

In Search of the Perfect Logo

– By Andrea Gaines
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The Oxford Dictionary defines a logo as **“a printed design or symbol that a company or an organization uses as its special sign.”**

Sounds pretty easy. But, while at times exquisitely simple, logo development is one of the most highly-disciplined practices in the field of marketing. Treat it like a fancy way to say your name and you’ll end up with frilly type on paper ... go overly symbolic and you’ll end up representing your industry or type of service, and say nothing about who YOU are among the other fish in the sea.

The advertising industry is pretty much in agreement with respect to what makes a good logo mark: it’s attractive; it’s functional (works across all communications media, from the web, to printed materials to a simple fax cover sheet); it says what you want to say about yourself; and it has staying power.

Yet, if you’re in the market for a company or individual to create a logo for you, you might wonder why you can, on the one hand, pick up a logo design from the web for as low as \$199, or, be charged \$10,000 by a boutique agency – only to find their creation looks just like the samples you see on the \$199 website ...

You don’t have to spend \$10,000 to get a good logo. But you do need to know what you are trying to achieve. You do need to know how to challenge and get the most out of the money you spend. **And, you do need to get both artistic and marketing value from the creator.** For, in addition to being attractive, functional, and timeless, quality logo marks also have these four key characteristics:

1. **The combined visuals – including words, letters and purely graphic elements – have immediate, competitively impact.** The logo creates interest and catches your eye, and it does this when viewed by itself AND in the context of other things that compete for the viewer’s attention – the photos in your brochure, the headlines and copy in your ad, the website address on your business card, etc. *(The logo for a community and faith-based non-profit called the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, above, is a perfect example of this.)*
2. The mark has **the look and feel of art.** Even if it’s all or mostly typeface, modern or old world illustration, every graphic element – including color, shape, and style – works together. Everything has a sense of talent behind it, and looks to be put there for a purpose – by someone who knew what they were doing. *(The World Wildlife Fund’s simple black and white panda is a good example of this.)*



3. The logo **communicates values consistent with your product or service’s market positioning.** Market positioning is defined as the place you occupy relative to competitors. Are you the innovate newcomer, or representative of the conservative tried and true? Are you the low price value, or, the top quality retailer? Are you the solid institutional type, or the warm and friendly service provider? *(Prudential’s “rock” communicates it is a solid and conservative insurance company ... Allstate’s “good hands” put the focus on customer care and service.)*
4. **The mark not only remains visually attractive over time, but is also simple enough and fundamental enough to always represent the core benefit you offer in a beneficially relevant way.** This is about the hardest thing to get right in a logo. Some of it is instinctual. Some of it relates to logo development discipline, where you communicate only what you need to communicate in the mark. *(Coca-Cola is king on this issue. Its bold “American” red, clean lines and unique, one-of-a-kind script say “We’re the one who created the soft drink – our product is “the real thing” – just as perfect today as it was a century ago.”)*



Like the Coca-Cola logo, if your mark is right, it feels like your favorite pair of jeans ... and fits you like a perfectly tailored suit.

People in your market will come recognize it for what it means in terms of the value you provide. It will be the visual opening and finishing touch that tells people everything you say in your ad or brochure is accurate and true. It will remind people of what you offer that your competitors do not. You’ll be just as happy it represents you today, as you were the first time you saw it on your business cards and letterhead.

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