

DON'T

TRY THIS

at HOME

**All you need is a logo?
You're creative enough.
Still, hiring a professional
logo designer is worth it.**

by: Kate Siegel

Logos are like "rabbits' feet," imbued with mystical and magical properties not always rooted in the rational.

So said famed designer Paul Rand, best known for his corporate logo designs including IBM, UPS, Westinghouse, ABC, and Steve Jobs' NeXT. From fashion to sports teams to electronics, we're all familiar with iconic logos that imbue products with a level of cachet beyond their intrinsic value. And when it comes to the public face of your company or institution, of course you have a personal interest in creating the "perfect" logo too. So if you have some creative ability and are on a tight budget, you might be tempted to do it yourself.

"I think people do not understand how important and valuable a good logo is to their business and, as a result, there is a glut of bad identities out there," says Jodi Hersh of Orange Star Design. "People are often unwilling to pay professional fees for good logos because they don't understand the value, nor do they understand the process and why it costs what it costs. They see the finished product, a simple icon or icon with type, and think 'I could have drawn that myself in less than an hour.'"

But really, could you?

In his book "Don't Worry, Make Money," Richard Carlson (the author of the "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff" series) writes, "I can do this myself better than anyone else' is really a foolish statement based on fear. It's ridiculous to spend your time doing things that others can do better, because your time is better spent doing the things that you're really good at. The truth is, none of us are experts at everything..."

"The skill is in the concept, not the hand," Hersh explains. "It's in the research, the exploration, the distilling, the breakdown of something complex to its most simple visual form. When I design a logo, I explore every direction I can come up with, sometimes generating 40 to 50 roughs before determining what is working, and then refining and refining and refining and refining."

WHAT IS A LOGO?

"A logo acts primarily as an identifier — something people can associate a company with at a single glance," says David Airey, an Edinburgh-based brand identity designer, popular blogger and author of "Logo Design Love: A Guide to Creating Iconic Brand Identities." "A successful logo should be appropriate, scalable, memorable, distinctive, practical and simple."

"In an environment where we are bombarded with so many images and messages each day, a good logo matters — to stand out, to communicate effectively," says Hersh. "A logo is the visual representation of a brand or organization, distilling the essence of something down to a simple mark. A logo speaks directly and instantly and should evoke positive recognition. Unlike a brochure, a logo must deliver with very little — and it must do this successfully at both large scale and small."

In an interview with www.designinterviews.com Airey says, "Too many designers (or should that be clients?) feel that the logo must tell the story of what the company does. The logo is used primarily as an identifier, not to describe the precise product or service on offer. Look at Apple, Nike, and Shell for example. What's important about their logos is that they're simple enough to remember."

Gregory Thomas in his book "How to Design Logos, Symbols and Icons" takes that memorability a step further: "A successful mark is one that engages the viewer and allows them to play a small 'interactive' mind game with it."

THE CRAFT OF DESIGN

Hersh spells it out: "Design is not random, and it is not decoration. It is communicating something visually, effectively and efficiently." It is, indeed, a skill.

"Designing a logo and identity for your own company can be a fun but dangerous thing. On one side you have a clean piece of paper with lots of thoughts and ideas. But on the other side, you can be way too close to it," says John Stapleton, chief creative director for 22squared, a full-service agency with offices in Atlanta and Tampa. The visual identity they designed for the high-end, custom furniture line Thomas & Gray was recently recognized by the 2010 HOW Logo Design Awards as a top ten entry.

"This is where the beauty of hiring a true designer comes in," Stapleton says. "They never get too close. They are there to explore and express your company in its simplest graphic form. They can do totally blind explorations and comparisons to other companies' identities so your company can stand out. They can present 50 different options in stages so things aren't too precious for you to kill. They can also serve it up on top of hats, t-shirts, websites, business cards and even building signs for you to see and judge what it would look like next to everything else out there. It can sting a little at first, but it will help you understand the importance of exploration. The good designers are tireless and relentless at exploration and creative solutions."

"Professional designers are going to give you choices,"

"Design is not random, and it is not decoration. It is communicating something visually, effectively and efficiently," says Jodi Hersh.

says Matthew Boyd of Evoke Design. "Sometimes I have clients that come to me with an idea, and once they get that in their head, it's all they concentrate on. I try to show them different styles for a logo (at least four on the first round), some far out of the box and some along the lines of what they had in mind. Often we end up with a hybrid of the ideas when it's all said and done, but it's something better than they came up with on their own. The same thing applies with colors, as the emotion from different colors can come into play when creating a logo."

"Unfortunately our industry is flooded with legions of 'tool-ers' — those who know the tools, know all the pre-fab pull-down menu effects, and spit out marginal design in volume. The public sees this every day and it leads them to think to themselves 'I can do that too,'" says Von Glitschka, founder of Glitschka Studios in an interview last year with Logo Designer Blog. His multi-disciplinary creative agency is a hired gun for both in-house art departments and medium to large creative agencies working on projects for such clients as Adobe, Microsoft, Pepsi, Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, Major League Baseball, John Wayne Foundation, Disney, Lifetime Television and HGTV. "I think our job is more than just design; it's also being a good communicator and teaching others. We shouldn't just know how to design, we should know why we are designing it so we can explain our approach to others and thus gain their trust. Doing so obviously raises the bar in terms of the public's opinion for what we do."

MORE THAN A DELIVERABLE

Paula Scher, a principal since 1991 in the New York office of the distinguished international design consultancy Pentagram, best known for her 1999 Citi mark and more recently for the 2010 rebranding of Bausch + Lomb, writes on Identity Forum (www.identityworks.com/forum), "I never knew a designer that got hundreds of thousands of dollars to design a logo. Mostly, designers get paid to negotiate the difficult terrain of individual egos, expectations, tastes and aspirations of various individuals in an organization or corporation against business needs and constraints of the marketplace. ... The complicated process is worth money. That's what clients pay for."

"Designers, good ones, are trained ... to distill what the essence is, what needs to be communicated and to whom. Most businesses cannot provide this information up front without an in-depth discussion with someone asking the right questions," Hersh says. "Once a business can define the message, the essence of a brand, a designer will make it visual. Very few DIYers have the ability to do this successfully."

"A professional logo and branding designer should be interested in learning about your company, culture and customers then be able to incorporate that understanding into a well-crafted gallery of concepts," says Mark Campbell, co-founder and designer at Logos Atlanta. "We love to involve our clients (even if they can't draw a stick figure) in the collaborative creative process by guiding us through conversation. We take our clients' fleeting thoughts and pin them down into a tangible, inspiring logo."

"When clients are guided through a creative process, they are investing in exploring key business decisions and exposing critical issues they may not have been aware of — or were choosing to ignore," says Canada-based Steve Zelle in his blog post "My Clients are Paying for the Process First and the Logo

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Second" at www.processedidentity.com (Jan 16, 2010).

Zelle continues, "This is one good reason why hiring a designer, and investing in a creative process, provides value to a client. There are many other reasons, including developing a relationship that can be leveraged in the future, the ability to meet goals and expectations through a proven method, and the expertise of someone trained and experienced in visualizing and simplifying concepts. I think the title 'graphic designer' can sometimes deliver the wrong message to a client, focusing on the deliverable and not the project as a whole. The logo is a result of the process."

Wages Design, one of the most accomplished and recognized branding and design consultants in the Southeast for over three decades, utilizes a proprietary seven-step process to develop their clients' communications criteria: discovery, focus, exploration, tuning, assembly, staging and measure. "At the core of the process is strategy," they say, "created in partnership with you through research and exploration."

"Strive to meet your designer open-mindedly without being emotionally invested in your DIY sketch," Campbell advises, "and find the reward of breadth and personality only evoked by a professional."

BEING PRAGMATIC

Aside from the critical discussion of what makes a logo good, there's also the practical side of the matter. "Designing is often perceived as an exclusively cosmetic exercise, such as coloring and shaping, whereas design also means analytical problem solving," says Gregory Hom of frog, an award-winning global product design and consultancy firm headquartered in San Francisco.

Think about an architect designing a structure. Yes, it needs to have the right number and kinds of rooms for its intended function and be aesthetically pleasing. It also needs to take into account to the laws of physics, comply with building codes and zoning regulations, and have affordable construction costs as well in order for the client to be able to actually build it. Similarly, professional designers also wrestle with the real-world applications of a logo.

Says Boyd, "A company's logo is going to be the only thing that shows up on everything that company does — websites, brochures and business cards and even on the side of a truck. Professional designers keep that in mind as they are designing a logo so that the logo can grow with the company."

Will it look as good half an inch tall wrapped around a pen as it will three feet tall on the backdrop of the tradeshow booth? Can it easily be heat-stamped on a coffee mug, die-cut out of vinyl, engraved on an award plaque, embossed on a presentation folder? How do you ensure that the color matches, or at least appears similar, in a newspaper ad and on your website and on softball jerseys? A good designer is aware of these considerations, anticipating issues with consistency in various uses across media and striving to minimize setup and production costs.

"What ends up happening, when [someone creates] a logo on their own, is they have to pay extra to have the logo converted ... so they can get signs created, shirts embroidered or put it on a billboard. Getting it done in the correct format to begin with will end up saving time and money in the long run," explains Boyd.

SEEING THE FOREST, DESPITE THE TREES

Glitschka believes educating the client is the most challenging part about logo design because of the inherent risk involved. "For example, a recent client showed a design to a committee and the consensus he got was to make a change to the art that, in my opinion, would ruin the design. So I had not just to tell him that their decision was wrong but explain it in such a way that was well reasoned and defined why it was wrong. Of course doing this — no matter how diplomatic your approach — runs the risk of offending a client and straining a work relationship."

"The designer needs to be ever-present because, inevitably, at some side meeting, something will be suggested that will totally destroy the form of the logo," writes Scher. "Something can be suggested innocently, with the best of intentions, that

will scuttle all plans, compromise all standards, and destroy the integrity of the design. The only person who can know this and stop this is the designer."

Like a coach, a good professional designer helps a client to accomplish their goal better than they could on their own. An independent designer can provide focus, challenge perceptions, fill in knowledge gaps, and bring fresh perspective and creativity.

"The ultimate proof is that our own agency hired a third party to design our logo mark," admits Stapleton. "We would have just gotten too close to make a smart and logical decision to last for the next decade and beyond."

"Savvy business owners value professional logo design not only for inspiring creative variety but also bottom-line producing results. We've had very artistic clients, but even they realize after our initial logo concepts that 'masterpiece' status very much depends on the critic, and in business, your critic is your customer," says Campbell. "We help our clients move beyond just pleasing themselves to clarifying their company story into an image that motivates and informs their target audience."

And that's the magic of a good logo. 🙌

WHAT I CAN'T DO FOR YOU

While professional designers are creative problem solvers, they are not miracle workers. Having realistic expectations about what a designer can and can't do will go a long way toward making your experience pleasant and your investment pay off with a great result.

On his website www.imjustcreative.com, Graham Smith, a freelance logo and identity designer in the UK with over 25 years of experience in graphic design, reprographics, advertising, marketing, commercial print, typography and photography, offers this list:

- I can't promise that by hiring me, I will design you a successful brand. A successful brand cannot be promised by anyone; a brand is created in the eyes of the customer. I can promise you I will work tirelessly to design and help you implement a successful business identity.
- I will not promise you a two to four day turnaround. Logo and identity design is typically a process of evolution and research. If you need a logo for your business within 48 hours, I doubt I can help.
- I will not try to compete with the various free and clip art style logo design websites that offer logo designs for £50. These are logo designs in the loosest possible sense.
- I will not use clip art.
- I will not provide you with two to four concepts or ideas, one of which you must choose. My logo design process is much more natural, free flowing... ideas evolve over time. I will work with you and show you my intended directions at various points of the process, so no nasty surprises or having to choose an idea you don't like.

A good designer is your partner and your coach, not your pixel-jockey.