

In search of the perfect
IDENTITY?
by Brad Haima

THE GREATEST LOGO IN THE WORLD

If you were asked to choose the greatest logo in the world, chances are you may or may not select one of the corporate identities below depending on what you believe a quality corporate identity to be.



Over the years, many business owners (and graphic designers) have made serious mistakes when designing their logo. These mistakes may appear to be minor when the company is starting up, but in the end, can often end up costing a great deal of money to correct.

The following article will hopefully help to educate you about the attributes of a quality logo and to guide you through the process of design and implementation. I have shared some simple tips that will help you to know what to look for and how to avoid some pitfalls that many companies experience.

Less is always more

For the most part, the logos above are not complicated, flashy or colorful; in fact they are quite the opposite. Most of these images are so easily distinguishable that we can name the companies and the products associated with them without seeing the company name written beside the mark. These simple logos have allowed these huge companies to build strong brand awareness all over the world. This simplicity allows advertisers and marketing agencies to use the logo for a variety of reasons without negatively impacting the advertisement the logo will be shown on. Whether it is in print ads, packaging, on signs, websites or television advertising, these logos do what many fail to do. The odd thing is that it doesn't really matter if we like them or not. The simple recognition forces us to associate these images with the company regardless of the media used to communicate the product.

What makes a great logo?

Your logo should also be flexible enough to be easily recognizable at a very small size, or at a very large size.

If these logos would be considered great, then what makes them more noticeable and better than many identities that we don't remember?

The key factors in all of these logos is that regardless of their use, the graphic communicates a consistent image of the company it belongs to regardless of the visual media it is applied to. A good logo should communicate the same image in a black and white ad as it does in a full color television commercial. If it fails to do this then you probably don't have a very good corporate image.

Your logo should also be flexible enough to be easily recognizable at a very small size, or at a very large size. This allows your logo to build consistent brand recognition on a billboard or on a business card. You would be amazed at how many poorly designed logos cannot pass this simple test.

In a typical day we are being bombarded by hundreds of different logos and advertisements.

The next time you are out, try analyzing the various ads, and signs you see as you are driving around. Can you differentiate between the good effective brands and the ineffective ones? You might surprise yourself that with a little bit of knowledge you will start to see why the successful companies brands work while other poorly branded companies struggle.

If your company is looking to invest in a quality corporate image then it is not only important that you understand the following rules when developing your brand, it may be the difference between a brand that succeeds or fails.

I learned a simple yet very important lesson from my good friend and business coach Mark Wardell a number of years ago. We were working on a number of different market strategy ideas for my company and he said, "Brad, we can do a lot of different things with your company, let's just make sure we are doing them on purpose". It is simple advice like this that can leave a lasting impression on how you make decisions for your company. It is like the old saying...'without a plan, how can you know where you are going?'

size comparison

KEYPAK 

KEYPAK 



PLANNING YOUR IDENTITY

01 | The big picture

Branding is about clarity and purpose, not only about the product it is selling for a particular point in time. For example: Let's say that your company currently sells a specialty product or service. You hire a designer and describe in detail what you are selling and what you hope to see in your logo. The designer then creates an icon or mark that incorporates that product directly into the new identity. This seems reasonable enough when developing the logo right? Well, this is a common mistake many companies make. Remember a good logo is one that is adaptable for today and tomorrow. If your product or service changes it should not kill your complete brand in the process. How well would the Nike "Swoosh" work for selling golf clubs if it had been incorporated into a running shoe icon? The truth is that it wouldn't. The reason Nike can use their current logo mark to sell shoes, golf clubs, clothing and possibly many more products in the future is because their brand is flexible and adaptable.

02 | The golden rule

A logo is created in order to steer your customer towards your brand. What is a brand? Your brand is not just a product or image, but an experience that your customer has when dealing with your company or your companies product. Think about McDonald's Restaurants for a moment. At first you may think that the brand is all about a BigMac hamburger, yet if you ask a child under the age of 10 they will more often say that McDonald's is all about having fun. The best part about this example is that a child doesn't understand branding or logos, yet they truthfully express what they love about McDonald's—pure and simple fun. The food may be a big part of the brand, but all successful brands have the ability to tie an emotional experience together with their product.



An example of how the McDonald's brand delivery process may flow something like this:

Client: kids

The Golden Arches logo steers the younger customer towards their brand by using the big yellow M sign and a secondary reference to a colorful playground. The parent is forced to drive in to the restaurant (rather than using the drive-thru) in order to please their child (and to stop the screaming). Once inside the child is tempted by the different Happy Meals—all which come with a toy—which only helps to increase the brand experience. Once the food has been purchased the family can enjoy the play area and complete their brand experience at McDonald's.



Client: adults

For an older McDonald's customer it may be a much simpler process with a completely different purchasing decision. The Golden Arches logo steers the adult customer towards their brand by using the big yellow M sign and a secondary reference to a drive-thru window, or perhaps a giant poster of a new food item. For an adult the brand experience revolves around value and convenience more than the fun experience, but the logo works just as well for both types of customers.

Regardless of the tactics used, the golden rule is to make sure your logo is leading your customer to a brand experience, then through this experience, delivering your product. It is through this process that your customer experiences all that your company offers in a clear and concise way.

03 | The psychology of color

In point number 2, I made a number of references to the big "yellow" M that McDonalds uses for its logo. Why do you think some logos are yellow, others blue and some are red? Just a coincidence? Not likely. Some large corporations spend thousands of dollars on market research in order to determine how their customer demographic will respond to certain colors. Many logos will focus on color as much as shape. Colors can have a lasting impact on how we view quality, value, reliability and industry. For example deep blues communicate a sense of reliability and solid reputation. You will see dark blues being used quite often by financial institutions, law offices and accountants. This is because they want to send out a message that says, you can trust us. We've been around forever... let's do business.



Other colors like bright red have a completely different impact on us. Red adds an extreme sense of urgency and attention. Many fast food outlets and gas stations use reds in order to communicate a message that says, "if you do business with us, you'll be in and out in a hurry." Bright yellows on the other hand are probably one of the most amazing of all colors in how they affect us psychologically. Many of us remember the No-name brand products from the late 70's and early 80's. Rows of lemon yellow cans would line the grocery store shelves advertising a simple product like "BEANS" or you could find bright yellow bags of "Potato Chips". There were many products but the common theme was the simple use of the color yellow. The reason yellow was used is because it conveys a sense of value or a good bargain. Again, you may remember that yellow is a key feature of many fast food chains including McDonald's. The message... "Get in quick for a cheap lunch."



A common trend that has been used with new technology companies is the use of brighter almost fluorescent colors. Acid green, bright blue and hot magenta are all the rage with hi-tech companies. Intel and Apple have used new colors in their computer chip and iPod advertising which tends to attract the younger generation by being big and bold.

Look at different logos today and it's easy to see old and new color trends. Some companies have no idea how their color is affecting their customers while other companies obviously do. Where does your company fit in the world of color? Just remember color, like the logo itself is used to draw the customer towards the brand experience while associating your company with your product.

Don't make the mistake of using the wrong color only because you prefer blue more than yellow. Doing so you may do more damage to your brand than good. Personal preference typically should never be the deciding factor in determining your color choice. Your color should be chosen for a specific reason because it positively affects your clients and effectively draws them in.

WINNING RULES OF LOGO DESIGN

1. Your logo should be clean and simple. It should be void of complex lines, gradients or blended colors. If your logo does use gradients, then a simple flat version should be created.
(See sample logo below)



2. Use a simple color scheme. Usually one or 2 colors at the most. If the logo uses full color, then there should always be a single color alternative.
(See sample logo above)

3. Use a simple color scheme. Usually one or 2 colors at the most. If the logo uses full color, then there should always be a single color alternative.

4. The logo should be just as recognizable in black and white as it is in color.
5. Your logo should scale. It should be able to reduce to at least 1 in. square and enlarge up to at least 2 ft. square without loss of recognition.
6. A smartly designed logo doesn't necessarily mean complicated. It is a creative icon coupled with clear type that will set your logo apart—simplicity with a unique twist goes a long way.



Can you spot the arrow in the above logo?



WHERE WILL YOUR LOGO BE USED?

An important question you should ask yourself is “where will my logo be used”? Will it only be used on your website? Will it have national exposure on signs, print advertising or television? This important question needs to be answered early on in your planning stage in order to avoid higher printing costs, or problems with sizing.

A number of years ago, the fast food chains of Mr.Submarine and Panagopolous Pizza both decided to change their corporate names in order to refine their brands and to also reduce costs incurred by the odd spelling and/or horizontal shape of their logos. The names were changed to Mr. Sub and Panago in order to allow their corporate identities to be more flexible and more recognizable. This change reduced the length horizontally and not only allowed their logo to fit better on advertising materials, but also saved large amounts of money on signs because they could now make smaller signs with fewer letters.



Even though this change could have seriously impacted any existing advertising already in place, the risk was worth the cost for both companies. Imagine the expenses incurred in order to change stationery, signage, print advertising, websites, television commercials and other advertising media. It must have been huge, but in the big picture, the brand was what was most important. These two large companies were lucky to be able to afford to do these changes—a smaller company with less disposable income may not have fared as well.

Even though these companies didn’t make the correct choice when the originally developed their logos, they realized it was necessary to do these changes in order to salvage their brands. The main lesson to be learned is that many potential pit falls can be avoided in the original planning phase. With simple forethought and proper planning you should be able to anticipate how your logo will be used and avoid any additional expenses due to unnecessary adjustments down the road.





FLEXIBILITY IS KEY



The logo above shows how a simple one color logo can adapt to different environments. Whether in color, black and white or as a 3D piece of artwork, the image still maintains its original identity and is recognizable.

The logo below is restricted because it's original design relies on special effects and/or gradients which can pose problems when the logo is restricted to a single color. In full color it looks fine but once it is reduced to a black only image, the identity loses impact and visual direction. The colors blend together and struggle to communicate.



TIPS ABOUT LOGO USE

If you are planning on developing a full color logo, be prepared to pay more. A full color logo will add significant cost in almost all areas, so be prepared to absorb the additional cost associated with color.

If you will be using your logo on signs or clothing make sure the design has strong cuttable lines. Most sign and clothing companies use computers to reproduce your logo, so simple lines allow your logo to reproduce better and be more cost effective.

Once your logo is finished make sure you ask the design firm to create a "Rules of Use" document. It may cost you more, but this sheet can be used to inform advertisers and designers what your expectations are for your identities use. The design company should also provide you with a copy of the logo in multiple digital file formats. Many companies use different programs to process your collateral materials, so having a number of file types will allow you to give your printer or advertisers exactly what they need.

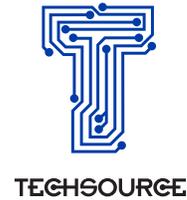


SAMPLE LOGO DESIGNS





SAMPLE LOGO DESIGNS



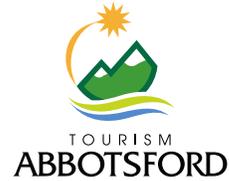


SAMPLE LOGO DESIGNS





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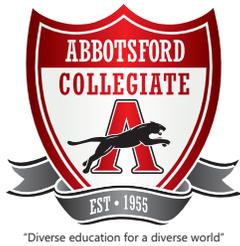


SAMPLE LOGO DESIGNS





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