



Business Week Small Biz Cover Story



REINVENTION

Rich Gilbert and Howard Green, two veterans of the office-products industry, already had their Glendale (Ill.) company up and running when they started thinking about branding. In 2000, they had purchased Newell Rubbermaid Inc.'s office-furniture division, but the acquisition didn't include Rubbermaid's brand name. Gilbert, chief executive and chairman, and Green, the chief operating officer, saw opportunity.

First, they needed a name and logo that would help the company's molded plastic furniture and office accessories stand out in their chief sales venue: cluttered office-products catalogs. The pair began brainstorming, first combining their initials, then inventing words by adding "ex" and other suffixes along the lines of FedEx or Memorex. Nothing seemed to fit.

Then Gilbert and Green realized they should try to choose a name that at least hinted at their combined 40 years; experience in the industry. When they hit on *Iceberg*, it seemed to do just that – to suggest something more impressive

BELOW THE SURFACE

The final logo (bottom) hints at the founders' depth of experience in the office-products industry



than first appearances might imply. The concept is probably too subtle for customers to grasp right away, but the partners thought the word was direct and memorable enough to work. When some friends and relatives said *Iceberg* brought to mind the Titanic disaster, Gilbert says the pair "agonized over it for weeks." But their instincts told them *Iceberg* was a winner.

Then they needed to figure out what their particular iceberg should look like. "We didn't want it to look exactly like a real iceberg, which could be a blob," says Gilbert. They went to Design Design, a small Chicago shop, for help. After several iterations, Gilbert and Green chose a stylized blue and white iceberg that stands out against a black background, and that looks like it's moving forward. The Graphic Shop, also in Chicago, made sure the logo showed up on all *Iceberg's* printed materials, from business cards to sales brochures, and of course, in the office products catalogs. They also prepared a handbook explaining how the logo should appear in other places, such as employees' PowerPoint presentations. Total cost: \$25,000. Not cheap, but "it wasn't a lot of money compared to what some people spend," Gilbert says.

Devising a name and logo also prompted Gilbert and Green to reexamine how the company was promoting itself. Catalog photos, for instance, showed the furniture in book-strewn conference rooms. But customers bought the furniture for hard-hat settings, such as a foreman's office in a factory. "No lawyer is ever going to purchase plastic furniture," Gilbert says. So *Iceberg* reshot the photos against cinder-block backgrounds more familiar to their likely customers.

Now, clients greet *Iceberg's* salespeople with "Here's the Iceman!" Even though the company has introduced new products such as shelving and hand trucks, the *Iceberg* logo is still perfectly appropriated. Sales at the 85-employee company jumped by about half to nearly \$25 million in 2004. Last fall, Staples began selling *Iceberg's* resin folding tables. As its owners hoped, the logo and image that helped *Iceberg* become a success with its business customers are proving versatile enough to help launch it again, this time with consumers.