

Identity Matters:

What do your marketing materials say about you when you're not around?

There's no doubt in my mind that you work hard at your business. You're always thinking of growth opportunities, ways to strengthen market share, networking... all the important factors that can make the difference in your bottom line. And it's likely you have a marketing plan that you implement — even if it's somewhat open-ended. Getting your name out there is crucial, but the old adage 'there's no such thing as bad PR' just doesn't hold water in today's culture of savvy consumers. If you are putting your organization's marketing materials out there and they send a confusing (or worse, unprofessional) message about your operation, it's no different than showing up to a meeting with food on your shirt. Let's make sure your business materials speak well for you even when you're not around.

Start at the Beginning

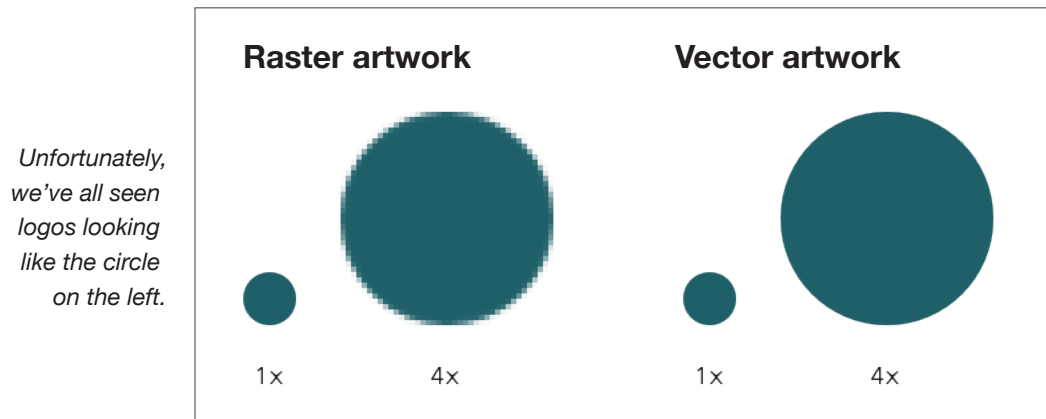
If you're just beginning the process of developing your business' identity and marketing materials (or are planning an update or complete redesign) there are several elements to be tackled up front to avoid problems down the road.

- **Keep it simple.** For whatever reason, developing a logo — usually the starting point for a business' identity — turns into a case of packing 10lbs of 'story' into a 5lb bag. Your logo does not need to tell your *entire* story in one 2" square. Instead, choose key elements of your company's area of differentiation and convey that conceptually. It will be enough, and your logo will be simpler (read: clearer and more memorable). From a technical standpoint, refine the design to remove extraneous linework, and avoid very fine lines that will disappear or look muddy when the logo is used at small sizes. And, rather than think of your logo as the entire method for telling your story, consider it the *signature* at the bottom of a letter of introduction.

Another recommendation is to avoid super trendy design approaches and effects, as they will seriously date your logo... and no one wants their company identity to look like a throwback to the late 90s (*why, hellooo, dropshadows and Photoshop blends!*) Your logo should have a version in black/white that looks every bit as strong as the color version.

- **Copies of your logo files.** This is crucial. Whoever is designing your logo needs to give you your own set of final logo files for your use. Keep these files in a safe place with copies on a cloud server like Dropbox or Google Drive. Make sure everyone in your organization knows where to find them and the proper way to use them.
- **Vector art files.** The folder of logos you're given should contain a variety of file formats, most importantly as vector art. The most common vector art file is Illustrator (.ai) but could also be a PDF, an .eps file or even an InDesign (.indd) file. With a vector file, you can enlarge your logo to any size (billboard! hot air balloon!) without any loss of quality. In all cases, make sure the designer converts all text to paths so there will not be problems if you (or a future printer) doesn't have the font used. DO NOT have your designer create your logo in Photoshop or other 'paint' type program. The limitations of building a logo in these programs will haunt your marketing materials forever. Trust me on this one.

- **Raster art files.** Also request a maximum quality (300dpi) .jpg version and a maximum quality .png with a transparent background. Used at 100% size, these will be print-quality and will output well from most desktop publishing programs as well as professional layout software. Having a 72dpi web-optimized version is also handy, but any web designer should be able to take your 300dpi file and optimize it for their purposes.



- **Color considerations** – If your logo has been designed with both a color version and a black-and-white version — and I sincerely hope it has — request that the designer save each version in both raster and vector formats.

If your identity is already established but you don't have these files in your possession, it's worth the time to contact the designer and get them, or figure out how to build/save your logo in these formats if you did the logo yourself.

Why is this important? In a nutshell, you don't know what marketing opportunities may arise. If you have your logo saved in these formats, you'll be ready for anything. You'll be able to send the proper file to a silkscreener (.eps or PDF), to a web designer (.jpg or .png), and should you suddenly need to make a minor change, you've got the native file (.ai) and most designers will be able to make the alteration with minimal effort. But if you *don't* have your logo files accessible to you, you will find yourself 'making do' with scans of existing pieces and stuff scraped off the web, which lowers the quality of your printed materials and hurts your organization's brand overall.

Looks Do Matter

The average consumer in the Western world must deal with thousands of brand names competing for mindshare every day. And, consumers have become more design savvy: we seek out good design in our everyday lives — cell phones, laptops, automobiles, etc. Your marketing materials will be out there competing for the consumer's attention and whether sharp or shoddy, people will notice. Plus, those potential consumers will judge the quality of your service or product by the quality of what's in front of them. You won't always be standing there showing them what a top-notch professional you are... *your marketing has to convince them in your absence.*

Let's imagine a typical program booklet for a local event — with all those business card-sized ads in black and white. They're all pretty much the same, and there's not a lot of room in that little ad. But let's say there are two carpet cleaning companies. One has sent in a slightly fuzzy scan of their business card and had it dropped in. It might even be a tad crooked from not being placed on the scanner just right. Yep, it's an ad and yes, it's technically getting their name out to the public. But then you compare it to a sharp little ad for another carpet cleaner. The logo is crisp and sized appropriately. Clearly, this ad has been created specifically for this space, and the message is even tailored to the event audience. Which company seems more detail-oriented? Which seems to care a bit more about appearances? Which one is trying to actually connect with you? By extension, which one seems like they would care about cleaning your carpet well?

Maybe you're thinking this is a pretty superficial way to judge a business. But in lieu of a referral from a neighbor or friend, people have to judge based on what's presented to them. Please care enough about your marketing to look professional everywhere you put your name.

Strategies for Consistency

Creating marketing materials that speak well of you doesn't have to be expensive. In fact, if you establish some firm identity standards you can eliminate guesswork and create more impact with the same budget. Here is a list of items to consider in relation to your business brand. If you set these guidelines and follow them consistently, your identity will be stronger for it.

- **Is your company logo a type treatment only, or is there an icon as well?** If type only, make sure you are importing a graphic file (such as a .jpg) and it's not simply being typed into your documents each time. Merely typing it means variations in size, spacing, and even font if someone isn't careful. If there is also an icon, make sure your graphic file includes it with the type. This way, the position of the two in relation to each other is always the same.
- **Do you have a slogan or tagline?** Make sure it is always the same wording, always written in the same font, and always the same scale in regards to the logo. In fact, it should ALSO be included in that same logo graphic file from #1 above. A logo containing all elements (icon/type/tagline) is commonly referred to as a 'logo lockup'.
- **How will your logo appear in materials?** Depending on the design of your logo, decide whether placing it at center-top, or bottom-right or some other location is best. Then stick to it! Craft your ads so the text or photo draws your eye to the logo. Be deliberate in your placement, and be consistent.
- **How will you convey your message?** Is it dramatic black-and-white photography with minimal copy? A bold but amusing headline? Pick a 'hook' or style of communicating and then own it! If you have a business card, a brochure and a billboard, they should all use the same look and language. This is the sort of consistent personality that people will come to associate with your BRAND. (There's far more to branding your business than this, but this is an excellent start you can tackle yourself.)
- **Choose a font family.** Pick a nice, legible font for body copy. Serif fonts (example: Times) are easiest to read, and more traditional. Sans Serif fonts (think Helvetica) are typically more modern and there are tons of variations. Then, choose something a little bolder for subheads and emphasis. Work with pairings until you find two that are compatible. These will become your corporate fonts, and you should use them consistently throughout your marketing.
- **Leave plenty of white space around your logo.** A smaller logo with plenty of "breathing room" will actually show better than a larger logo squished into a busy space.
- **Have a corporate color or palette.** Color is a great visual cue! But you need to be consistent with it. Choose your color based on the Pantone Matching System (a printer or designer will have a Pantone book for you to review colors). Ideally, you should have both a Pantone number and a CMYK build of your corporate color(s). If your logo is being professionally designed, make sure your designer provides both of these plus RGB and Hex, so you can use the same color throughout your print and online marketing.

The Big Picture

Full-fledged corporate branding is far more than I've put forth in this short article. However, with a little foresight, planning and consistency, you can create marketing materials that will speak highly of the work you do, and give you far more bang for your marketing buck.

Melanie Shellito is a graduate of IWU and a 25+ year veteran of the design profession, specializing in helping positive impact businesses market smarter. Her portfolio is full of organizations that she has helped through their 'identity crises' plus many other wonderfully challenging projects. Melanie can be reached at melanie@firebrand.com.