

How to create a logo that will serve your brand well for a long time



Some effective and enduring logos, created by a variety of brand designers.

By John Fries

If you haven't had the experience of developing a logo—or working with a designer or design firm to create a new logo or refresh an old one—be prepared to invest some time when the time comes.

To do it correctly—meaning *strategically*—you'll need to consider lots of factors and implications. If you simply need a nice mark that you can post at the top of your letterhead or a design to affix to your shingle, there are plenty of cheap options available. But if you're serious about building and communicating a brand that has a platform, message and philosophy, you'll want to go professional. For most companies, that means outsourcing it to a designer who understands and executes pro-level brand design.

There are some non-negotiable qualities that every logo should embody.



1. **It should provide a visual representation of your company's value proposition.** Look at the FedEx logo. Notice anything unusual?

Yeah, that forward-pointing arrow in the negative space created by the second E and the x. It's not even noticeable if you're not looking for it, but it subliminally says that FedEx moves your packages forward. How about the smile-like swoosh that connects the A and the z in the Amazon logo. The company sells everything from A to Z, and it's logo implies that. Then there's the Baskin, Robbins logo, which tells us right in the typography that the company offers 31 flavors.



2. **Simplicity.** Look at the logos that have stood the test of time. One thing virtually all classic logos have in common is simplicity of design. Many of today's most recognizable—and most simple—logos (including those shown above) were designed by the great brand designer Paul Rand back in the 1950s and 1960s. Google him when you have a moment. The more busy a logo is, generally, the less professional it looks. As we see in point #1 and we'll see again in point #4, there are many ways to communicate a brand message without introducing extraneous items. Most major corporations have extremely simple logos that are immediately recognizable at first glance. More than that, there are brand values attached to them that your mind perceives at first glance.
3. **A symbol . . . or not?** Again, simplicity is key. Disney has mouse ears, Nike has a swoosh, McDonald's has golden arches, Apple has an apple, Starbucks has a siren, Target has a simple target, and the Red Cross has a red cross. Symbols can play an important role in a logo if they represent the brand. Logos aren't clip art and shouldn't be used gratuitously. In fact, corporate identity guidelines often specify how large the logo should be and where it should appear when used in combination with logo type.
4. **Typefaces and colors should be strategically selected.** There are more fonts and color options today than ever before. Lots of choices. How do you decide which to use? I've worked with clients who had favorite colors and even a few pieces of art that they insisted be included in the design. However, there's science (psychology, actually) that designers

consider to determine which to use typefaces and colors based on how they communicate specific values and messages. Different fonts communicate different messages, some classic, some contemporary, some conservative, some vivid. So, too, do colors. Blue signifies trust, green symbolizes vitality, red connotes excitement. And there are some colors that have negative connotations. You'll want to consider these factors when having a logo designed.

5. **Scalability.** A logo needs to look good and reproduce equally crisply and clearly on a business card, a banner, a large building, possibly vehicles and uniforms, and your computer screen. This supports point #2 about simplicity. With all the special effects available in design software today, it can be tempting for non-designers to want to include gradients, thin lines, halftones, and other elements. But many of these extras can create real problems when it comes to printing or reproducing.
6. **Hierarchy.** Consider how your logo might be used if you're dealing with several departments, service lines, sub-brands, or parts of a company. I've designed identity programs for hospitals, in which it's necessary to consider not only departments, but specialties, services and programs that must be part of the hierarchy.

Logo and identity design, done well, is the visual component of your unique selling proposition and, over time, will trigger people's perceptions of your company, its values and reputation. It's smart to invest in brand design that will take you through the long run.

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