

## Dick Maggiore: Survival of the fittest: Reinvent or die

By [Dick Maggiore Special](#) to The Canton Repository

Posted at 7:14 AM

What do you do when even a good coat of polish doesn't make your shoes shine anymore?

It might be time to buy a new pair of shoes.

Whether we are talking shoes or business, how we handle disruptive threats makes all the difference in the world.

Reinvention is the new normal. Reinvention is about **repositioning**. When faced with disruption, who will you become? Your identity likely will be very different than what you once were.

Sears could have become Amazon. Sears mailed catalogs to homes and shipped products by trains and trucks. Today, we shop on the internet.

To understand why Sears missed it, consider the difference between continuous improvement and continuous reinvention. Improvement is about polishing the shoe. Reinvention is about something that's changed so much it appears entirely new.

Continuous improvement is comfortable. Continuous reinvention is not. To compete, we often work on doing it better by polishing the shoe rather than doing what's really needed: reinventing a brand new pair of shoes.

We are in the midst of a highly disruptive environment driven principally by the tsunami of digital. Ironically, the result of market disruption is market growth. Disruption offers a big opportunity for those who make the right moves.

Blockbuster was the leader in the video rental category. Faced with the DVD onslaught, Blockbuster adjusted beautifully to renting DVDs at its stores instead of videos. Then came Netflix distributing

DVDs by mail. Blockbuster is no longer with us. It didn't reinvent itself. Blockbuster could have become Netflix.

In 2007, Netflix reinvented itself by transitioning into online streaming — a brilliant move. Another reinvention, Netflix began producing content, for example “House of Cards.” Its stock price rose from less than \$4 per share in 2007 to nearly \$200 per share in 2017, making a lot of folks millionaires along the way.

Kodak, sadly, is the poster child for the failure to reposition.

Kodak was the world leader in film for photography. While Kodak also invented the digital camera, it was blind to the digital future. Kodak today is a skeleton of its former self. But don't count them out. They're relaunching its Super 8 movie camera, which is more than a movie camera. Stay tuned.

We pick on Xerox quite a bit, but the truth is they have a rich history of innovation. They actually invented the personal computer. They also invented scores of technological firsts including the Ethernet, the mouse and the laser printer. (Too bad they let Hewlett Packard win in that category.)

Of course, they also invented the copier. This became the company's Achilles heel. The name Xerox is synonymous with the copier. Not many wanted to buy a personal computer from a copier company. Xerox got stuck.

Western Union was the world's largest telegram company. Some of you might have to Google to find out what a telegram is. The last telegram was sent in 2006. Today, they are the world's largest money transfer company. Let's watch Western Union's next move. They know there are more disruptors after its business.

Nintendo was founded as a playing card company in the late 1800s. It reinvented itself and became the world's most successful video gaming company. Remember “Super Mario Bros?”

Apple, the world's largest company by many measures, might have reinvented reinvention. Its most dramatic move came when it turned its focus from Mac computers, its first big reinvention, to the handheld iPod, iPad, iPhone and the Apple Watch. Interestingly, they really didn't invent any of these product categories. It is what they did to these products that merited the reinvention designation.

Get ready for its next big thing, the Apple HomePod, expected to be available in just in time for our Christmas stockings. In the same category and already in the market are Amazon Echo and Google Home.

Levi's, the jeans company, is weaving into its clothing metallic alloys along with natural yarns. Somehow the clothing will be connectable to smartphones so that you can swipe your jeans and your room lights will turn on (or off). We're not so sure this one will catch on.

KFC is pulling off a masterful repositioning. To appeal to millennial tastes, its revamped menu includes less messy items to eat on the run, such as its Go Cup and \$5 Fill Up boxes. At the same time, it didn't want to alienate its core customers, so it brought back Colonel Sanders in its advertising. Sales are up system-wide. Nice work, KFC.

Old Spice went from near obscurity to the largest brand in its category with its dramatic repositioning. Like KFC, it wanted to appeal to the millennials. Old Spice produced zany advertising and heavy online programs, including social media, video games, mobile apps and very entertaining YouTube clips.

Charles Darwin was not a marketer, but he did say something that brings clarity to the concept of reinvention: "In the struggle for survival, the fittest win out at the expense of their rivals because they succeed in adapting themselves best to their environment."

*Dick Maggiore is president and CEO of [Innis Maggiore](#), founded in Canton in 1974 and today the nation's leading positioning ad agency, building strong brands for companies in competitive markets here and across the country.*