

What Makes a Good Logo?

Advice from professional graphic designers

David Airey

When it comes to seeing a logo that makes you wonder, “Why didn’t I think of that?”, what exactly is it about the design that gives you that impression?

There are four critical elements that can be seen in every great logo design:

1. It must be **describable**
2. It must be **memorable**
3. It must be **effective without colour**
4. It must be **scalable** i.e. effective when just an inch in size

Points 1 and 2 go hand in hand, because if you can’t describe what a logo looks like then how will you be able to remember it?

Point 3 is important because colour is secondary to the shape. Adding colour to your logo should be left to the very end of the process, because if the mark doesn’t work in black only, no amount of colour will rescue the design.

Point 4 is vital for things such as office stationery (pens, pin badges etc.). All those little things that people often forget about.

Christopher M. Knight

One of the most important marketing tools is an effective logo. It provides an easily recognizable identity for your business or organization. It not only communicates who you are but what you are. Therefore, every business or organization contemplating adopting a logo should know the criteria that make for an effective logo.

1. The first characteristic of an effective logo is that it has immediate impact. Your logo should catch the viewer's eye and hold the viewer's attention. Consider the logo of Apple Computers; the graphic apple with a stylized bite taken out of it has immediate product and corporate identification with consumers. An effective logo "grabs" attention.
2. In addition to impact, a good logo must be good to look at. An effective logo should have the look and feel of "art", if a logo is not appealing to the eye it will defeat its purpose - attracting attention and providing effective identification.
3. A good logo must also copy well. In any business or organization, the use of a logo becomes ubiquitous - it is ever-present on buildings, letterhead, signs, products, promotional items, etc. A

good logo will be as effective on a business card as it is on a billboard - small scale and large scale uses. Will the logo still be recognizable printed on the barrel of a ballpoint pen?

4. This brings us to the next characteristic of an effective logo the logo must create or evoke a positive image. "Branding" is a common marketing principle based on product identification growing out of identifying a product with a positive image and a sense of goodwill.
5. Another characteristic of a good logo is that it accurately represents the organization or business. If a company or organization wants to project a serious, professional image, the logo must look professional. A humorous or whimsical logo would be counterproductive to projecting professionalism.
6. The best logos are the most memorable logos. The Apple Computer "Apple" logo and the McDonald's Hamburgers "golden arches" are great logos because they are memorable to the point of being iconic.
7. A logo identifies a business or organization so it would be counterproductive to change it because it did not wear well over time. Do you remember what we said about "branding" earlier in this article? Companies that have invested vast amounts of money, time, and effort to establish their "brand" do not change it frequently for a reason. Make sure your logo will be "timeless" for the same reason.

The Logo Factory

- **Uniqueness**
 - Your logo should be able to stand out as completely **'yours'**. It's surprising how many times we get asked to **'copy'** logos - we've even had clients request a 'version' of **The Logo Factory** house. Not a good idea. On top of the potential legal complications nothing screams 'unprofessional' like a logo that's looks even remotely like someone else's. Do not copy. I'll say it again. **Do. Not. Copy.**
- **Timeless**
 - Every few years there's a trend, or fad, that new logos seems to embrace. A few years ago it was the 'swoosh' - made logos all hi-tech and 'internety'. Trouble is, **everybody** jumped on that bandwagon and the treatment rapidly became hackneyed and trite. Few years hence, and we've got lots of people stuck with out of date designs. The latest design logo trend is so-called 2.0, a technique that (like a lot of design trends) can be traced back to **Apple Computers**. Take your logo, add a 'gel' treatment, give it glassy reflection at the bottom and you're all set. (hey - the 3D version of our house could qualify!). Web 2.0 is **still** going strong, but I'll go out on a limb and say it will be yesterday's news by end of summer.
- **Gimmick Free**

- Special FX and filters are usually applied, by inexperienced designers, to logos that are 'missing something'. Trouble is, what the logo is generally missing is any design integrity, and adding bevels, lens flares and drop shadows is the logo design version of '**putting lipstick on a pig**'. While it certainly shows how cool your latest design software is, it doesn't do much for the professionalism of your mark. Such treatments are fine for glamour shots (used as display pieces on brochures and the like) but used on the standard version of your logo, are only going to cause grief down the road, especially when it comes to application of your new logo on typical business material. Your logo should be as technically simple as possible for adaptability, which just happened to be number 4 on our list...
- **Adaptability**
 - Over the life of your company, you'll want to plaster your logo over **everything** you send out. That's the point of having a logo in the first place. In order to do this, you'll need a logo that's adaptable to every occasion and while they may look 'pretty', the design gimmicks we just talked about render your logo impractical for many of these uses. Some of these uses - checks, FAXes, embroidery, newspaper ads, invoices, letterheads, etc. Your new logo has to work on all of them. You'll also need a quality black and white version that can reproduce as a [halftone grayscale](#), or in the cases of low-resolution BW reproduction, [a linear version](#).
- **Scalability**
 - When using your logo, you'll need to be able to use it small. Real small. Postage stamp size. Classic example of this - over the years, I've designed a load of sports event posters that feature logos from dozens of event sponsors. Space only permits the logos to be featured as very small images and it's always the simpler logos that stand out when viewed from a distance. The cluttered logos aren't recognizable to any great degree and the sponsors are probably wasting their money, especially if inclusion on the poster is the only benefit of their sponsorship. When it comes to scalability, the text portion of the logo is the most important, as that's the piece you want people to remember. Scrawny, sickly text doesn't read very well at half an inch high.
- **Color is Secondary**
 - Colors are extremely important. Using consistent corporate colors will become part of your brand - that's understood. However, when it comes to the design of your logo, color must always be secondary. A logo that requires color to 'hold' the design together is fine when reproduction is optimal - websites, 4 color process printing and what have you - but even then only if the size is appropriate as well. Logos that rely too much on color tend to blend together when used small (see above) and unless the contrast between the two colors is pronounced, will be a grey mess if used in black and white. As for low-resolution reproduction (FAXES, checks, etc) you can forget about readability

completely - logos that use color as a design cornerstone usually come out as black blotches on a FAX transmission and with all their money, banks still haven't figured out how to print a decent check.

- **Appropriate Aspect Ratio & Footprint**

- The aspect ratio of a logo is the relationship between a logo's height and it's width. Bottom line, you don't want a logo that's too tall, or too wide. Square-ish' is always best as this allows the maximum adaptability of a logo, especially when it's being used in conjunction with other artwork. The 'footprint' of a logo refers to the amount of physical space that's required to place a logo on any page. If the footprint is 'wonky' - trailing design elements 'poke' outside the footprint - it can greatly affect the size that the design can be used at, as well as the visual impact of same. See [here for more on aspect ratios](#) and how they control the use of your logo.

Graphics for Business (Book)

What Makes a Good Logo?

- The most successful business logos share valuable characteristics. Here are some of the most important.

A successful logo can't be just creative or clever. Because a logo ends up being an important guest at many occasions, it absolutely must perform and behave well no matter what.

It is a tricky balancing act, but one that you can achieve. All you have to do is consider what makes a logo effective. Make sure your design follows these guidelines.

1 It Is Simple

The "too busy" logo is a roadblock to communication, so don't crowd it with stuff: green, flag, fairway, golfer, peninsula, borders, circles, curving type. It's easy to get carried away, but you'll create a stronger image with fewer pieces.



2 It Is Bold

Fine lines make lovely illustrations but poor logos because 1) they're difficult to see, and 2) a fine line will often break up or even disappear when reproduced.



Although the two logos are rather similar, visualize them on vehicles moving through city traffic. You'd—blink!—miss the first one.

3 It Works Well in All Sizes

This one is often overlooked by designers who make presentations on large format paper: The logo that looks great at billboard size must also work on a business card.



Typically, a logo designed at a large size has too much detail to be clear when reduced. Note how the lines crowd together at left. A good solution is to build a second logo with less detail for use in small sizes (right).

4 It Is Appropriate for the Business

This seems like common sense, but in the throes of artistic rapture, common sense often goes out the window. Make sure the whimsical cropduster that was so much fun to draw is suitable for the client, in this case, a regional commuter airline.



5 It Is Distinctive

Don't settle for the ordinary (let other companies be ordinary). Your company is unique—that is, it has a distinctive culture and market presence; capture this intelligently and thoughtfully.



Circles Are Strong Design Elements

A circle is a familiar focal point which the eye can interpret with little effort. Its soft edges are more often pleasing than those of angular squares and triangles. Cousin to the circle is the ellipse.



Avoid Trendy Typefaces

Unless you're in the fashion business, the type you choose for your corporate identity should still be suitable years from now. Laser printer standards—Times, Palatino, Helvetica—are always appropriate; in general, low-key is best.



Avoid Extremely Tall or Wide Logos

Odd shapes are hard to fit into common spaces—business cards, advertisements, and so forth—and as a rule they aren't as pleasing, either. A good proportion for a logo is roughly 3 units by 2 units tall, about the ratio of a TV screen (a 1-to-1 ratio also works quite well).



Design Logo and Name as a Unit

If the company name will be part of the design—especially popular on signage—look for ways to integrate the two.



Andrew Fandango

1. An effective logo is a reflection of the business it symbolizes. It will certainly not 'make' a company, but plays a vital role for building an emotional connection with the viewer.
2. The logo should be clear and simple yet full of substance and significance. It may not immediately spell out what the company does, but should make absolute sense.



The logo that smiles from A to Z, revealing the personality of the world's biggest online retailer.



An arrow between the E and x suggests speed and promptness. Subliminal for some, obvious for others the company has major kudos with designers.

3. As subjective as aesthetic appeal may be, solid design principles must be adhered to. There is such a thing as bad design, and bad grammar for that matter (apologies).
4. Timelessness (something that stands the test of time), staying with the company as it grows. Relying on trends, or what's 'cool' will result in a logo that looks dated and most likely need replacing soon after.



Rob Janoff's iconic logo shape remains unchanged, an apple with a 'byte' taken out of the right side.

5. Meticulous research. The company, it's industry, competition and of course the audience all need to be explored so that the end product is soundly designed.
6. Uniqueness that will keep the mark distinct and memorable. Instant recognition is, in the end, the holy grail. Let's not get lost in the crowd.



In 1972 Paul Rand designed what is now one of the most recognized logotypes. Horizontal stripes are used to suggest speed and dynamism.



The peacock was first introduced to indicate Technicolor and was later refined by Chermayeff & Geismar.

7. Ability to adapt; screen, print, light, dark, multicolor, monochrome, large and small the logo must perform under any condition.