

EIGHT RULES FOR A SUCCESSFUL IDENTITY

From Kenny Miller's *How To Develop More Effective Advertising* seminar

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I don't want to point fingers at my friends in the printing industry, or throw cold water on the talents of a budding art student, but they are not necessarily the best people to see for a new logo. Notice the hedge word, "necessarily." Sure, there are great examples of logos produced from those folks just as one can find lousy examples of logos produced by your friendly neighborhood advertising agency. The problem is in the definition. You should not be buying a logo. You should be buying an identity.

First of all, let's not forget why a printer is in business. A printer sells printing. In order for the printer to sell his printing, he must put something visually pleasing on paper—envelopes, letterheads, business cards, labels, catalogs, etc. As you can see, the logo just became a necessary evil. That logo design probably works well on the envelope, the business card, the labels and the forms because those items all have one thing in common. Those items are some form of "box" and most printer designs that fit into a box. That doesn't mean those same designs are going to work on a product, a truck, a uniform, and God only knows what else that is going to come along over the course of the business. When those unusual needs pop up, so does the "tinker syndrome." Someone makes a little change here and a little change there and before long, whatever you had in mind is now a mind-numbing design headache. Your design consistency is gone. Toast. Consistent use of a good strong design will build a strong identity--it is a graphic investment in your business future. The time to clear away the urge to tinker happens on day one.

RULE 1: Never design a company logo to fit pleasantly on a piece of paper.

Start the identity design process in terms of a "mark" and not something that takes care of the top two inches of a piece of paper. What do I mean by "mark?" Why trademark of course. Think of a single design unit, which over the course of thirty years, is going to become the visual you. The Ford® script in the oval, the strong block-style GM® for General Motors®, the Nabisco® Triangle, always in the upper corner, Apple® computer's apple, a big silver and blue star for the Dallas Cowboys®, AmericanAirlines® with no space between the names. and, my all-time winning favorite, a big red "N" on a white football helmet. Get the idea?

RULE 2: Once you have a design in mind, do a quick sketch and a trademark search.

It doesn't have to be that expensive to conduct a quick trademark search. The Internet has made that process fairly easy. Go to the Department of Commerce page <http://www.commerce.gov> and you will find a trademark search engine. If you find out early that you are treading on someone's trademark toes,

you can save design time and money and move in another direction, or you can approach the design holder and buy them out. Apple did just that with their apple trademark.

If everything is clear and/or bought out, now is a good time to file a registration. Take about \$50 or so to your friendly Secretary of State Office, along with a copy of three uses of the design (use your computer to create those), to do the cheap registration. If you choose to have a lawyer do it, have a trademark lawyer do it. The trademark lawyer will let you know when you should apply the circle ® to your trademark and will draft a nasty letter to those who would dare steps on your newly registered toes! (NBC television came up with a nifty new design to replace the peacock some years ago and did a big splash on the air. Unfortunately, it looked just like the trademarked used by Nebraska Public Television. As a result of the settlement, the NPT folks have enjoyed some of the latest production equipment in the industry. Be careful! You should also know that “first use” is almost as good as a legal registration. There isn’t a designer alive that hasn’t asked, “Is this an original design or is it something I may have seen and my subconscious has stored?” Only the other guy’s lawyer will know for sure.

RULE 3: Make sure your mark looks great in black and white.

Let’s face it, most of the time, you will see your trademark in black and white. Ads. Copies. News photos. If it comes off great in black and white, a little color will probably help. That’s not true the other way around. The fact is, some colors don’t show up well in black and white. Make a Xerox® copy of something red and yellow and you’ll see what I mean.

If you chose those colors, or if someone chose them for you, make sure they don’t turn into black and white image mud. A simple Xerox® copy of your color trademark will tell you a great deal about how it will look in black and white.

RULE 4: Control the flow.

Before you start to produce anything, sit back and take a look at your new design. In the art business, we have a concept of “movement and flow.” Designs are like pointers. Forget the items in your design for a moment and just look at it and see if it “points” somewhere. See where it takes your eye. If you believe your design “points” then you should use that pointer to your advantage and have it point at something. If you don’t like where it points, you can stop the motion by framing it with a box, an oval, or a circle. Caution: make sure the box, oval, or circle has a thick enough border. If it is too thin, it may not be visible when you use small versions of your logo. Don’t create a special border for the small ones. That’s tinkering!

RULE 5: Take control of your logo by having “slicks” available.

Once you have a trademark design that works well in black and white, have your printer shoot your new design and reproduce it in a bunch of different sizes. Have these different sizes printed on a page and print several pages on glossy white heavy paper. These pages, called “slicks” and the purpose is to keep your logo in exact proportion.

When someone outside of your company, or inside for that matter, needs a copy of your logo, give them one of these sheets. They can cut the right size trademark out of the sheet and use it in their artwork. Anytime you hand out your trademark to a smiling face, ask that smiling face to present a proof of what’s planned before they produce anything. Always ask to see the result before it is put in front of the public. Remember consistency adds recall power to your advertising and you do not want your audience to recall bad design.

RULE 6: Identify your colors with standard industry colors.

The next step is to choose the “right” color. Check out the psychology of color at <http://www.colormatters.com>. You’ll find lots of good information.

There is also a cost consideration. One color is actually two colors. You pick one for your logo and use black for the address etc. Two-color is actually three and so on. Beyond three it starts to get pretty expensive.

When I say “blue” you think blue. When I say “blue” to a printer, he or she thinks hue. There are bunches of blues. Fortunately, you can define all of those shades through industry standard color mixes. More specifically, identify your color choices as specific Pantone® colors (<http://www.pantone.com>). Your printer and your designer have a little book of Pantone® colors, which defines the exact ink mixtures, which will produce your exact colors. Computer design programs such as Adobe Pagemaker® and Quark Xpress® have Pantone® palettes included in the software.

When you define your colors by the Pantone® system you retain control of your design and build consistency. Just make certain you see a proof! Remember, consistency builds recall and that’s free advertising.”

Be smart with color. After all, the smart duck pays more attention to a brown and white eagle than a peacock.

RULE 7: Show your family when you’re done. Show your mentor and respected customers while you’re doing.

Don’t confuse a family business with an evening at a lousy craft show. Seek the opinions of those who know business, your mentor, or those who will spend the dough, your best customers. Just because a family member has taken a craft class doesn’t make that person a qualified judge of a very major decision. Bring all of the decision-makers into the process early so they are involved in the entire process.

RULE 8: Consistency sells!

You shouldn't be surprised by now. Want to get the most out of your advertising (and trademark) dollar? Then design a visually powerful trademark and use it consistently. That means YOU control how it is used and here's how.

Create a corporate identity manual. This is a control document of how your logo should be used. Create the design rules. Specify the type styles used. Identify the type setting company and the artist you used to create your logo. Define where and how your logo can be used. Create a graph paper overlay of the design so the sign painting folk can make exact copies of the design. Include the slicks. Include a color comprehensive of the design and define the Pantone® colors used. Include the legal information. Create a change log which outlines the change requested and by whom, the approval and by whom, and a copy of the finished product. Make the process of taking "liberty" with the design a difficult and carefully considered decision.

If you have a firm set of rules and a set of reproduction proof sheets, and specifically defined Pantone® color(s), chances are excellent that thirty years from now, someone will look at your trademark and instantly recognize your company. If you don't think that has long-term advertising value, just ask Ford®, American Express®, General Motors®, AmericanAirlines®, and Wal-Mart®. I think you'll get the idea.