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## Branding Experts to Airbnb: Ride the 'Vagina Logo' Buzz Accidental Rorschach test may be genius By Christopher Heine

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Technology



What appeared to be a [run-of-the-mill rebranding story yesterday](#) with Airbnb has taken a strange turn toward either memories of elementary school anatomy/sex-ed class or pre-Giuliani Times Square. Indeed, the Internet had a lot of fun with what the two b's in the brand might actually stand for.

The digital home renting service unveiled a new logo called [Belo](#) on Wednesday that generated [considerable](#) blogosphere [chatter](#) around whether the mark looked like [female or male private parts](#). (Vagina, though, seems to be [the prevailing choice](#).) More than likely, that's not what Airbnb intended.

What's more, Freelancer.com jumped on the often-humorous development by [starting an Airbnb logo redesign contest](#) with a \$500 prize. At the time of this posting, 630 submissions had been turned in. And original Web series [It Could Be Worse](#) has purchased Promoted Tweets around the "Airbnb vagina" phrase.

San Francisco-based Airbnb declined to comment on the brouhaha. So Adweek asked branding experts what the tech player should do next.

"You know what they say, beauty/filth is in the mind of the beholder," said Robert Passikoff, psychologist and founder of the [Brand Keys](#). "As to re-design, I'd suggest not to. Whether it's balls, a butt, breasts, or a vagina, it's their logo [that] seems extendable. And it's doing exactly what a logo is supposed to do—get attention and identify a company."

Ben Hordell, partner, [DXagency](#), added: "The question of whether the logo is sexual or not is the beauty of Airbnb's redesign. They serve a global community from all walks of life, and at the core of their brand is a sense of fun, adventure and even promiscuity. I initially saw the letter 'A.' But after more exploration, I saw all sorts of human anatomy."

Well, should Airbnb redesign—again?

"Absolutely not," Hordell said. "The world is talking about the brand. What more can you ask for? People will seek out the true meaning and story behind the logo and the brand."

Sam Becker, creative director at Brand Union, had a more nuanced reaction to Airbnb's situation.

"There are a million ways to handle something like this badly," he said. "Ignore it, and you'll appear out of touch. Deny it, and you'll alienate yourselves from your community, adding fuel to the fire. So far, Airbnb has done an excellent job responding to these observations with lighthearted acknowledgement. They've also continued to back the brand with confidence. Showing any weakness at this point would be tantamount to giving up. Once past this logo

adolescence, the mark will have a chance to stand for everything Airbnb and its customers want it to."

Becker also mentioned how Airbnb was temporarily embroiled on Wednesday in a controversy about [whether it had stolen its new logo](#) from Automation Anywhere, a small tech player. But the two companies quickly put that notion to rest with [a joint statement](#).

Meanwhile, logo-gate has created plenty of comedians.

"This is like the story of the psychiatrist giving a patient an ink blot test," Passikoff from Brand Keys said. "Every time the [doctor] shows the patient another blot, the patient tells the doctors it portrays some sexual act. The [doctor] finally says, 'Everything seems to remind you of sex.' And the patient says, 'What do you mean? You're the one with the dirty pictures!'"

Check out several of the more clever reactions from Twitter users below. To be clear, the first one is a fictitious creation—TechCrunch did not post such an article.