

The basics of logo design

Your logo is the primary part of your brand identity, so it's important to make sure it communicates the right message. Here are four key things to bear in mind when looking at logo design.

A logo is usually made up of several elements - the mark (or symbol), the logotype (or name), and sometimes, a tagline.

What I'd like to focus on is the effectiveness of your logo design from a mechanical viewpoint, that is how effectively it can be applied across different media and how well it communicates.

1. Legibility

Tape an A4 colour printout of your logo on a wall. What elements can and can't you see from the other end of the room? Run the printout through a photocopier a few times, or fax it to yourself. How legible is it now? Have some elements disappeared?

Here are some common issues that impact on the effectiveness of logos.

Fancy typefaces with thin lines or heavy embellishments are less legible, such as in the following two logos:

When the **size ratio between key elements is too extreme**, the smaller elements can disappear when the logo is reproduced in a smaller size, such as on a website:

Elements in light colours can disappear against a light background, for example the sun in the Start Right logo.

Insufficient contrast makes it hard to retain fidelity when a logo is photocopied, scanned or faxed, for example in the Two Roads logo:



Certain **inadvisable colour combinations** like red on green are invisible to people with a colour vision deficiency, which is 7-10% of the population according to Wikipedia.



Overly **enthusiastic graphics** can negatively affect the legibility of the other elements of the logo such as the all-important name.

2. Simplicity

If you walk past your logo at a normal pace, what elements stick in your mind? Logos are often read in passing, with no more than a glance.



Blur your vision by squinting – how many broad fuzzy lumps can you identify? Ideally you should aim for no more than three lumps.

The lumps must clearly indicate an order of reading. If the mark is the first thing you want people to read, make it larger, or set it in a brighter colour. If there are letters or characters in your logo design, these must follow the expected convention of reading for that language – left to right for English, right to left for Arabic for example. Avoid putting important text on its side or upside down.

Compare the above with the logo below. See how visually powerful the relatively simple Westpac logo is?

Watch out for logos where every element is clamouring for attention. Less is more. It is impossible to tell your whole story via a logo, so don't try.



3. Usability

This is **OWNING YOUR OWN COMPANY** stakes - a logo design that looks beautiful in full colour on a large sheet of pure white paper, but looks terrible when it's seen on a shirt or signage, or when displayed in low resolution on the web.

Neither of the following logos can be reproduced successfully on non-white backgrounds. The Hayden logo is possibly illegible even on a business card.

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At a minimum, a logo must be designed to be reproducible in the following situations:

- Black and white only, such as a newspaper ad or a fax.
- A single colour only, when superimposed on a photo, a textured background, solid colours or black backgrounds.
- A vertical format, where it will be taller than wider.
- When shrunk to a very small size.



It is common practice for a logo designer to create different versions to accommodate each of these situations.

4. Unambiguity

Graphical representations are notoriously hard to get right. A seemingly innocent symbol to you can mean something completely different to someone else from another culture. You should seek honest feedback from a diverse range of people – especially those who have a somewhat irreverent outlook on life – to avoid embarrassments like the one below.

Ambiguity can come from the choice of typeface too, and the spacing (tracking or kerning) between letters. Remember logos are usually read at a glance!



Without sufficient thought, a mark can innocently present an unintended message, such as a peeling poster.



A final piece of advice for solopreneurs - stay away from using a mark for the sake of it. If you don't have a multi-million marketing budget to drill your mark into people's heads, go with a legible logotype of your name instead. There is nothing more confusing and forgettable than a mystery symbol, particularly with no name attached.



Remember that artist who has a symbol instead of a name...

Zern Liew helps his clients build beautiful businesses by practically innovating across their Branding, Communications, Processes and Systems.