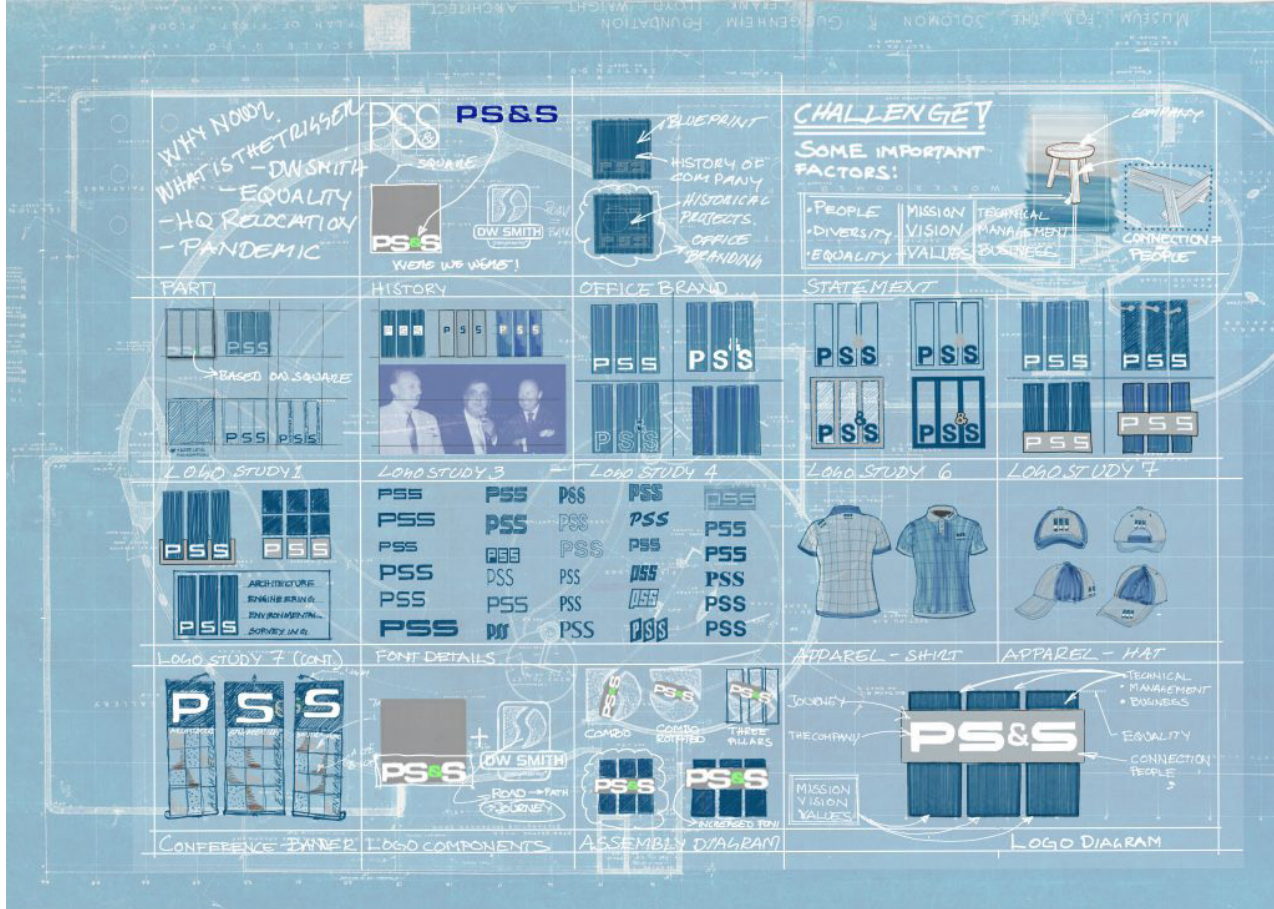


THREE LEGS

How a Warren company went about the process of rebranding during a pandemic



An illustration of PS&S's blueprint and logo which incorporates the company's past, present and future, the milk stool and it's people.

BY LINDA LINDNER

With roots dating back to 1962, architecture, engineering and design firm Paulus Sokolowski & Sartor follow the tenets established by its founders – excellence in managing skills, technical skills and business creation skills.

In fact, it's how the Warren-based company evaluates itself in annual reviews. So when it came time for a redesign of the company's brand and logo, those three "pillars" were no doubt going to be at the forefront of its new look. For starters, PS&S shortened its name. It's now easier to text and type and adds a modern feel in the age of communicating in acronyms, but it doesn't lose what the company stands for. President and CEO, John Sartor, is a second-generation owner who wanted to honor those who came before him – after all, the last "S" in PS&S stands for his dad, Tony Sartor, who is now executive chairman.

But it's not only the fact that the company is his legacy. Sartor says the foundation is so solid that he wanted to communicate it to his employees and clients.

"I believe a company logo should be kind of a brand ethos. It really needs to embody something special to the culture. It's really important to try to give some tradition and history to your next line of new folks," Sartor said.

The company, which now has a total of nine offices primarily in the Northeast, has been in growth mode over the last few years, opening smaller regional offices closer to its clients and establishing new locations in Doylestown, Pa. and Houston. It even acquired a company, DW Smith Associates, a multi-discipline professional design and engineering consulting firm with values very similar to its own.

FIRST TRIES

Sartor said he first approached the company brand redesign as a typical engineer would. He took his existing logo and changed it a little bit here, a little bit there, and was thinking more in terms of beams and steel. And then after gathering and meeting periodically with an internal group that leads marketing and branding efforts, Sartor brought in Jesper Ryberg, his chief designer and associate principal architect, and asked what he thought. Ryberg knew there wasn't something quite right about what he was being presented. He waited until everyone was finished speaking and when it came time for feedback Ryberg challenged Sartor.

What was it that the company was trying to convey? What did

it want others to see when they looked at it? What did they want the brand to represent to employees and clients? And Ryberg kept pushing until it all came out – the history, what was important – and where was the company going: its mission, vision and values.

"It's a lot of what was in there already. You know, the history of this company and the foundation that was built by the founding fathers means a lot to me," said Sartor. "He [Ryberg] clawed a lot of really good things out of me. As he does, he's our lead designer here. He's used to doing this for buildings. He's used to trying to help a client achieve their goals. So it was very similar to the process. It was just the product was different than usual."

Ryberg said that what he took away from everything Sartor conveyed was the company's people were paramount. "We have people in a building with some monitors, but these people here are some that John has known for 30-plus years and there's people that he's known for three weeks. The brand had to inspire all the age groups," said Ryberg. "So people became, like, a big thing for us."

The other thing Ryberg saw as imperative was incorporating the company's three pillars.

"I somehow wanted to galvanize these three gentlemen's names into the logo to be there forever. And not just text of the names Paulus Sokolowski & Sartor ... they each had their own expertise, they were the rocks of this company and that's how kind of the three pillars came about."

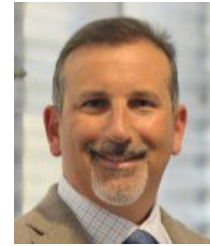
MILK STOOL STABILITY

Those pillars – managing, technical and business creation skills – are represented on the company blueprint as a milk stool, with the top holding it all together. Sartor even has a milk stool in his office.

"We've adopted a three-pillar approach, like a milk stool which has three legs. It's no good if one of those legs is missing. It's no longer stable," said Ryberg.

"It was never so much about the stool as the connection that keeps the three legs together. Because if you take that connection now, its three legs mean nothing. And the connection will always resemble the people in the company driven by the three legs of the excellence. That was something that was very strong in the logo," added Sartor.

According to Sartor and Ryberg, each of the company's founders embodied those qualities. Paulus had managerial expertise, Sokolowski was the technical expert and Sartor was a talented business



Sartor



Ryberg

development guy.

"So conceptually what we're trying to do, we want to tell our story so that when that brand is seen, it's recognized right away for what it means. It's the strength of having those three legs, supporting the overall company," said Sartor.

And why not take the opportunity to add a little recent history into the mix? While the brand was undergoing its change, Sartor subtly snuck a little of the new generation's heart into it. Having earned his undergraduate in engineering from Duke University, Sartor changed the color in the logo to the navy blue of his alma mater in honor of where he started to shape himself as an engineer.

"It only seemed fitting to add a little Blue Devil color to tie things together and give something significant and important to me into the symbol. I felt I had to take a little bit of myself into it. To write my own story a little bit more."

As the company was getting ready to relocate its corporate headquarters to a new 44,000-square-foot space in Warren, the COVID-19 pandemic struck. A global pandemic might not be an ideal backdrop for a company rebrand, but the timing worked out well. A lot of planning and designing was taking place for the redesign of the office in January and February of 2020, and the company had to quickly pivot by April. But Sartor said the final product, a much safer, more flexible, adaptable and sustainable workplace, is particularly important now.

It also seemed like an opportune time to push the new logo's development. The company's leaders were trying to tie in new col-



PS&S's blueprint will be incorporated at each of its offices around the country, starting with its headquarters location in Warren.

ors and wanted the physical space to reflect its history and all the new undertakings.

THE BLUEPRINT

The collaboration on the branding and new logo seemed woven from the company fabric of the company's history. Sartor and his team decided they wanted to put the story onto actual fabric and have it displayed on one of the main entry walls as a blueprint illustrating significant projects and people.

The blueprint will be on display when employees, customers and clients walk in. One will be produced for the headquarters and it will also be rolled out to all the other offices at different scales for their main entryways.

"As our employees start to understand why we approached it this way, they can feel more part of the fabric of the company, Sartor said. "Instead of just telling the history of the company, you know, you can look at that wall and you can look at projects we've done throughout the region, you know, really substantial projects we've done throughout the region. You can see some of the people and you really can experience the history and what's great about this."

Sartor and Ryberg also describe the milk stool as an example of equality and diversity. And with the fight for equality being front and center around the country and the world, it was something they both felt strongly about incorporating. "So we believe that everybody in our business, and consulting with the architecture, engineering, environmental, really needs to have three legs on your stool to be successful," Sartor said.

"You always need your three components to work properly, bounce things off of and something on top to adhere it all together. That's so important at PS&S, and always has been."