Firefly has worked with Czech companies such as 65-year-old home improvement chain ETA. Shin sat down with The Prague Post to explain how a brand can be a company's most valuable asset.

**The Prague Post:** In your own words, what does branding mean, and why is it important for a company?

**Jiwon Shin:** I think it's important to first explain what a brand is. I like to think of a brand as a living being and identity. It is the most powerful and significant persona of a company. It is, in fact, its DNA.

Branding is the creative process of bringing those brands to life. That's what we do at Firefly. We create an unforgettable brand identity to represent the essence of a company's image. Branding is also essential in order to gain a competitive advantage in the market.

**TPP:** Is branding appropriate for companies of every size and type?

**JS:** Absolutely. Good branding can be vital for any company to grow. I've worked on creating brand identities for companies as large as Samsung and UPS, but I've also worked with start-ups and government agencies. For example, we recently helped the U.S. Embassy in Prague revive the American image, giving them a fresh new look for their cultural and educational events. I'm currently creating a new logo for the Prague Writers' Festival.

**TPP:** How have you approached the Czech market, where branding is a relatively new concept?

**JS:** In the United States, it's fair to say branding is nearly as important as the actual product or service itself. In the Czech Republic, branding used to take a backseat. Now, in the free market, it is extremely important for Czech businesses.

Firefly, with 20 years of experience and offices around the world, is the first branding agency to enter the Czech and Central European market. I've given lectures on the challenges faced by new businesses in the free market. I use a cup of Starbucks coffee as an example of how effective branding can be. Everyone agrees, Starbucks is profitable because of its branding.

**TPP:** Do Czech firms want a different sort of brand than other countries?

**JS:** I've noticed Czech firms tend to be more interested in creativity, while American companies seem to be more strategy-driven. At Firefly, it's our job to focus on both because good branding must be creative and strategic. At the same time, brands must be international, especially in today's global economy.

**TPP:** Many of your brands, such as the one you developed for Eventival, are very colorful. How is color important in your work?

**JS:** It's critical. Color can evoke emotion, show personality and activate brand association. Our visual perception registers color and shape almost simultaneously. So these elements are both important and must work in harmony.

It's said that 60 percent of the time, product choice is based on color. When we were asked to rejuvenate ETA's 65 year-old brand, we not only created an exciting yellow logo color, which was not being used by any of the competition, but we also created a vital color palette that ETA used for their individual home appliances.

Meanwhile, the UPS brown has become so famous that they now use it in their slogan: "What Can Brown Do for You?"

**TPP:** How often should companies think about reinventing their brand, and what are the factors that go into such a decision?

**JS:** The brand should stay alive and appealing. Brands need to be regularly modernized to meet changing market needs. Anytime there is a major change in a company, a new strategy or a shift in the market, it may be a good time to reposition and reshape the brand.

**TPP:** What sort of research goes into it before you begin drafting a design and strategy?

**JS:** Branding comes from a combination of research and creativity. I like to say, "Look for

### **The Shin file**

**Title:** Founder and creative director, Firefly Branding

**Nationality:** South Korean

**Portfolio:** Created brands for companies such as Samsung, UPS and Czech firm ETA

**Where:** Firefly has offices in New York and Prague

**On Prague:** Chose Prague "because of its visual beauty and market potential"

**Next step:** Firefly's Seoul office will open in 2010. Shin plans to "continue to master skills to create the best possible brands"

logic, see the magic, ignite a brand.” The logic part is developing an effective brand strategy, by analyzing the competitors and understanding the company’s vision and short- and long-term goals. Then, Firefly begins the creative process of developing a leading and compelling brand.

**TPP:** What’s an example of a brand you’ve done that has been able to transform a company?

**JS:** The re-branding of Samsung was a complete transformation. Prior to working with Samsung, it was a group of 48 subsidiaries with different business identities and names. We created one single corporate brand for the entire group with a fresh new face. We also positioned it to become a global brand by replacing Hangeul, the alphabet of the Korean language, with the Latin alphabetic spelling of Samsung. This was a very big decision in Korea. Within a few years of re-branding, Samsung’s brand valuation moved ahead of Sony’s, becoming the worldwide icon that it is today.

**TPP:** Do you believe many companies will have to reinvent themselves once the economy picks back up?

**JS:** Branding during tough economic times may seem illogical, but it’s critically important. While most companies try to reduce costs and lower prices, historically, companies that invest in branding during a recession retain their core base, attract new consumers and come out stronger when the economy recovers. In fact, companies that are closest to the root of the economic downturn - including banks, insurers and real estate companies - could benefit the most from re-branding.