



5 Cardinal Rules of Logo Design

Follow these guidelines to create the best logo for your company.
By John Williams | February 14, 2005

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Do you realize just how important your company logo is? It appears on everything from your letterhead to your website, reaching customers, prospects, suppliers and the press. In other words, your logo reaches everyone who has any contact with you and is the first impression someone will have of your company. Because of its potential impact, your logo must offer a favorable impression of your business. Present yourself clearly and dynamically, and you'll look like a pro, even if your office is in your home's basement.

Easier said than done, you say? Maybe. Luckily, there are time-tested guidelines you can follow in your quest for a great logo. Whether you hire an agency or decide to create it yourself, commit these rules to memory--or at least bookmark this web page:

1. Your logo should reflect your company in a unique and honest way. Sounds obvious, but you'd be surprised how many business owners want something "just like" a competitor. If your logo contains a symbol--often called a "bug"--it should relate to your industry, your name, a defining characteristic of your company or a competitive advantage you offer.

What's the overriding trait you want people to remember about your business? If it's quick delivery, consider objects that connote speed, like wings or a clock. Consider an abstract symbol to convey a progressive approach--abstracts are a great choice for high-tech companies. Or maybe you simply want an object that represents the product or service you're selling. Be clever, if you can, but not at the expense of being clear.

2. Avoid too much detail. Simple logos are recognized faster than complex ones. Strong lines and letters show up better than thin ones, and clean, simple logos reduce and enlarge much better than complicated ones.

But although your logo should be simple, it shouldn't be simplistic. Good logos feature something unexpected or unique without being overdrawn. Look at the pros: McDonald's, Nike, Prudential. Notice how their logos are simple yet compelling. Anyone who's traveled by a McDonald's with a hungry 4-year-old knows the power of a clean logo symbol.

3. Your logo should work well in black and white (one-color printing). If it doesn't look good in black and white, it won't look good in any color. Also keep in mind that printing costs for four-color logos are often greater than that for one- or two-color jobs).

4. Make sure your logo's scalable. It should be aesthetically pleasing in both small and large sizes, in a variety of mediums. A good rule of thumb is the "business card/billboard rule": Your logo should look good on both.

5. Your logo should be artistically balanced. The best way to explain this is that your logo should seem "balanced" to the eye--no one part should overpower the rest. Just as a painting would look odd if all the color and details were segregated in one corner, so do asymmetric logos. Color, line density and shape all affect a logo's balance.

Many logo gurus insist your logo should be designed to last for up to 10 or 15 years. But I've yet to meet a clairvoyant when it comes to design trends. The best way to ensure logo longevity, in addition to the rules I've listed above, is to make sure you love your logo. Don't ever settle for something half-baked.

And once you commit to your logo design, be sure you have it in all three of these essential file formats: EPS for printing, JPG and GIF for your website. Essentially, these file conversions render your logo as a single piece of art--so it's no longer a symbol with a typeface. Which brings us to the most important rule in logo design. . .

Never, ever re-draw or alter your logo! If you want to animate it for your website, fine. But don't change its essence. Reduce and enlarge it proportionally. And if you become tired of your logo, that's good. Because that's usually about the time it's starting to make an impression on everyone else!

John Williams is Entrepreneur.com's "Image & Branding" columnist and the founder and president of LogoYes.com, the world's first do-it-yourself logo design website. During John's 25 years in advertising, he's created brand standards for

Fortune 100 companies like Mitsubishi and won numerous awards for his design work.