Marketing Doctor

Marketing Check-up

Intel

As of September 24, 2024

Condition: Critical

A famous sticker, a lost lead

Intel pulled off one of marketing's great tricks: it made PC buyers care about a part they would never see. The Intel Inside sticker told people the computer had the best chip in it. In 2024 that promise was harder to keep. Intel had fallen behind in AI and manufacturing, and some of its processors had a stability problem. This check-up looks at what the brand promised, where the proof went and what Intel is doing now.

Key takeaways

- Intel Inside, launched in 1991 with a $250 million first investment, turned a hidden component into a reason to choose one computer over another.
- An ingredient brand borrows its value from the ingredient. When Intel lost its lead in manufacturing and AI chips, the sticker lost some of its meaning.
- In 2024 Intel said some 13th and 14th Gen desktop processors were unstable and extended their warranties by two years, a direct hit to a logo that stood for quality.
- Renaming its chips Core Ultra did not close the gap. Intel is counting on its next manufacturing process to "regain process technology leadership."

Marketing health check

Area	Finding
Ingredient brand	Famous. Intel Inside is still widely recognized.
Product proof	Weakening. Process leadership is now something to regain.
AI	Behind. Nvidia leads the chips that power AI.
Product trust	Dented by unstable processors and extended warranties.
Naming	Changed to Core Ultra, but labels don't fix chips.

Timeline

When	What happened
1991	Intel launches Intel Inside with a $250 million initial investment.
End 1992	More than 500 PC makers have signed on.
2017 to 2018	Intel discusses buying a stake in OpenAI and decides against it.
Mar 2021	Pat Gelsinger launches IDM 2.0 and a foundry business for outside customers.
Jun 2023	Intel drops the "i" from Core processor names and moves to Core Ultra.
2023	The foundry business posts a $7 billion operating loss.
Jul 2024	Intel confirms instability in some desktop processors and extends warranties.
Aug 2024	Intel announces cuts of more than 15% of its workforce.
Sep 2024	Intel plans to make its foundry an independent subsidiary and wins custom chip work for Amazon Web Services.

What happened: a brand built on the best chip

Intel launched the Intel Inside program in 1991. It subsidized PC makers that put the logo on their machines and in their ads, starting with what Intel's own history calls an unprecedented $250 million initial investment. By the end of 1992 more than 500 PC makers had signed on. The logo told buyers that the part inside came from the company that defined the state of the art. That is brand building in its plainest form.

The promise depended on the product staying ahead. Reuters reported that in 2017 and 2018 Intel discussed buying a stake in OpenAI and decided against it, while Nvidia went on to lead the chips that power AI. In manufacturing, Intel's new foundry business posted an operating loss of $7 billion in 2023.

Then came a product trust problem. In July 2024 Intel said "elevated operating voltage" was causing instability in some 13th and 14th Gen desktop processors, and it extended their warranties by two years.

The diagnosis: the sticker outlived the lead

- **An ingredient brand borrows its value from the ingredient.** Intel Inside meant "the best chip is in here." When others led, the sticker said less.
- **Recognition is not preference.** Strong positioning rests on a claim customers can check. Intel's own executives now describe process leadership as something to regain.
- **A quality brand with a quality problem.** Unstable processors hit the very promise the logo was built on.
- **Renaming is not a fix.** Intel dropped the "i" from its Core names in 2023 and moved to Core Ultra, but buyers judge the chip, not the label.

The treatment under way

Intel is fixing the product first. On September 16, 2024, chief executive Pat Gelsinger told staff that Intel would make its foundry an independent subsidiary inside of Intel, and announced plans to make an AI fabric chip and a custom Xeon 6 chip for Amazon Web Services. He describes the launch of Intel 18A, its next manufacturing process, as the step "to regain process technology leadership."

That is the right order. The choices that matter are where Intel competes in AI and whether outside customers trust its factories, a strategy question before it is a tactics question. Advertising can wait until there is a new lead to talk about.

The result: a famous name under pressure

In August 2024 Intel reported second-quarter revenue down 1% and said it would cut more than 15% of its workforce. Gelsinger called the quarter "disappointing." Weeks later the Wall Street Journal reported that Qualcomm had approached Intel about a possible takeover.

The Intel Inside logo is still on millions of computers. What it promises is now something Intel has to prove again.

Lessons for your marketing

1. A brand can only promise what the product keeps delivering. Intel Inside worked because buyers believed what was inside.
2. If your brand borrows its value from a feature or ingredient, guard that lead as your most important marketing asset.
3. When the product slips, fix it first and say plainly what went wrong.
4. Don't expect a new name to do the work of a better product.
5. Keep testing where demand is moving, even when a new market looks too early to pay off.

The doctor will see you now.

Book a free marketing check-up at marketingdoctor.ca/contact. We'll examine your marketing, show you what's holding growth back and prescribe what to fix first.

Sources

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