

Branding and Design Guide

What is Branding?

Branding goes beyond having a cool logo or the perfect name for your ensemble. When a person or organization has a well-defined brand, it means their audience has a visceral understanding of their identity. A few perfect examples include Apple, Dove or Barack Obama. These brands connote specific brand attributes, and these attributes resonate throughout their entire organization.

A brand is an identity and a promise that must be delivered on. Whether or not you realize it, your brand already exists. Take some time to identify and define your brand, then make your brand resonate with the way you act as a professional, and the content you put out.

Three Simple Steps to Defining Your Brand

1. Define your **mission statement** Your mission statement says what your present goals are as an organization (individual or group).
2. Define your **brand values** Choose three or four words, or short phrases that reflect who and how you are. For example, Stephen Colbert’s brand values might be “spontaneous wit,” “exaggeratedly self-absorbed” and “coy.” Apple’s brand values might be “user-friendly,” “innovative” and “reliable.” While these brand attributes are inherent to who these organizations are, they are reiterated through all of their communications (ads, social media, press, website) in a narrative that is easily understood.
3. State your **vision** Ultimately, every professional is contributing to a greater mission. What greater goal are you contributing to?

Applying Your Brand

Make an effort to represent yourself consistently through your entire creative and communicative output. These are areas where you can apply this awareness:

- Website: color scheme, simplicity of your interface, font, spacing between letters (kerning)...
- Photos: lighting, use of darker/lighter colors, overall character
- Social media: use a consistent voice in posts on Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- Business cards: elegant, simple, harsh... how are you trying to convey yourself?
- Any writing: bios, media pitches, and press releases. Write in a voice consistent with your brand.

Finding your brand attributes simply requires that you be honest with yourself. The attributes of your brand should accurately reflect your character and purpose. It may take some digging, but a meaningful and well-defined brand streamlines your communication efforts and gives your audience a clear picture of who you are.

Classical Musicians with Clear Brands

wild Up <http://wildup.la>

wild Up is a modern music collective – a group of Los Angeles-based musicians committed to creating visceral, thought-provoking happenings. Our programs are eclectic studies of people, places, and ideas that we find interesting. The group believes that music is a catalyst for shared experiences, and that the concert venue is a place for challenging, exciting, and igniting the community around us.

Third Coast Percussion <http://thirdcoastpercussion.com>

This ensemble represents themselves as a vibrant and energetic ensemble who are creative in terms of their musical collaboration and delivery. They reflect these qualities not only through their performance, but the appearance of their website and press photos.

Eighth Blackbird <http://www.eighthblackbird.org>

eighth blackbird \`ätth `blak-, bərd\ slang (orig. and chiefly U.S.)

1. verb. to act with commitment and virtuosity; to zap, zip, sock
2. adjective. having fearless (yet irreverent) qualities.
3. noun. a flock of songbirds, common in urban areas since 1996.

Duo Del Sol <http://duodelsol.com>

On stage, this firebrand duo takes no prisoners. They harness the raw energy of a rock band by wildly stretching their instruments beyond any traditional limits, mixing and engineering their unique sounds like two mad scientists. Their instruments become irrelevant and what's left is evocative, powerful music.

What Is Graphic Design?

Graphic design is the art or profession of visual communication that combines images, words, and ideas to convey information to an audience. A graphic designer is responsible for arranging and using elements on different types of media (such as a poster, a package or a website), most likely with the use of a graphics software program such as Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop or InDesign.

Types of Graphic Design

Raster graphic programs create images that are made of thousands of little dots, or pixels. Creating or editing an image with dots allows you to provide for rich detail in an image. Because every dot can be a different color, you can allow for any kind of color change. Raster images are ideal for rendering rich, full-color images, like photographs.

Raster-based programs do have some drawbacks, though: all of the zeros and ones that are used to make up each pixel result in large file sizes. Your computer must keep track of the zeros and ones and must change each one when editing. This is memory-intensive and may cause slower editing. Rasters also do not resize well. When you resize a raster image, the pixels just get larger, making the image appear distorted and chunky/grainy. Photo editor programs, like Adobe PhotoShop, use raster-based images to allow for precise editing and total freedom in image appearance.

Vector graphic programs do not render images on a pixel-by-pixel basis. In a rasterbased image creation program, a square would be made of thousands of pixel dots. In a vector-based program, the same square would be made of only four dots, one on each corner. These “vector points” essentially allow your computer to play Connect the Dots. Each vector point has information in it telling your computer how to connect each point with straight or curved lines, and with what color to fill in the closed shape. If you resize a vector-based image, it loses little or no detail. The vector points spread out and the computer just redraws the image. You can easily color, or recolor, a vector-based image very easily using a drawing program. Vector images can also result in smoother lines because the lines are not hand drawn.

Vector images do have some drawbacks, however. They are generally filled with a solid color or a gradient but can't display the lush color depth of a raster. They also work better with straight lines or sweeping curves. Drawing programs, like Adobe Illustrator, primarily use a vector-based drawing mode to allow for scalability and clean lines.

Graphic Design Principles

The Gestalt Theory (gestalt meaning “unified whole”) is an effective way to explain the over-arching theme behind the principles of graphic design. If you collect together your design elements in an arrangement using these principles, your layout will feel more connected, coherent, and complete. An essential understanding of the ways in which an individual element and the whole in which it exists are important, both separately and together, will help you to create an effective design scheme.

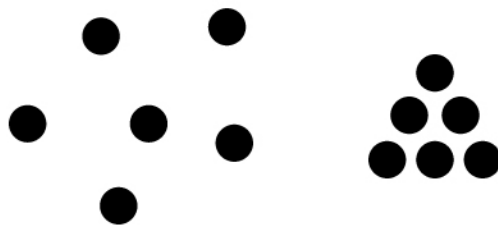
Continuation: The principle by which the eye is drawn along a path, line or curve, choosing to see a single continuous figure rather than separate lines. This can be used to tie the elements of a page together, and is witnessed where a line is cut through one object, often in a curve, aligning perfectly with a secondary element.



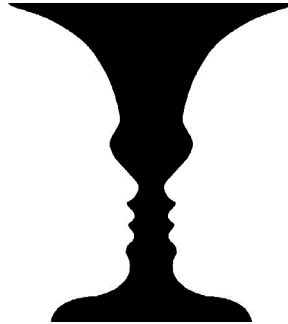
Closure: A common design technique that uses the human eye’s tendency to see closed shapes. Closure works where an object is incomplete or the interior space of an element is not fully filled out, but the viewer perceives a complete shape by inserting the missing information. This technique is often associated with stenciled artwork, but is also closely associated with logo forms.



Proximity: Otherwise known as grouping, this concept uses the close arrangement of elements to create a group association between those objects. If individual elements are also similar, they will tend to be perceived as a single whole, even though they are separate elements.



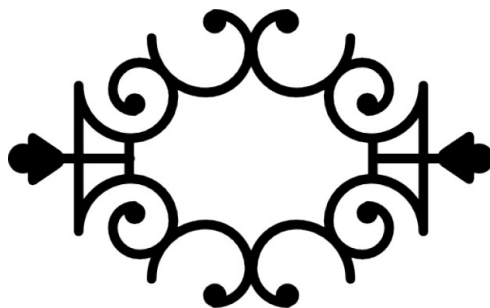
Figure/ground: This principle describes the eye's tendency to see and separate objects from their surrounding background. A classic example uses a vase/candlestick illustration to show two faces peering at each other, but you can also see this effect in a variety of log designs. It works because human eyes want to see the figure (foreground object) and background (ground) as two different planes of focus. Everything that is not figure is considered ground, which can be used to create some interesting visual effects and tricks, particularly when the designer or artist introduces deliberate ambiguity.



Similarity and contrast: When objects look similar to one another, viewers will often see the individual elements as part of a pattern or group. This effect can be used to create a single illustration, image or message from a series of separate elements. A particular element can be emphasized when it's dissimilar, breaking the pattern of similarity. Planning a consistent and similar design is an important aspect of a designers work to make their focal point visible. Too much similarity is uninteresting—however, without some similarity, important elements won't stand out. The key is to find a balance between the comparable and conflicting.



Symmetry and order: This principle says that a composition should not provide a sense of disorder or imbalance, as otherwise the viewer will waste time trying to locate the missing element, or fix the problem, rather than focusing on the message or instruction. You can achieve symmetry by providing a good balance or sense of symmetry in your design elements. Like the concept of similarity and contrast, a certain component can be accentuated when asymmetrical, breaking the pattern of symmetry.



Graphic Design and Branding

Graphic design is about the presentation and organization of market concepts that deliver everything in one attractive package. When you combine a striking image and a compelling headline, your message will hit its target. However, if either of those elements is missing, the message will likely miss its target as well. Through the use of graphic design, you can provide your audience with an image that they'll recognize every time they receive or see something from you.

Branding isn't limited to just a company logo—it entails putting that logo on everything your company presents as theirs. Your website/poster/brochure should tie into your brand by remaining consistent with the fonts, colors and overall graphic standards that your audience has been used to seeing.

Consistency is the key to effective branding, and graphic design is the key to consistency. Graphic design creates the structure for delivering your message, so that over time, your audience recognizes you in every message you deliver. Consistency creates confidence, and an assurance that your brand is dependable and, to an extent, predictable. If a company's visual concept inexplicably changes, their audience may lose trust in the brand.

Given the mass proliferation of digital media, there is an ever-decreasing window of time for an advertisement or website to capture the audience's attention. If they come across something in that window of time that makes them look twice, then they'll stop to absorb the message. A well-designed marketing scheme helps the audience see past the graphics to the underlying information, but it's the appealing graphics that initially reel them in.

Why Should I Know Graphic Design?

Money: On average, professional graphic design artist charges \$60 or more per hour. There are an abundance of free graphic design programs, and the majority of purchasable programs are relatively affordable (Adobe Creative Cloud, for example, is \$20 a month for students).

Multifunctionality: A simple logo or graphic concept can be utilized on websites, resumes, posters, or any other visual material. Therefore, a fairly small amount of graphic design work can yield results applicable to a wide variety of outlets.

Programs

GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program): This program is free and ideal for those who have had little experience with graphic design. GIMP can be used to retouch and manipulate photos, compose and author images, paint, and much more. Similar products are Paint.NET (Windows) and Adobe Photoshop Express.

Adobe Creative Cloud: If you're slightly more acquainted with graphic design but don't want to commit to purchasing expensive software, or are just looking to briefly dabble in graphic design, Creative Cloud may be your best bet. This program gives users access to the company's suites of software for graphic design, video editing, web development applications, and cloud services. Students and teachers can purchase a subscription for \$19.99 per month. Additionally, Cloud contains both vector and raster graphic programs, which will allow for a large amount of variability in your output.