

Logos

A logo is an identifying symbol used to advertise and promote an organization, event, product, or service. Usually, such symbols combine images and text in a distinctive manner (such as Nike and its “swoosh” mark). When consisting solely of stylized text (Coca-Cola, for instance), such symbols are called logotypes or wordmarks. A logo’s goal is to represent your organization, event, product or service. When people see it, they should not only know what it is, but they should also know that it stands for you and how you want to be remembered (and you do want to be remembered).

The most effective logos (McDonald’s, for example) are instantly recognizable and evoke an emotional response. Well-designed logos work well at many sizes, and often in one color. A logo is not only a visual representation of your company but often also gives insight into how your business is run. Capturing the complexity of an organization is the goal of branding—which includes your organization’s overall presentation, of which the logo is the most important piece.

As you can guess, creating a logo requires some homework on your part. The best designer in the world will not be able to create a logo that represents you are if you unsure who you are. For more information about this, see our white paper titled *Branding*.

Do You Need a Logo?

Consumers are becoming increasingly sophisticated about logos. They see more and more each year, and they know which are good and which are not. A quality logo is more likely to represent a quality organization, and more likely to attract the business of an increasingly savvy public.

A quality logo must:

- Identify your organization, product, or service;
- Differentiate your organization from similar ones;
- Communicate fundamental information, such as mission, value, service, or product;
- Represent your commitment to quality by being high quality itself.

Larger organizations recognize that their logo is the cornerstone of their entire branding effort. It can successfully separate them from the competition in the public’s minds, especially when products and services may not actually differ much (for example, Coke vs. Pepsi).

How important is it to have a well-designed logo? I believe that for smaller organizations it is important, but not vital. Many smaller organizations don’t have the resources to spend on a logo. If you have to do it yourself, use a simple and consistent naming convention. Avoid a logo that is complicated, hard to read, or garish. Don’t get fancy with colors and design; keep it simple. Choose a type font that is clean and clear, and use it in no more than two colors. Also, use the same font and color whenever you use your name (except in written copy). Don’t vary it for any reason. Be sure to give it some white space, meaning do not clutter it with a long tagline or slogan, pictures, or writing. Don’t change your new logo for a year or two, or until you have the time and funds to revisit it.

Naming

Naming is also important, and more difficult to do well than most people realize. If you take one thing from this short section on naming, let it be to avoid acronyms. They are easily confused with similar names, say nothing about an organization, and are ubiquitous. To come up with a good name, you must assess your needs, research competitors and positioning, brainstorm, test, and perhaps hire

a consultant. The payoff is enormous since your name is your most valuable asset.

Logo Elements

Assuming that you have a great name, consider these essential elements of strong logo design:

Sustainability You don't want to change your logo often. Frequent exposure to your logo is the only way that it will be remembered, and "frequent" means a lot more often than you think. You live with your logo every day, and it is tempting to think that others see it as much as you do, but that is never the truth. You want a logo that can survive for years, and hopefully decades with a few facelifts. This means that you should avoid fads. You can't go wrong with clean, clear, and classic.

Distinctiveness Clean, clear, and classic do not equal boring. Many organizations choose logos that are similar to others in their field. Sometimes this makes sense, since visuals can communicate quickly what your business is—such as using a pizza logo for a pizzeria. But the key is making even a common image your own. If you want to incorporate a pizza in your pizzeria logo, do it in a unique way. Avoid ubiquitous images, like modified swooshes, globes, or hands, unless you can do it in a truly creative way. The goal is (usually) not craziness, but creativity that captures the individuality of an organization in a memorable way. You will want to research both your name and logo to make sure that they are not being used already. Assuming that is the case, you will want to explore trademarks and copyrights, which are outlined in more detail in our Trademarks, Patents and Copyrights white paper.

Appeal Your logo must attract people, which is another reason why it must be distinct. You want to appeal to people who already know you, and more importantly, to those who may not. Measuring appeal requires feedback and testing.

Image How do you want to come across to clients—as creative or conservative? Consider the artwork as well as the colors and font that you choose. Look at logos in your field. What are the successful ones? Why do they work?

Clarity Clean and clear logos work best. A confusing logo, or one that is hard to read, is a turn off. Your logo must work under a variety of circumstances, such as full color for print, color for multimedia, and black and white for faxes and one-color ads.

Consistency You must have a guide that accompanies the logo. This guide dictates the use of color, font, and spacing, and usually shows how the logo looks on business cards, stationery, brochures, signs, and Web sites, for example.

Logo Development Process

The development process varies by communications firm and depth of research required, but in general it follows a path like this. You will meet with the designer, who will ask questions about your project's goals, and probably gather information about the history of your organization and its mission and values. The designer will further research your field and competitors. It is a good idea for you to do research on your own. Take a look at logos both within and outside your field and compile a list of what you like and dislike. Analyze what you do or do not like about each—color? style? concept? This information can be of service to the designer. Be sure to provide the designer with any things to avoid, like a particular symbol or color.

To qualify the last point, good designers are that precisely because they do not restrict their thinking. A designer will probably ignore your parameters at the initial sketching phase to make sure they do not miss any ideas, and may present you with sketches that you were not expecting. However, if there are ideas/colors/images you simply cannot consider, do let your designer know these are non-negotiable.

The designer will then work on sketches. If you are working with a firm, they may have several people meeting and putting together ideas. They will consider a very wide range of possible ideas, and make dozens of sketches. A few will be selected and presented to you. You will discuss these concept sketches—usually

roughly drawn and in black and white—and (hopefully) choose one or two solid directions. Next the designer will refine and sharpen the idea in concept and look, and explore appropriate colors. By the third round you will not only further refine the logo, but also you may start to explore how the logo will be used on signs, business cards, brochures, and the Web.

Feedback and testing can take place at any point in this process. It can be as informal as asking colleagues and friends for their opinions or as formal as presenting finished-looking samples using your logo to organized groups of potential users. Gather as much feedback and as many test results as you can, but no more than three people should analyze the feedback and make the final decision. All feedback is not equal, and you can kill a great idea by pandering to too many interests and having a committee make decisions.

In the end you will have three basic versions of the logo: color for print, color for the Web, and black and white. These will be provided in a variety of electronic file formats. You should also receive from your designer (or create for yourself) a guide specifying how the logo is to be used.

The entire process will take from six weeks to six months, determined largely by how quickly you respond to the designer and whether you are testing potential logos.