



Good Design is Good Business!

Consider for a minute the number of graphic images you come across in a day. Each morning you're greeted by the product labels on your tube of toothpaste, shampoo bottle, shaving cream and cereal box. As you make your way to work, hundreds of messages will compete for your attention – signs, company vehicles and radio advertisements. Your day will continue with a flood of other visual messages coming in the forms of brochures, letterhead, direct mail, websites, etc.

Now, ask yourself, why do you notice some messages and not others? Why did you choose Crest instead of Colgate? I'd venture to say it had something to do with good branding affecting your perception of the product, and likely good design which visually drew you to the Crest box instead of Colgate. Not to say that Crest has better design than Colgate, but for a myriad of reasons (design being just one of them) your eye was drawn to one product over another.

Good design is critical to good branding

Branding is the art of creating perception; while there are several elements to creating a brand (see our Jan and Feb 2008 issues for more), good design is perhaps the most tangible since it is what creates visual perception for consumers. A well-managed brand will infuse good design throughout all touch points where the consumer encounters the brand. Poorly or inconsistently designed materials can give the impression that your company is unstable, unreliable, disorganized, or cheap. Many consumers can't look past this first impression and your company's image and message is drastically impaired. In contrast, good design can present an organized, more credible, well-communicated impression that helps people understand your product or service.

Companies that embrace good design as part of good branding lead the pack

Case in point – FedEx. In 1992, Federal Express engaged Landor Associates to overhaul their corporate identity. After 30 years, their original identity system didn't represent the company and their expanding interests any longer. Two years later, on June 24, 1994, FedEx was unveiled. The new corporate identity demonstrates on many levels how good design delivers good branding.

Officially known as Federal Express, customers often shortened the name to FedEx. In time, this term became a verb meaning "to send something overnight," and today it's common terminology to "FedEx" something. Landor Associates' year of research showed that Federal Express had existing brand equity in that it was closely identified with speed, reliability and customer service. Research also uncovered that the term "federal" (originally intended to imply an official alternative to the post office) created associations to being bureaucratic and slow. And, in some parts of the world, people had trouble pronouncing the word. All this considered, Landor made the recommendation to adopt the shortened name.

Logo work tweaked the colors, making the orange more orange and the purple less blue. The new logo included a hidden arrow subtly implying the company's promise of speed and precision. Often asked why they chose to keep the arrow hidden, FedEx logo designer, Lindon Leader, says, "The power of the hidden arrow is simply that it is a 'hidden bonus.' ...if you do see the arrow, or someone points it out to you, you won't forget it." This is a prime example of how simplicity can be a brand's strongest asset.

(to easily view FedEx's hidden arrow, go to www.thesneeze.com/mt-archives/000273.php)

Rounding out the new corporate identity, Landor Associates included the tagline "The World On Time" to clearly communicate the global reach and delivery speed that FedEx was built on.

Once the new visual direction for the company was established, FedEx executives smartly proceeded to apply that visual direction to every element of the customer experience. Their brand overhaul implementation is a testament to the fact that good branding, and therefore good design, will be economically smart for a company. With 30,000+ drop boxes, repainting to reflect the new image would have been costly. Instead, decals designed to retrofit the existing decals were produced. By eliminating the overall purple background on their delivery trucks, nearly \$1,000 was saved in painting for each 53-foot tractor trailer. Aircraft paint jobs were considerably cheaper as well. And since the new design used white as the overall color, surface temperatures on the planes were reduced by 40 degrees, lowering the need to cool the planes and therefore allowing for fuel cutbacks per flight. Validating the economically smart decision to overhaul their brand, Gayle Christensen, director of global brand management for FedEx, said “The research, development and launch of our new corporate identity cost less than the production and placement of one average TV commercial.”

As FedEx has continued to grow through expansion and acquisition, each of its services under the FedEx brand is a sub-brand unto itself. Some of the most recognizable are:

- Next Day Shipping (FedEx Express)
- Ground Parcel Shipping (FedEx Ground)
- Heavier Freight Services (FedEx Freight)

Each of these services has its own look and logo, while remaining unmistakably a FedEx product. All feature the same type style and signature purple of the FedEx logo.

Many of you might be reading this and say “Sounds great for a shipping service, but what about me?” The principles FedEx continues to apply to their brand management are ones that transcend product or service industries. As a developer, it’s vitally important to manage all aspects of your consumer’s experience with your property. Most of the time, the consumer experience begins with advertisements or direct response messaging; this leads to consumer-controlled exploration, likely through your website. Finally, interested consumers may visit your sales center and tour your property. If at any point, there is disorganized, inconsistent, or poorly designed communication, the brand experience is interrupted and degraded.

So what makes good design and how do you get it?

Let me make our disclaimer - all design is subjective - although, there are consistent elements to good design.

- **It presents a clear and concise message:** consider FedEx’s tagline “The World On Time.” The message of global delivery with speed and accuracy is clearly communicated. Additionally, all graphics are easily identified as FedEx.
- **Achieves product goals and fulfills its purpose:** FedEx was troubled with an outdated corporate identity that didn’t correspond with its changing brand. The new identity system answered the challenges put forth by FedEx executives in an economically smart way.
- **It’s memorable, distinctive and differentiating:** FedEx’s hidden arrow logo conveys their commitment to service in a way that is subtle and memorable – once you see the arrow, you don’t forget it. The simplicity of the logo proves that distinctive and memorable design doesn’t have to be shocking or complicated.

Good design embraces the fundamental principles and elements of design. Designers use elements like line, texture, color and space to create a composition. Principles like balance, proportion, contrast and harmony are applied to these elements in way that creates a unified and aesthetically pleasing composition.

Getting good design can be pretty simple if a few rules are considered:

- **Hire an expert:** FedEx employed Landor Associates – they didn’t try to pull it together in-house or at dinner on their napkins. Be wary of

just anyone calling themselves a graphic designer. With the advent of desktop publishing, anyone who knows how to use Microsoft Publisher considers themselves a “graphic designer.” To earn a degree in graphic design from an accredited program, students complete rigorous programs of study that include the fundamentals of visual arts, critical thinking, and innovative problem solving. While graphic design has transitioned to a technology-based career field, it is still a fundamentally-based art form.

- **Budget accordingly (in time and money):** It took two years to research, concept and launch FedEx’s new corporate identity. While your project might not be on that scale, it’s important not to rush the occasion. Likewise, don’t expect to get exceptional work on the cheap. Investing in good design is investing in your brand, which if done correctly, will pay off significantly over the long-term.
- **If you feel a design isn’t working, explain what you think is wrong, not how to fix it:** This goes back to knowing how to work with an agency (see our December 2007 issue for more on that). You hired the expert, let them do their job.

So where did all this good design get FedEx? In April 2008, FedEx ranked 81 in the world’s top 100 BrandZ Ranking. To point out the obvious, that’s the *world’s top 100*. Think back to all of those messages you see in a day – to be in the top 100 of the world is no small feat. Researched and developed by Millward Brown, BrandZ Ranking identifies the world’s most powerful brands as measured by their dollar value. FedEx’s brand is valued at \$9.273 billion. Most of you reading this newsletter won’t be managing a brand of that high value, but there’s a lesson to be learned from FedEx – Good Design is Good Business.

Resources

“The Man Behind the FedEx Logo” Retrieved on June 23, 2008 from www.thesneeze.com/mt-archives/000273.php

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“Why Federal Express Became FedEx” Retrieved on June 23, 2008 from www.cdf.org/issue_journal/why_federal_express_became_fedex-2.html

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“BrandZ Top 100 Brands Shows Dramatic Growth In The Financial Power Of Brands” Retrieved on June 23, 2008 from www.millwardbrown.com/Sites/Optimor/Media/Pdfs/en/BrandZ/BrandZ-2008-PressRelease.pdf

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