



Developing a Logo

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We've said it before and we'll say it again, "A logo is not a brand." A brand is the personality and philosophy that defines your company or organization, and a logo is a representation of that brand. Logos are a sort of shorthand—quick visual marks that help a client remember you and distinguish you from the competition.

So while your logo is not your brand (yup, we meant to repeat that), it must accurately reflect your organization and speak to your clientele. Professional service firms like lawyers, brokers, and insurance agents generally choose logos that convey a sense of stability, security, and traditional heritage. Creative firms tend more toward whimsical or archetypal images that reflect playfulness or artistry.

What are the key elements of your company's personality? Are you warm, quirky, and fun-loving or serious and traditional? Eco-friendly or cutting edge? Logos must be representative of the brand and message you are trying to develop.

At the same time, be wary of literal translations as they can be both complicated and overused. People remember shapes and colors first, details later. A logo that is too literal (a sparking monitor for a computer repairman, for instance) doesn't say anything unique about your company, and something similar may already be in use by several competitors in your market. Also, complicated logos don't translate well to promotional items, signage, and other marketing tools.

Think Ahead

Can your logo stretch? Will it break or change colors? Does it work with ink, thread, and pixels?

A basic tenant of logo design is that it must look good in black and white. Even if you can afford color, chances are you'll need to use a black representation from time to time. Think newspaper ads, fax covers, office suite signage, and plaques.

Scalability is important too. Is it still distinguishable when minimized on a



business card or name badge? Now how does it work on the front of your building or the side of your delivery trucks?

Along with scalability comes shape. Many popular promotional items, like pens, can't accommodate a full logo representation. A logo that can break apart into distinct, recognizable elements will give you greater flexibility in advertising and promotional programs.

Finally, consider the virtues of simplicity. Detailed logos won't translate well embroidered on a hat, shirt, or golf towel. And research shows that simpler logos are easier to recognize. Give your customers something clean and simple to remember you by.

Connect with Color

Whether he was Prince or the artist formerly known as, one thing was clear: Prince is purple. Just like Home Depot® is orange, UPS® is brown, and Target® is bull's-eye red.

Color is a strong element that distinguishes your brand and helps people recognize your organization. Used consistently throughout your marketing materials, color can create brand cohesion that reaches far beyond your logo.

When choosing logo colors, remember that less can be more. One or two colors are easier to remember and easier to build an identity around than several shades. Again, be sure your logo color represents your organization but remains distinct from the competition. If you will be doing business internationally, be sure to research color connotations overseas.

Specify the specific colors to be used for your logo. For Web design or screen applications, color is represented with an RGB code (red, green, blue). For print pieces, specify a PMS and CMYK tone.

Most printing is done using the CMYK four-color printing process. Also referred to as "process color," CMYK represents cyan, magenta, yellow, and black. Combining these four shades can create thousands of colors. However, many corporations elect to use a very specific "spot color," generally a PMS or Pantone color. PMS or Pantone Matching System is a standardized color palette for consistent color application in the graphic design and printing industries. When you specify a Pantone color, you get the exact same shade no matter who prints it. With CMYK, your logo is subject to slight variations.



A word of caution before you mandate a PMS color for your logo: You'll pay more to print a four-color job PLUS a spot color. Requesting a specific spot color requires more labor and time on behalf of the printer. When working on a logo design, ask to see PMS and CMYK versions. If the color is consistent, you may be able to switch satisfactorily between the two. Check with your printer for more details

Set Limits

Once you've resolved all the shape, scale and color issues, establish logo guidelines and stick to them. Your employees may find it tempting to make small changes to fit certain project needs. Someone may want to skew the proportions to fit an ad layout or change the color for a holiday promotion. Don't let this happen. Remember, your logo is a visual shorthand for your brand and it builds customer awareness. People can't remember you if you keep changing your look.

Decide which elements, if any, can be used alone and which must remain part of the total logo. If the logo is printed as one color, which color will you use? Can it be printed in reverse?

Determine the amount of white space required around all sides. Document these specifications in a logo guidelines manual, demonstrating the do's and don'ts. Then distribute it to your employees and hold them accountable for upholding the standards.

Case Study: River City Rubber Works

In anticipation of company changes and before embarking on a large promotional program, River City Rubber Works decided to update its logo. Three owners established the rubber stamp company in 1994, but first redesigned the logo in 2000, after moving into a quaint countryside barn. The barn originally served as a private manufacturing facility. Six years later the owners are making plans to open it to the public with classes, shopping, and food. They wanted the new logo to play up the rustic barn and better reflect their business.

Figure 1

The original River City Rubber Works logo is rather detailed and doesn't scale down well. At a small size, part of the company name is barely legible.

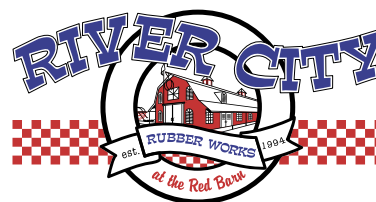


Figure 1

papers
rubber

As part of the redesign, the owners wanted to emphasize a sense of place. In the current logo, the 'River City' text is curved, giving the subtle indication of a river. And while the river was important to them, the barn was critical. Many people and businesses in their community simply know River City Rubber Works as "The Big Red Barn." The barn is the place to be—people want to visit and be a part of it.

Figure 2

River City Rubber Works and 4imprint both began new design iterations. Figure 2 shows two of River City's early attempts. The barn and the river take center stage, but neither says much about the stamping business and the effect is less rustic than initially envisioned.

Figure 2



Figure 3

From the very beginning, everyone agreed the new logo should convey the idea of rubber stamping. In subsequent design attempts, River City Rubber Works developed the logo on the left, playing on the 'stamp' idea.

The circle in the upper corner of River City's design has an authentic stamped feel to it, and the designer at 4imprint used that idea to develop the image on the right. It maintains the round shape and banner from their original logo, but uses photo corners around 'River City' and broken lines to recreate a stamped look. The logo on the right is visually simpler and less literal. Plus, with one less color, it would be cheaper to print.

Figure 3



Figure 4

Many design versions and several weeks of collaboration later, a final logo is selected. The new logo adheres to several key design guidelines:

Figure 4



1. Update, don't replace

The new logo maintains the same shape and shares several other visual elements with its predecessor. Established customers won't struggle with company recognition because the image is still familiar.

2. Represent your organization

The font, the broken lines, and the photo corners on the banner all work together to create a nostalgic stamped look that represents the company's stamp manufacturing business as well as its picturesque facility.

3. Simplify

With its simple circle and two color design, the final logo will be easy to recognize and remember and less expensive to print than the original.

4. Develop options

The new logo can be separated into pieces. The name 'River City Rubber Works' stands on its own as either a one-color or two-color version, making it very versatile. Even when the pieces are separated, they share a continuity that is so important whether you are developing your company's image or its brand.

Use it Wisely

The girls at River City Rubber Works were a lot of fun to work with. They're artists. They work in a barn. They like to say "Hay!" a lot. That's all part of their brand. It's who they are and it's the personality they share with customers. In a short time, their new logo will come to represent that

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brand—historic, rustic artistry with a touch of irreverence.

A logo is a tool. When designed well, it can say volumes about your organization. But it can only stand for the brand you create. Communicate your corporate philosophy to everyone in the organization, so that it always represents a positive brand experience. Even the best-designed logo can't provide good service; it can only help your customers remember it.

Editor's Note: The redesign of the River City Rubber Works logo was undertaken as part 4imprint's 'Brand With Ten Grand' contest. River City won the contest, receiving the grand prize of \$10,000 in promotional products. You can read more about how they're using promotional products to grow their business (and watch a really great video captured as they learned they'd won) by visiting www.4imprint.com/tengrand.

Blue Papers