

How to Build a **Visual Identity**

When you're a time-starved executive with a brand to grow

You may not be a designer. But now you can start to think like one.

This ebook makes the elements of a visual identity easier to grasp. Keep in mind, an identity is much more than a logo. So please consider hiring a seasoned brand designer if your firm is in need of a new look and feel. We hope you enjoy How to Build a Visual Identity.

Choices We All Have to Make

It's not fair. You have to know what looks good. What sounds good. What truly represents your firm, its offers, its team. You have to sacrifice ideas you love dearly so the big message hits home with the customer. We're very sorry. That's just branding. To help you make the tough choices, we've put together a nice little package of material on the following.

- ✓ Brand Strategy
- ✓ Brand Name
- ✓ Logo
- ✓ Wordmark
- ✓ Buddy Icon
- ✓ Colour
- ✓ Typography
- ✓ Layout
- ✓ Paper Stock
- ✓ Visual Hook

Are We on the Same Page?

WHAT IS GRAPHIC DESIGN?

The practice of combining text, colour, form and layout to communicate an idea or create an experience. Though it's very much an art, graphic design is nothing without logic and problem solving. It's visual planning.

WHAT IS BRAND DESIGN?

The practice of developing a brand's visual identity based on its brand strategy. It's a highly specific discipline, and it demands a firm grasp of brand design and brand strategy dos and don'ts.

WHAT IS A VISUAL IDENTITY?

The visible embodiment of a brand strategy. It's the end product of the brand design process. A good visual identity is compelling, scalable and well differentiated from the competition. It's a system. It has rules.

WHAT IS AN APPLICATION?

A fancy way of saying "thing you need to brand." Common applications include business cards, letterheads, brochures and websites.

Don't Forget

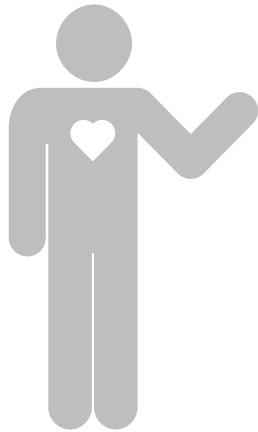
This ebook focuses on the basic moving parts of a visual identity, and the best practices surrounding them. It doesn't teach you how to design an identity. It gives you the tools to evaluate one.

ready.set.

GO

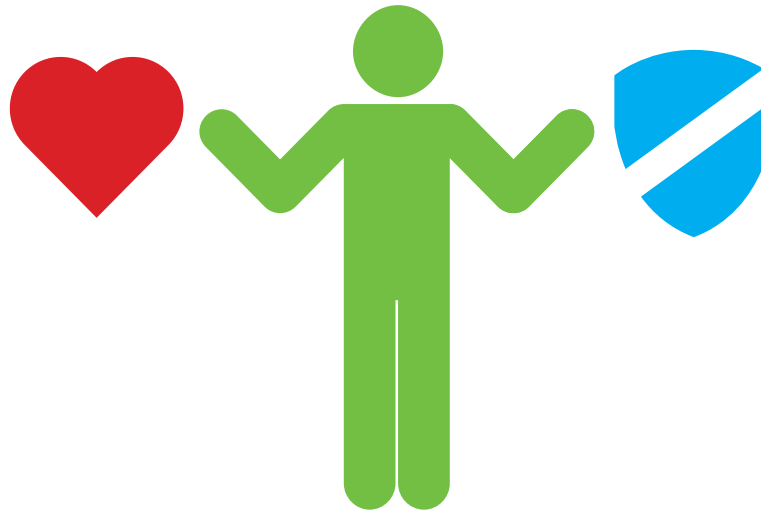
Choose Your Brand Strategy

Target Audience



Your target audience has a need.

Your Brand



Your brand promise fills their need and reflects your passion.



Your brand personality is the style with which you deliver your promise.



Your brand position makes you no.1 so the audience resolves their need with you, not the competition.

Competitors



A dear and honest brand is a barrier to the competition. It helps you simplify, sell and succeed.

You wouldn't build a house without a blueprint

You shouldn't design a visual identity without a brand strategy

Brand Strategy Examples: Disney Resorts + FedEx



Promise

The fusion of our audience's need with our passion to deliver.

Disney Resorts Promise
Memories

Embodied in the slogan
"Let the Memories Begin"

FedEx Promise
Service Excellence



Position

This is the reason our customers choose us over other service providers.

Disney Resorts Position ca 2010
The only resort with the Disney cast of characters

Disney Resorts Position Today
The only resort with the Disney, Marvel and Star Wars casts of characters

FedEx Position ca 1995
The only express transportation company with guaranteed overnight delivery

FedEx Position Today
The leader in the U.S. express



Personality

This is the style with which we market ourselves to the world.

Disney Resorts Personality
Magical, Family Friendly

FedEx Personality
Reliable, Confident, Optimistic, Warm

Nail Your Brand Name

If you've got a name, we hope it meets the following criteria.

- ✓ Short
- ✓ Appealing
- ✓ Memorable
- ✓ Legally protected
- ✓ Easy to find via search



Your name
is your most
important
marketing tool

If you're choosing
a name, make sure
you consider what's
on the next page ...

Nail Your Brand Name

Your name and the letters that constitute it are your best weapons in the creation of a brilliant visual identity. Think about that when you take in the designs below.

Pictured to the left and in the centre, there are two variations of the same name. To the far right, you'll see the winning name carried through to creative work.

Ask yourself: what's going to work best in design?

ORIGINAL NAME

REFRESHED NAME

NEW WORDMARK

THE
JACK
PROJECT



JACK.ORG



SIM & McBURNEY
SIM ASHTON &
McKAY



SIM



now it's
time to
get visual

Choose Your Brand Signature

A LOGO MIGHT NOT BE FOR YOU

Many of our customers come to us with sights set on a cool new logo. They want their own Nike Swoosh or McDonald's 'M.' That's when we, as responsible branding professionals, are obligated to crush dreams.

WHAT IS A LOGO?

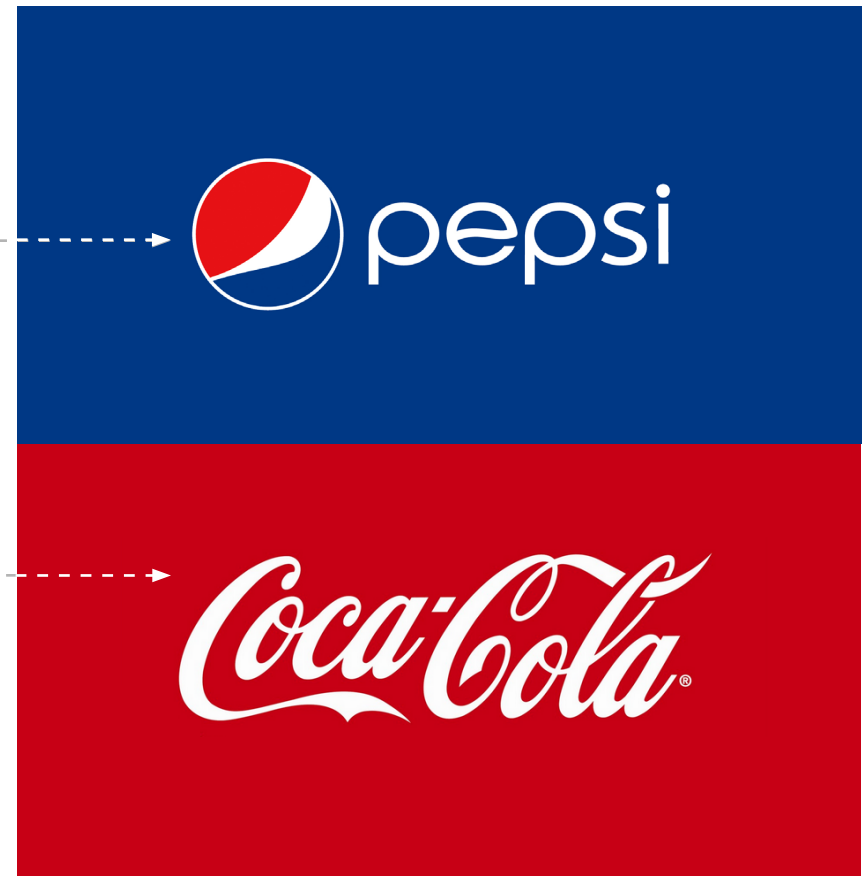
A logo is a symbol that can stand in place of your brand name. It takes a lot of money to use effectively. Unless your marketing budget is in the multi-millions, you won't be able to advertise heavily enough for your logo to embody your whole brand at a glance. What most firms actually need is a great wordmark.

WHAT IS A WORDMARK?

A wordmark is a stylized brand signature based on the letterforms in your brand name. Unlike a logo, a wordmark isn't separate from your name.

WHY ARE WORDMARKS GREAT?

They put maximum focus on your brand name. They're easier to scale. They're easier to protect legally. Plus, of the 2010 Fortune 100 corporate brand signatures, 64 are wordmarks.



ABOVE PEPSI LOGO + WORDMARK BELOW COCA-COLA WORDMARK

Give It a Hook

BY HOOK WE DON'T MEAN LOGO

All winning brand signatures hook the eye. But that may not require a logo. Let us explain. Many savvy brands opt to build a graphical device right into the wordmark. Amazon is one of them. When you look at the Amazon mark, you see a delightful little arrow bolted to the base. We'll talk more about this in a minute, but first, let's contrast it with Nike.

THE CASE OF NIKE

Nike has its iconic swoosh logo. Unlike the Amazon arrow, the Nike swoosh can stand alone. It means 'Nike' even when the name itself is absent.

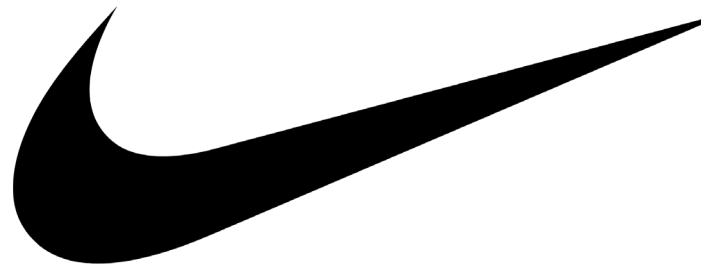
BACK TO AMAZON

Amazon's arrow, on the other hand, is part of the wordmark. There's no separating the two. Even in social media, when the brand's first initial is all you get, the arrow is still there, fused to the 'a.' Where you never see this element is floating in space, without some piece of the wordmark to ground it.



ABOVE: AMAZON WORDMARK + ARROW DEVICE

BELOW: NIKE STANDALONE SWOOSH LOGO



Give It a Hook

It comes down to this: Amazon can really make use of visual space. Don't get us wrong, Nike is brilliant at this too. It's just that they've hammered their logo into people over decades of relentless marketing. That comes with a monolithic price tag. Unless your resources grow on trees, it's better to approach your brand signature like Amazon.

Small firms, listen up: Okay fine, Amazon also has no shortage of marketing dough. But if you're a smaller brand, you can still take something from them. Specifically, when you build a stylistic hook into your wordmark, all eyes are on your name. Your audience doesn't have to split attention between your wordmark and a meaningless secondary graphic. It may be easier said than done, but it's something to keep in mind.

Make It Iconic, Buddy

NOW THAT YOU HAVE A WORDMARK

You need a buddy icon. We'll get into what this is in about 35 words. But for now, remember: these days, your wordmark needs to live in some pretty small places. Specifically, it needs to work nicely within the confines of mobile devices and social media. Enter the buddy icon.

WHAT IS A BUDDY ICON?

Popularized by social media, a buddy icon is the screen execution of your wordmark. It's square, it's small and, though it doesn't have to feature your wordmark in full, your buddy icon should display the most recognizable part. Remember, your brand name will affect your wordmark, and that will affect your icon.

A BIT MORE ON BUDDY ICONS

Did we mention that a good buddy icon needs to work at a small scale? Just kidding, we did. But we didn't specify how small. Ideally, your buddy icon will work at the near microscopic size of 16 x 16 pixels. These are the dimensions of the icon that appears in your browser tab.

COMPANY CO

YOUR WORDMARK SHOULD
BE DESIGNED WITH YOUR
BUDDY ICON IN MIND



IT'S BEST TO FEATURE THE
MOST MEMORABLE DETAIL
FROM YOUR WORDMARK



A LONG BRAND NAME WILL
DRASTICALLY REDUCE THE
IMPACT AT SMALL SCALES



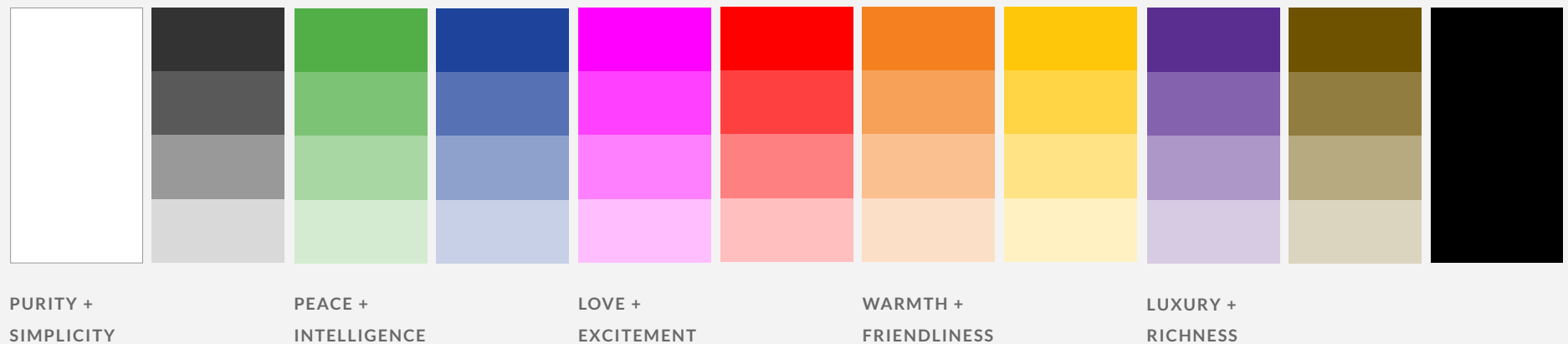
Remember, your name affects this!

So pick a good one. Your creative resources will thank you.

Show Your True Colours

Start with colour strategy. The colours you choose for your brand are as important as the actual message. Use colour to evoke emotional, subconscious responses, and to differentiate from your competitors.

If the other guys are **blue**, be the opposite of blue: **orange**. If they're **green**, be **red**. The more you can start to think like this, the better. Especially when it's time to sign off on your team's design work.



Show Your True Colours

CONSISTENCY IS KEY

It's no secret that colour plays a vital role in a great visual identity. It seems simple, but it isn't. Your identity needs to look consistent in multiple colour formats for screen and print.

KNOW THE FORMATS

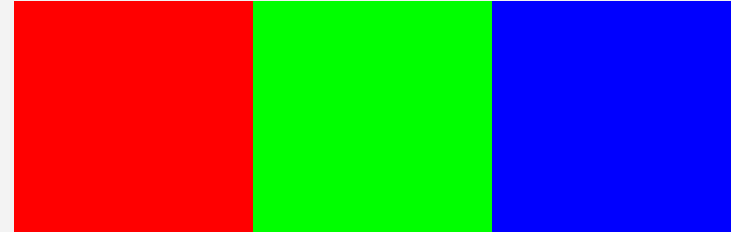
Screen and digital media use red, green and blue (RGB). Four-colour process printing uses cyan, magenta, yellow and black (CMYK). Spot colour printing uses the Pantone colour matching system (PAN) for premium results.

GET THE RESULTS

RGB achieves repeated colour fidelity most easily because, here, colours are produced with light. Print is more difficult, especially when it comes to secondary colours like purple and orange. (Don't get us started on orange.) The more complex the colour formulation, the more difficult and costly it is to reproduce.

WE'RE NOT QUITE DONE YET

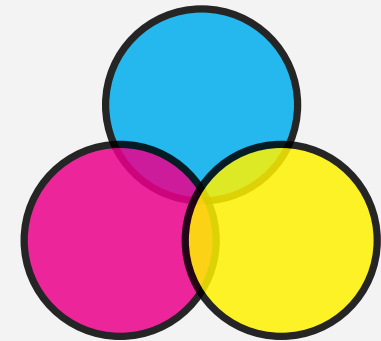
Commercial applications use industrial paint, vinyl and other synthetic materials matched to CMYK and Pantone values. To nail colour reproduction here, bring a keen eye and a swear jar.



RGB: SCREEN



PANTONE SPOT
COLOUR: PRINT



CMYK: PRINT



Don't forget

RGB = Screen

CMYK = Print

Pantone = Spot colour print



FYI

**Your visual identity also
needs to work in pure black,
greyscale and halftone.**

Be a Font Fanatic

DISPLAY MESSAGES

First things first. You need a display font, a headline typeface that makes people go "wow!" Display fonts entice a person to read more. They make announcements. They set the mood.

HEADINGS

You also need primary and secondary heading styles. These can hail from the same font family as your display text, but they should be styled differently using size, colour or case. Headings help you scan for information.

PARAGRAPHS

Last but not least, you need a solid paragraph font. Good paragraph fonts don't call much attention to themselves. They have been designed to perform best between 6 and 14 pt. They need to be highly readable.

Our display message style.

Our Primary Heading Style

OUR SECONDARY HEADING STYLE

Our paragraph style.

Fonts Are Finicky

Your fonts are affected by applications. Print fonts may not be available for web and vice versa. Neither print nor web fonts may work in PowerPoint.

Must Haves



PRINT FONTS

Desktop + commercial print applications

OFFICE FONTS

Sharing on products like Microsoft Office

WEB FONTS

Display on devices

Be a Font Fanatic

Type says a lot about you. It's one of the most viewed elements of your identity. Smart brands use fonts that embody the strategy, and that work for print and web.

Don't get too excited. For a clean look, keep fonts to a minimum: one or two. While we're on the subject, keep font sizes carefully under control, with no more than three sizes in one space.

*Here's a bad
font hierarchy*

*We're combining
fonts willy nilly*

AND WE BET IT'S LOST YOU

By the time you get through these headings – by the time you realize that your eye is gravitating towards the sub-heads before the display text – you have stopped reading.

The Hidden Costs of Type

HERE'S A NICE FONT



WHY ARE WE SHOWING YOU THIS?

Designed in the 90s by Tobias Frere-Jones, and licensed by Font Bureau, Interstate has been used by Lamborghini, the US Army, The Weather Channel and countless other brands. If you're thinking you want to use it too, stop right there.

Double Whammy!

You'll have to get separate Interstate licences for desktop and web (and the cut won't quite be the same). Ouch.

If it's any conciliation, your designer can easily make Interstate your principal font in Microsoft Office.

Only thing is, they may forget to mention that you need to buy a license for every user at \$100 a pop. Ouch ouch.

A black circle containing the white text 'FYI' in a bold, sans-serif font.

FYI

Typography is an art, even when it comes to letter spacing. Letter spacing includes tracking, the space between characters, and leading, the space between lines. **Both need to be ultra consistent.**

Speak the Language of Layout

YOU'RE SO CLOSE!

You've got your wordmark. You've got your hook. Your colour palette and font hierarchy go together like dark chocolate and raspberry. Now you need them to look great on a web page, a business card, a sales sheet and an outdoor print ad. How do you make sure this happens effectively across all these applications? How do you stay consistent?

KNOW YOUR LAYOUT OPTIONS

The dimensions of applications can seriously vary across print and digital media. That's why your brand designer needs to create deliberate conventions for your layouts, which should conform to different canvas sizes without breaking the overarching look and feel. You want every touchpoint to embody the same design logic. Wordmark, tagline, image and message should always be in the same zone, and size relationships should be baked.



DISTILITY CLIENT AUTOSHARE PRINT COLLATERAL SYSTEM

Speak the Language of Layout

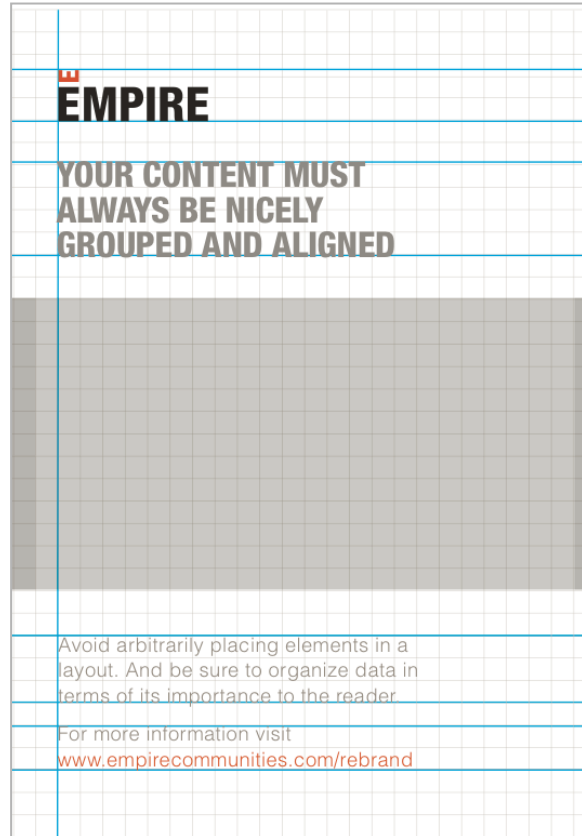
HOW ABOUT A GRID SYSTEM?

A grid system will help you define and enforce clear rules for every design. The grid your designer uses can be adapted to incorporate things like photography and illustration. It can also be rejigged to suit various sizes and aspect ratios. But watch out. Your brand's layouts have to give the impression that the same hand is at work. That means your grid system can only be so accommodating before it's off brand.

ALWAYS BE GROUPING

When reviewing designs, make sure that all elements – wordmark, display text, image, body copy and call to action – are nicely aligned. They should follow a clear hierarchy that's consistent with other brand collateral. And then there's the information itself, which needs to be properly grouped.

Here's what we mean: If a list of product benefits sits close to a block of contact information, each should feel like its own unit. That way, your design will be easy to scan. And let's be honest, we all love to scan.



DISTILITY CLIENT EMPIRE COMMUNITIES
GROUPING + ALIGNMENT



Pick Your Paper Stock

DON'T SKIMP ON THE STOCK

No print job will look better than the paper it's printed on. That's a fact. When the time comes to print, it's a good idea to get the best possible materials. Keep in mind, that doesn't always mean the most expensive materials. It simply means the right stuff for the job.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT OTHER THAN COST

- Thickness, measured in pounds per 500 sheets; standard printer paper is 20 lbs
- Texture: felt, linen or something else?
- Brightness, based on the amount of bleach in the product
- Finish: glossy or matte?
- Folding: the thicker the stock the harder it is to fold
- Composition: percentage of virgin to recycled material



DOMTAR PAPER PRODUCTS

What's that saying about the medium again?

The medium is the message. Or the mess, if your paper stock belongs in the bin.

Pick Your Paper Stock

YOU'LL NEED A COUPLE WEIGHTS

First, you need to consider the paper stock for some basic brand infrastructure. Applications that benefit from different stocks are letterheads, business cards, brochures and folders.

KNOW WHEN TO CHANGE IT UP

It's good to use the same paper stock for multiple applications, say a letterhead and a sales sheet. But when something has a distinct function or feel, it may be time to change it up.

REMEMBER: LOW TOUCH, LOW CONFIDENCE

Ever been handed a business card so flimsy you could've sworn it dissolved a bit in your grasp? Or a sales sheet so thin it could've passed for the skin of an onion? Not too confidence building.

If a brand pays no attention to materials, it can feel like there's no concern for your journey as a potential customer. If, on the other hand, a brand takes pride in how it presents, it feels like a high-touch experience is headed your way.

Be Consistent Across All Media

Back in the day, everything was printed. Today, you need to think about multiple display formats. A sales sheets is a great example of something you need both print and screen ready. No matter the media, your applications should share the same look and feel.

Bring It All Together for the Win

REMEMBER THE IDEA OF THE HOOK?

This is where we expand on it. Again, don't hate us, but your brand's visual hook does not have to revolve around a swoosh in your wordmark. It can be driven by any of the stylistic elements we've covered in this ebook.

BUT WHY?

A visual identity isn't just one thing. It's an amalgam of text, form, colour, imagery and layout. All of these ingredients have to be there. But one or two of them can drive the identity's hook.

LOOK AT COKE ZERO

If there's one element Coke Zero leads with, it's colour. Admittedly, this product has the classic Coca-Cola wordmark going for it. But the brand makes a serious point of dominating the shade black in the soft drink space.



COKE ZERO LEANS ON BLACK

Bring It All Together for the Win

FEDEX IS ANOTHER GOOD ONE

The shipping giant has a simple wordmark, but it's genius. Why's that? Well, the space between the 'E' and the 'x' is shaped like an arrow. Plus, the 'Ex' is a different colour for every corporate division. For these folks, typography + colour = oomph. That's why, even at its barest bones, the FedEx brand stays eye catching and memorable.

IF YOU'RE NOT FROM CANADA

Our Canadian readers will tell you that TD Canada Trust bank has used the same green leather chair in its photography for over a decade. Talk about a hook with legs!



FEDEX USES COLOUR + TYPOGRAPHY TO BRAND MULTIPLE DIVISIONS



TD CANADA TRUST LEADS WITH COLOUR + CHAIR APPEAL



A great visual identity can
associate positive feelings
with your brand over time.
It's your job to settle on one
that's authentic, compelling
and unique. Make us proud!

Before You Go

Remember, This Is Just the Tip of the Iceberg

There's a lot more to a brand than what we've covered here. Designing a brilliant visual identity takes someone with years of experience and lots of talent. The reality is that more firms get it wrong than right. Getting it wrong comes with costly inefficiencies and wasted market share. Who needs that!?

There's No Need to Overcomplicate Things

We're big fans of the simplest approach that works. To that end, we champion clean, flexible visual identity systems that are driven by strategy. Regardless of your firm's goals, your identity should drive brand awareness and equity. To endure, it has to be streamlined, it has to scale and it has to stand out.

Contact Us

Find out how we can get your brand in gear, starting with our accelerated brand strategy workflow. Speak to us directly at 417 413 7777 x1 or email us at hello@distility.com



Avoid an Identity Crisis

With some best practices in your back pocket, you're set to lead better discussions about your visual identity. Get your team on the same page. Send them this ebook and start the conversation.

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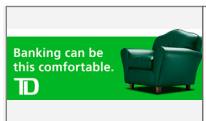
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