Your company's logo: Time for a refresh?

There are a lot of smaller companies out there that don't have a definitive logo. This is an important part of branding because it is how your current and potential customers will recognize you. Your logo builds trust and gives you an identity.

Many larger companies either have logos that aren't being used to their full advantage, or logos that need to be updated. A word to the wise: if you are looking at changing your logo, think very carefully about it. It is important that you pick something and stick with it in order to have consistency in branding. It doesn't do a company's image any good to flip flop between different logos.

Take a good hard look at the design of your logo. Does it convey the message you are trying to send to your customers and the rest of the industry? Maybe it's time for an upgrade. The hardest part of the process is trying to figure out what you want, and then trying to communicate it to a designer. If you have no idea where to even start, this article features some do's and dont's for logo design that can steer you in the right direction. If you've got an eye for design though, you can try sketching out some ideas and playing with shapes and colours. If you really think you've got a good knowledge of design software and creative concepts, you could even let this article be your reference for DIY logo design!

DO: Think outside the box when it comes to design

Here's a key point: your logo design doesn't have to depict what your company does. Of course, that is the obvious idea when thinking of a graphic that represents your organization, but you might want to be more unique and think outside of the box. The Mazda logo isn't a picture of a car and the Starbucks logo isn't a picture of a cup of coffee.

What does your company symbolize? When thinking of a design, ask yourself the following question: "What are adjectives that describe my company?" Whether the answer is speedy, powerful, productive, environmental, creative, professional, or even classic, think about ways in which you could convey this message with a simple graphic or symbol.

Tip: flip through some magazines or websites and look at some already existing logos. Look at each one and think about the things you like, the things you don't like, and why. This will not only help narrow down what you want, but will also help your designer in his or her creative process.

DON'T: Use a photo in your logo – keep it vector!

Some might think this goes without saying, but that's not always the case. There are a lot of logos out there that use intricate raster graphics such as clip art. This is a problem because not only will you be unable to alter its size, but you may not own the rights to use your clip art file.

Your logo needs to be completely scalable. As opposed to a raster image, a vector graphic is one that can scale to any size without losing resolution or image quality. Keep this in mind because clients will see your logo on everything from your trade show booth banners, to your business card, to your website. It has to be versatile.

DO: Make sure it is recognizable in both black-and-white and full colour.

Believe it or not, while colours are a very important decision for branding, they are secondary when it comes to logo design. If you have a logo with elements that are only distinguishable when printed in colour, you've got a problem. Lots of documents are printed in only black-and-white, such as faxes and newsletters. It is important for your customers to be able to recognize your brand identity in any situation.

Another thing to look at with the colour of your logo is the background it will be displayed on. It might look fine on a white piece of paper, but what about if you want to have it printed on a black binder or on a dark vehicle wrap? You should consider having an alternate scheme for use on a dark background.

DON'T: Make it complicated. Less is more!

Your audience will only glance at your logo for a couple of seconds. It has to be simple. If it is confusing with the text and graphics you've used, it won't be memorable. The best logos are the ones that are not complex at all – think Nike, think McDonalds, think Pepsi. These logos are known and remembered worldwide.

Another tip: try not to combine and merge the text in with the graphic in your logo; keep them separate. You want them to be multipurpose – both parts should be able to stand up by themselves. For a letterhead, you might want to use only the text, and for your business cards, you might want to use just the graphic. You also want to think about the size ratio of the logo. If your design is much taller than it is wide, it could be hard to place on a website banner, and will take up too much room on your letterhead. However, if it is too wide, you might also have a problem putting it on something small such as business cards or company pins.

DON'T: Get crazy with fonts

You should never use more than two types of fonts in one logo. If you have more than that, you've either got one confusing design, too much text – or worse – both! Your logo, above all, has to be coherent. One font is classic, two fonts can create an interesting contrast, but more than that is just plain confusing.

Also think about readability. Have you chosen a font that is too thick that you can hardly distinguish between letters? When dealing with logos, kerning is especially important – this is the distance between each individual letter. Some fonts can be too tight and need to be manually spaced out to be more legible. The opposite – too loose kerning – can also be true in some cases. Always make sure you kern the type in your logo perfectly. It might seem like a small task, but it can make a world of difference.

DO: Show it off!

Your logo is a representation of what your company is. Make it easy for your clients and the press to get to it. Put a high-res downloadable version in the media centre of your website. Have your employees (especially the ones in marketing) automatically attach it at the end of each email. Embed it in the bottom of every press release. This makes it easier for magazines and websites to write articles about your company. The easier it is for the press to find and use your logo, the more they will feature it, and the more your customers and the industry will see it. This is such an easy thing to do that can turn into a sizable amount of brand recognition – and it doesn't cost you a thing!