



he new CEO called a meeting with the company's publicist and the designer. "This company needs to work on its image," he announced. Looking at the publicist, he said, "First, I want a brochure. You've got about 3,000 words to sum up what the company is all about, where we come from, and where we're heading. Use words our clients'll understand. Make it speak to them. Make it current. And don't worry, you can change it next quarter."

Then he turned to the designer. "From you we need a logo. Basically, you do the same thing as the publicist. Only you get to do it in one little symbol. A symbol that will be seen by a hundred times more people than will ever read that brochure. And, by the way," he added, "I want something that'll last forever."

Marks of excellence

what logos do and how they do it

The preceding story is fictional, but the point it makes is very real: logos can be a designer's biggest challenge. They are every business's visual emissary. A logo must be immediately recognizable, must be able to be sized to fit everything from a business card to a billboard, and must convey the company's intended message. A logo may relay a very broad message, involving intangibles such as image and mood, or may speak directly about a particular product or service. The greatest logos are powerful, striking, symbolic; they cut through language barriers, communicating through shape and color. The constant presence of a logo, placed on stationery, packages, signs, ads, and T-shirts, breeds familiarity between a company and its public.

If you'd like to feel more prepared the next time a logo-design project walks in your door, it may be helpful to learn a little about the history of logo design, and then to look at some examples and what makes them work.

by ANISTATIA A MILLER & JARED M. BROWN

The search for identity

The practice of synthesizing business or personal images into abstract symbols is as ancient as the desire to personalize possessions and individual achievements. For millennia, distinguishing marks have represented such declarations as “I belong,” “I own this,” and “I made this.”

Creative pride inspired Transylvanian potters to inscribe their personal marks on the clay bowls and wine vessels they produced 7,000 years ago.

This consciousness also stimulated ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman artisans to carve their initials or acronyms on their creations. Ancient religious sects created some of the world’s best-known logos—the Christian cross, the Judaic Star of David, and the Islamic crescent moon.

In the Middle Ages, royal seals and coats of arms depicted the lineage, aspirations, or virtues of a king or nobleman. These seals appeared on clothing, objects, entryways, even great dining halls; emblazoned on flags, armor, and shields, they reminded soldiers who and what they were fighting for. And, just as in today’s business world, acquisitions or other changes were sometimes reflected in the “logo”—for example, King Edward III of England added French fleurs-de-lis to the royal seal around 1350, visually expressing his new claim to the throne of France.

By the Renaissance, the notion of the “trademark” was emerging—a symbol associated with a certain craft or guild. Masons (stoneworkers) and other craftsmen adopted heraldic trademarks as displays of their qualifications. The caduceus on a physician’s sign assured patients that their doctor was thoroughly educated and lived up to his craft guild’s code. Trademarks flooded the 16th-century European government offices whose job it was to register and protect each guild’s symbol.

The Industrial Revolution’s burgeoning supply of manufactured and imported goods increased the competition for public attention. By the late 19th century, business was booming and trademarks were firmly rooted in the corporate consciousness.

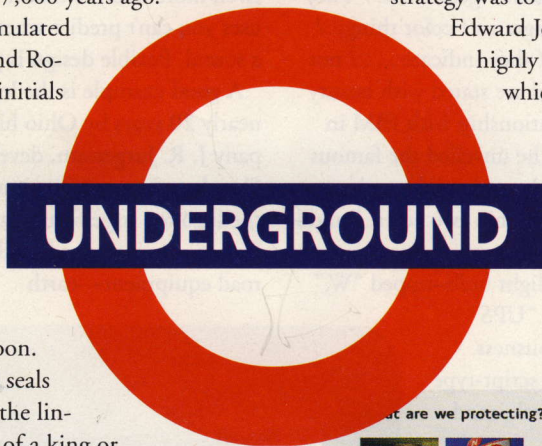
From confusion to clarity

Early in the 20th century, one of the first milestones in corporate identity emerged, in the form of a simple red circle with a bar running through it. Now, nearly 90 years later, the London Underground’s roundel remains intact—a symbol of quick, safe, reliable, and economical mass transit, and the most internationally recognized icon of the city itself.

In 1908 the Underground’s general manager, Albert

Stanley, inspired by the Paris Metro’s standardized station nameplates, commissioned a logo. It started out as a solid red disk with the name printed across it in a bar. But Frank Pick, a company attorney with no design experience, suggested that the circle’s center would draw more attention if it were white. This suggestion led to his appointment as the company’s identity program director—a fateful choice, as Pick would quickly become a pioneer of modern design. One key

strategy was to commission typographer Edward Johnston to create an open, highly legible, masculine typeface, which was unveiled around 1916. Before long, posters, station plaques, rail cars, buses, and maps all bore Pick’s signature roundel and one of the world’s first modern sans-serif typefaces.



What are we protecting?

The graphic relates to the protection of London Transport's copyright, marks and signs.

Some of these elements are important parts of London Transport's corporate identity and an integral visual code in symbols of London Transport.

The New Johnston Typefaces and its associated alphabet.

The family of typefaces was specially designed for London Transport's postmodern in 1913, and has been employed since then by London Transport since that time to sign and label its services. It was one of the earliest examples of a sans-serif design face. The letters are London Transport's copyright in all their applications.

The Johnston family of typefaces based on London Transport's sign and typeface.

London Sightseeing Buses

© London Transport has been known to take advantage of the strong similarity between the Johnston Typefaces and London Transport's service.

Key element 1
The Johnston Typefaces

New Johnston Light	ABCDEFGHIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 1234567890 EB...:PT !..*
New Johnston Medium	ABCDEFGHIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 1234567890 EB...:PT !..*
New Johnston Heavy	ABCDEFGHIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 1234567890 EB...:PT !..*
New Johnston Bold	ABCDEFGHIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 1234567890 EB...:PT !..*
New Johnston Extra Bold	ABCDEFGHIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 1234567890 EB...:PT !..*
New Johnston Black	ABCDEFGHIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 1234567890 EB...:PT !..*

f g h i i k l m n o p a r s

When the government took over the Underground in 1939, Pick’s strategy was retained. The program came up for its first review four decades later, in 1979; the roundel underwent minor modification, and Johnston’s typeface was expanded with eight additional weights by the Banks & Miles design firm.

Copcats and frauds have attempted to use this time-honored image to market everything from running shoes to cookies, but—as any logo should be—the Underground’s logo is well protected. Licensed souvenir producers continue to make it London’s most popular icon, placing it on silk scarves, pencil boxes, and reprints of the classic map and posters.

Tracking big blue

“Corporate image,” “identity program,” and “brand identity” didn’t become general business/design jargon until after the Second World War, but by the 1960s, they were the magic words for market-driven execu-

The London Underground has one of the earliest and best-known identity systems in the world. Its elements include the “roundel” (top left) and the proprietary Johnston Typefaces (above), originally unveiled in 1916 and expanded to a family in 1979.



Above: The UPS logo was one of a number of influential designs by Paul Rand in the 1960s. Below: Similarly influential were Massimo and Lela Vignelli's name-as-logo designs, such as this one for Fodor's. Right: Although Jim Slaughter's logo for J. R. Jurgenson gets silkscreened onto trucks, it also works on stationery and business cards.

tives worldwide. Target audiences were inundated with a veritable tsunami of slick iconography. West Coast logo designer Jay Vigon aptly describes it as a "whole period following the success of the IBM logo where we just had tons and tons of combinations of three initials. Thank you, Paul Rand."

In his book *Paul Rand: A Designer's Art* (Yale University Press, 1985), Rand summarized the sentiment of an entire logo-design era in a poem: "Trademarks are animate / inanimate / organic / geometric. / They are letters / ideograms / monograms / color things. / Ideally they do not illustrate / they indicate . . . / not present / but suggest . . . / and are stated with beauty and wit." Rand began his relationship with IBM in the 1950s, but it wasn't until he unveiled the famous striped blue symbol in 1961 that the world understood his design philosophy. Within two years, Rand's IBM monogram, his "abc" for American Broadcasting Company, his Westinghouse light bulb-tipped "W," and his United Parcel Service "UPS" flooded the corporate consciousness with the desire to revise their script-type or badge-shaped logos into sleek, modern monograms.

Italian designers Massimo and Lela Vignelli opened a design office in Chicago amid the late 1960s torrent of "initial" identities. Rather than relying on monograms or geometric shapes in their logo designs, the Vignellis instigated a wave of name-as-logo solutions. Type treatment and color selection comprised the entire logo-design solution for corporations like Knoll Design, Bloomingdale's, Lancia Motors, the Ciga Hotel chain, and Fodor's Travel Guides.

Both schools of thought espoused systematized logo design and usage. Helvetica, Univers, and Futura echoed the era's corporate buzzwords: efficient, modern, and orderly. Master color palettes used bold crayon colors like true blue and fire-engine red, or conservative shades of navy blue or coffee brown. In a design

climate reminiscent of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, designers developed strict, formulaic identity programs well into the mid-1970s.

Such heavy corporate visual language is less prevalent today. Recent design trends lean toward a light, open, diversified, and sometimes whimsical approach. Some corporate bastions are renovating their identities to reflect more comfortable, humane business personalities. Yet many of the traditional underlying principles have not changed. Successful logo designs must still have versatility, legibility, and familiarity.

Fodor's

The need for flexibility

Few design projects require as much flexibility in application as a logo. Depending on your client, you may know at the outset that your creation not only will appear on stationery and business cards but also will be printed in the Yellow Pages, painted onto the side of an airplane, or embossed into a chocolate bar. It may have to appear in black-and-white as well as color (see the sidebar "Living color" on page 46). Even more likely is that it will eventually be put to uses you can't predict when you're designing it. So a sound, flexible design is paramount.

A good example is the logo that has been used for nearly 20 years by Ohio highway construction company J. R. Jurgenson, developed by Slaughter & Slaughter, Inc., of Cincinnati. Jim Slaughter designed the logo for large-format application. As a 2-by-3 1/2-foot image, it was to be silkscreened onto the firm's road equipment—earth



movers, grading equipment, and bulldozers—where it would be readily seen by passing motorists. But it was also eventually miniaturized. As Slaughter puts it, "I thought it'd take them years to run out of their old stationery, but six months later I got a call." The logo sized down smoothly onto business cards and letterhead, turning out to be the ideal solution in both scenarios.

Logo application isn't limited to signage and stationery, of course. To distinguish the photo-archiving and -leasing company Corbis (a Latin term meaning "woven basket" or "container") in an ocean of stock-photo catalogs, image licensing materials, capability brochures, and CD-ROM boxes, the Seattle-based design firm Hornall Anderson Design Works (designers of the Starbucks logo) developed an icon that portrays not only Corbis's principal business functions, but the swirling motion associated with their CD-ROM products. The logo's grainy texture helps it function equally well on packaging, promotions, and Web sites.

Author of two logo design books (*Marks* and *Marks II*, published by Graphic Sha, Tokyo), Jay Vigon is well known for his innovative identity work. His de-



C O R B I S

The logo for Corbis, a Seattle-area firm that archives and licenses photographic images, was designed by Hornall Anderson Design Works. It functions well in a variety of printed matter; half-deconstructed, its parts even serve as on-screen navigation buttons (far right).



ANN TAYLOR.

Desgrappes Gobé & Associates updated the Ann Taylor logo in 1992, and developed spin-off identities for sportswear, fragrance, shoe, and denim lines. All share a two-color master palette and the use of Bauer Bodoni type.



signs for Prince's *Purple Rain* and *Star Wars: Revenge of the Jedi* (later renamed *Return of the Jedi*) were used on everything from T-shirts and record-album covers to videotape packages, lunchboxes, and a host of other products. As Vigon explains, "For me, it was really important that you could get a great T-shirt out of a logo, or be able to fax it around the world and still have it look like something."



words and pictures

Many logos consist of both words and pictures—often a visual icon plus a specific treatment of the company's name. Others, however, rely almost entirely on an image, or on just words or letters. Although there's no rule as to which approach is better, nonverbal images are more likely to translate well across international borders.

For Jay Vigon, the best example of this was one reaction to his Fahrenheit Films design. While his image does involve fire, no reference to hellfire was intended. Nonetheless, he recalls, "one of the people from Fahrenheit was actually refused entrance to the Vatican because she was wearing a Fahrenheit T-shirt on location. She had to go out and get a Pope T-shirt to gain entrance."



Vigon's fish-man for Gotcha surfwear plays up the energy, youthfulness, and vibrancy of the sport. Among his other logos is one for Fat Fish Films, in which a smiling, gold-toothed shark emblem speaks volumes about the film industry and the company's attitude. And the Malibu Laundry logo—a clothespin with a shark's fin protruding from its "back"—doesn't really need words to tell you what the company does at its oceanside location.

Vigon says he uses an essential emotion as his central focus. "What I tried to do, in a nutshell, was to tell a story, which is not easy to do with a logo because you can't put too much information into it. I have a phrase that I attach to the kind of design I was doing: complex simplicity."

But text alone can also be used to create arousing logo imagery. IBM's is a classic example, consisting simply of three horizontally striped, slab-serifed letters, but there are many others. Some use the letters *as* imagery. When a company called Fiberlink expanded its horizons beyond phone service and changed its name to Nextlink, the Hornall Anderson team created a proprietary typeface and applied striking colors to focus attention on a leaping "X" in the name. This solution reflects both the "unknown" in

the technology's future and the company's leap-ahead attitude. It also avoids familiar, overly concrete pictures (such as phones or faxes). In the international marketplace, type-only logos can overcome language barriers if their shape and color communicate beyond words to their intended audiences.

refreshing makeovers

Some logos persist for decades unchanged, while others get altered or updated—sometimes repeatedly. The reasons for these updates and makeovers vary widely. In some cases it's hard to see why a logo gets changed—maybe a new CEO or marketing director just wants it done. But in many cases a logo update or redesign serves a specific business purpose. Here are a few examples.

Appearing on store signs, vending machines, bottles, ads, billboards, and even glasses and serving trays, Coca-Cola's quill-pen-script trademark is an internationally recognized symbol of the American dream. Through decades of marketing, this century-old symbol has come to signify that a refreshing soda, guaranteed to fulfill consumer expectations, can be had at that spot.

But the company's present business

Living color. Color is nearly every logo designer's favorite toy, and—thanks to the technological advances of the last decade—it is widely available, both at the design and reproduction stages. But color can be a fatal distraction during the design process. There are still monochrome applications to consider in this full-spectrum, computerized world. A logo design should be reviewed in black-and-white to unmask any flaws that the chosen colors might be concealing. Complex or color-dependent logos often turn into visual mud when faxed or used in a newspaper ad.

In addition, the color you picked may not be the color you get when your design is reproduced. Picking spot colors—such as those from the universally accepted Pantone Matching System (PMS)—works if a

logo is going to be printed on pure-white stationery. But it sometimes falls short of expectations when reproduced in a magazine ad, printed on a product, or downloaded from a Web site.

Magazines are generally printed in four-color process, which uses dots in four colors (cyan, magenta, yellow, and black, abbreviated CMYK) to reproduce a wide range of colors. But there are many colors that CMYK can't reproduce faithfully. Simply indicating that the spot color you picked should be reproduced via process colors can yield disappointing results, transforming that pale blue-green spot shade into decayed-cabbage gray. The Pantone Color Process Simulator (available at most art-supply stores) is a handy guide that displays each PMS color with its four-

color process complement. (Magazine advertisers wishing to use true spot inks can expect to pay extra.)

The World-Wide Web presents yet another color translation problem. Different browsers and different computer platforms don't share a common color palette; also, individual monitors can display color very differently. If you started out picking a logo's colors for print, you may find that they look very different, and may be heavily dithered, when viewed in a Web browser. (For a guide to picking colors for the Web, see "The Discriminating Color Palette," by Lisa Lopuck, *Adobe Magazine*, May/June 1996, page 49.)

The point: When choosing colors for a logo, think ahead to how and where it may be reproduced—and make sure that it works in black-and-white.

horizons include more than soft drinks. Coca-Cola has built Olympic City, an athletic theme park developed to coincide with the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, the company's hometown. Designed by Desgrippes Gobé & Associates, Olympic City's logo subtly incorporates Coca-Cola's time-honored icon into a new, youthful, family-oriented image that's brimming with lively type, energetic shape, and vibrant colors.

As a business matures, it often becomes apparent that its visual identity needs updating. Market shifts, consumer trends, and venue expansions are some of the reasons even firmly established logos go under review. In recent years, Desgrippes Gobé has updated a number of signature identities. The fashion trend toward overt logos (Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Gucci) spurred Mark Cross, a respected name in fine leather accessories, to review its logo. The existing image didn't translate well when stamped onto metal closures and brass fittings. "It is a very prominent detail," creative director Peter Levine explains. The revised logo's vertical and horizontal versions integrate a bold proprietary typeface and a modernized emblem that retains its audience recognition.

Diversification spurred Ann Taylor, an exclusive apparel chain, to reconsider its image in 1992. Levine felt that "Ann Taylor's character as a woman needed to be evolved a little bit more. Ann Taylor's not a real person, but I wanted her to grow up a lot to compete with brands like Donna Karan or Dana Buchman that have a lot more sophisticated approach in talking to women. We wanted to communicate a bigger brand feel."

In addition to the logo update, distinctive spin-off identities were developed for the sportswear, fragrance, denim, and shoe lines, and for the Ann Taylor Loft casual-wear stores. A two-color master palette and Bauer Bodoni type are the flexible base elements that can continue to be applied in future expansions without restructuring Ann Taylor's quintessential image. The result is a flawless family of identities.

essential refinements

So how does it happen? Combining image, type, and color into a successful logo design requires a lot more than deciding on a nice typeface, drawing a pretty picture, and selecting pleasant colors.

One skill that used to be required (and not just for logo design) was a specialized knowledge of graphic-arts techniques such as specifying type, scaling images, and preparing camera-ready mechanicals. In the

last few years, though, computers have eliminated many of the old skills. Now, as Peter Levine remarks, "The only difference between you and somebody else with the same equipment is your thought process."

Perhaps more than any other design project, creating a successful logo requires the designer to "get out of the way" and focus on the client and the project—a great logo designer's creations don't resemble one another. This requires research and thought, not reliance on the latest cutting-edge style. Jay Vigon's philosophy is simple: "Being different doesn't always mean weird or radical. It just means being original. But it can be original and conservative, or original and fun. . . . There's a difference between conceptual problems and decorative problems. If you're just doing what you're into at the time, you're not solving the problem."

Peter Levine's favorite parable of how the logo-design thought process works comes from the dance world. When choreographer Agnes de Mille was commissioned to create a ballet around Aaron Copland's musical composition *Rodeo*, she thought it was too easy to design with just the obvious square-dance steps and cowboy swaggers. "She stood in front of her apartment mirror and went through all the motions cowboys make. She found a thrusting, bucking motion from the hips that came out in everything they did, whether it was baling hay, or using a lasso, or getting on a horse. She used balletic movements centered around this one gesture to create a parody of a cowboy ballet."

Distilling a company into a single gesture or emotion that the visual elements can convey is the core of the logo-design process. The final result must balance timeliness with timelessness, trading simultaneously on trend and tradition. There are no prescribed success formulas, no secret color combinations or hidden shapes that dictate a logo's success. The keys to a great design can be found in a company's name or business focus, or in the "intangibles" such as its mission or attitude.

Whether the result is bold or subtle, innovative or conservative, the ultimate goal is to create a logo that stands out in a sea of business identities. ▀

Anistatia R Miller and Jared M. Brown write and design from their home in Vancouver, B.C. Their design work includes both books and Web sites; Miller was art director for Millimeter magazine and for numerous books during her 25-year career.



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