

**MEDIA**

# Aiming for Recognition, Axa Trims Its Name

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Advertising

By **STUART ELLIOTT**

AXA EQUITABLE is taking an ax to its name, trimming it to Axa so it will conform in the United States with the French-based company's brand elsewhere.

The new name is on display in a campaign that Axa is ready to introduce to American consumers. A new website, [axa.com](http://axa.com), is to go live on Friday, replacing the current site at [axa-equitable.com](http://axa-equitable.com). That will be followed on Monday with a campaign by Publicis Kaplan Thaler in New York that portrays communication with Axa about products like life insurance as a small but important step on the road to easing worry about one's financial future.

The campaign will be supported with what is to be a big increase in marketing spending, to an estimated \$85 million. The most the company has spent in a recent year was \$9.8 million in 2008, according to the Kantar Media division of WPP, with a total of \$1.1 million in the first nine months of 2013.

"This is a significant investment and commitment that Axa is making in the U.S. business, more significant than anything we've done in the last 30 years," said Beth Pasciucco, head of brand management and customer experience at the Axa Equitable Life Insurance Company in New York.

The campaign includes a reallocation of money among media, she said, adding: "We're disproportionately spending on digital, probably three times as much. I think the media will work a little harder." The media duties are handled by Havas Media in New York, part of the Havas Media Group division of Havas.

There are three reasons for bringing out a new campaign with an increased budget, Ms. Pasciucco said. One is that insurance is "a low-interest,

low-engagement category,” she said, so more needs to be spent to elicit attention.

A second reason is that Axa needs to keep up with “so much money being spent in the category” by other insurers, she said. That is being underlined in the run-up to Super Bowl XLVIII as one Axa competitor, MetLife, who owns the naming rights to the stadium where the game will be played, introduces a campaign that includes commercials, online video, events and social media.

The third reason is that, although Ms. Pasciucco said that Axa was considered the best-known insurance brand in the world, “on an unaided basis we have 2 percent awareness” in this country. The company has been called Axa Equitable since 2004, 13 years after Axa acquired majority control of Equitable, which was founded in 1859.

Of the 10 insurers ranked in the most recent study of consumer loyalty and engagement in the United States by Brand Keys, a New York research consultancy, Axa Equitable finished eighth, behind The Hartford and John Hancock, said Robert Passikoff, the president of Brand Keys. New York Life and Allstate were tied for first, he added, followed by the American International Group, Northwestern Mutual, ING, MetLife and Prudential.

The Axa campaign includes commercials in which everyday people demonstrate how “when you plan for tomorrow, it helps you live for today.” Print and online ads depict facial worry lines as a result of stress over questions such as “What if I outlive my money?” And so-called out-of-home ads, which appear in places like the steps in subway stations, bear this message: “Reach your financial destination one small step at a time. Axa. Redefining/standards.” Publicis Kaplan Thaler is part of the Publicis North America unit of Publicis Worldwide, whose Paris office handles the worldwide creative account for Axa. Don Blashford, executive vice president and worldwide account director at Publicis Kaplan Thaler, described the new ads as “a big, honking consumer campaign” that was the result of “more than a year’s worth of heavy lifting, understanding what the consumer needs.”

“We had one line in our creative brief, that people get so overwhelmed,” Mr. Blashford said. “It’s not apathy, it’s ‘There are so many choices, it’s so complex, I won’t do anything at all.’ ”

The campaign takes no note of the name change. “We frankly did not want to spend a lot of time, money, energy announcing” it, Mr. Blashford said, because it

was more important to discuss the idea of Axa's products as a solution to the problem of paralysis over financial decisions.

Besides, he added, "it wasn't like we were going from Axa Equitable to the Acme Insurance Company."

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