

# Designing a Brand Identity



One of the most interesting projects that a graphic designer can take on is designing a **logo**. It can be daunting (and stressful) to come up with logo options based on market research, and stumble upon some "**design magic**" through the exploratory process. Narrowing it down to a final approved logo and then seeing it out in the world can be a very rewarding experience for a designer.

However, most of the time, a logo is not enough. Large organizations with layers of management require a thorough brand identity system that provides a unified vision and tools that help everyone build the brand. But before we dig in, let's define the difference (and **relationship**) between a brand, an identity and a logo.



- A **Brand** (or Branding) refers to the perceived image and subsequent emotional response to a company, its products and services. It also represents the conversation that customers are having with each other about the company, and how that spreads. My favourite definition about brand is the one **Seth Godin gave**: *A brand is the set of expectations, memories, stories and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer's decision to choose one product or service over another. If the consumer (whether it's a business, a buyer, a voter or a donor) doesn't pay a premium, make a selection or spread the word, then no brand value exists for that consumer.*

- An **Identity** describes the visual devices used to represent the company. **Identity systems** are a visual components package that is paired with style guidelines and used as a framework to ensure the corporate image is cohesive and consistent. Some of the visual devices that leverage the brand elements and style guidelines are as follows: **stationery, marketing collateral, packaging, signage**, messaging, and **digital projects**, among others.
- A **Logo** is the central, identifiable visual element that helps customers discover, share and remember a company's brand. Usually it's in the form of an icon (mark or symbol), logotype, or combination of the two. The main purpose of a logo is summed up nicely as the five principles of effective logo design in [this Smashing Magazine article](#).



<http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2009/08/26/vital-tips-for-effective-logo-design/>

## Phase 1: Research, Vision & Design Brief



This phase should be as thorough as needed — depending on the depth of research and size of the company. It's the most crucial part of the **overall process**, and should result in a design brief that guides the rest of the project.

Below is a list of foundational questions and key dynamics to explore and document through **qualitative** and **quantitative** methodologies. (Note: This is only a quick overview of the most complex part of this process.)

- How is the **brand perceived** against competitors in the market for products and services you're looking to provide?

- What is the positioning statement of your brand? Answer the what, how, to whom, where, why and when questions.
- What is the heritage of your product type, and the origin(s) of its ingredients and fabrication process?
- Who is your audience? Are they digitally savvy? Where will your products/services have contact with them? How do you want that contact experience to make them feel, take action and think about your brand?
- What values & beliefs should the brand have about the business and its mission in the world? If the brand was a person, what would its personality be? How would it look, act and talk?
- What benefits do you want customers to associate with your brand? What is the **vision of the brand that you want to create?**
- Other brand image concerns: market awareness, emotional associations, value to the consumer, brand perception vs. consumer behaviour, changes desired in the brand-consumer relationship over time.

As you can tell, **it's complicated**. Two agencies who I think do a good job with their brand research are **Landor** and **Fi**. It shows in the way that they describe their completed work as challenge-and-solution projects.

## The Design Brief

It's important to have a design (or creative) brief if the brand identity project is bigger than one designer doing work for a small local business. A **design brief** should contain summaries from the research phase, such as: target audience(s), messaging objectives, values and mission of the brand, and the brand's products/services offering. It should also include budget, project schedule, file formats for delivery, and other practical needs.

If you're looking for tools and help on how to write a design brief for a brand identity project, explore the following: Freelance Switch **Brief Tips, Link List** and **Logo Design Brief, 99designs, Just Creative**, and **FreePDF Templates**.

## Phase 2: Logo, Identity, & Guidelines



After the research phase is complete and a design brief has been created, it's time to start designing the logo and identity system.

## The Logo

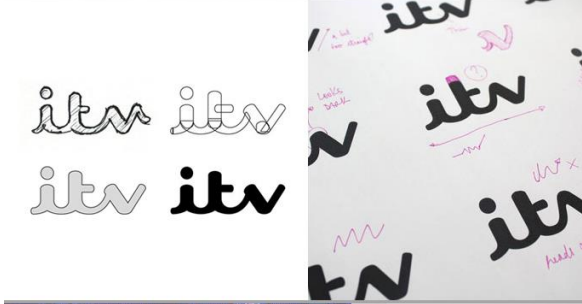
There are many ways to start **designing a logo**, but most often times you'll see designers begin by sketching out dozens if not hundreds of iterations on paper. The process of getting concepts down on paper and then iterating on those ideas can unlock new directions to explore and final solutions that you wouldn't have normally arrived at when starting on the computer. After selecting your best sketched concepts, you should start iterating on them digitally.

Here's a peek behind the curtain of a few logo concept sketches as they became final digital solutions:

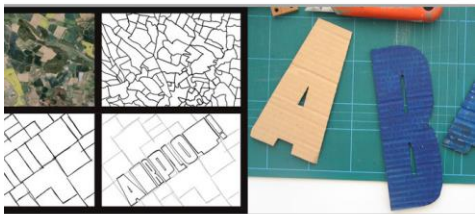
**Firefox Logo** by Martijn Rijven of **Bolt Graphic**, art direction by **Wolff Olins**



**ITV logo** by Matt Rudd of **Rudd Studio**



Greenpeace Airplot Logo by Airside



# The Identity System

The identity system usually starts after the logo is complete. The purpose of the **identity system** is to form a systematic visual language around the logo — one that compliments the design thinking of the logo and offers a family of useful, flexible elements that will help to design marketing and business collateral. Here are some examples:

**Fortaleza 2020** by Guivillar



Handsome Coffee Roasters by **Ptarmak**



Patina Restaurant Group by **Mucca Design**



## The Style Guidelines

The style guidelines contain and prescribe the logo usage rules, typeface system, colour palette, layout guidelines, and more. They exist so that others can create design collateral and marketing materials that will have a cohesive look and voice.

**Style guidelines** have traditionally been produced as print and web-ready PDFs. They're the core of the identity design, and usually accompany the logo, templates, fonts and other resources packaged together to make designing for the brand easier. Style guidelines are in-depth rules about logo usage, styling, and layout, and are always interesting to browse through.



Here are a few style guidelines of popular brands: Skype ([pdf, brand page](#)), Best Buy ([Euro Guidelines](#)), [BBC](#), [Adobe](#), [Apple](#), [Google](#), and [Walmart](#). Looking for more? Dig into this list by [Logo Design Love](#).



#### Logo color

When the logo appears on a white background, use our primary, authorized Walmart medium blue (PANTONE® 285 C).



#### Alternative color backgrounds

- Our primary, authorized Walmart medium blue (PANTONE® 285 C) is preferred when you need a blue background. When using blue as a background, reverse out the logo.
- When the Walmart logo is used on a color background that is in equal value or brighter than PANTONE® 285C, reverse the logo out to white
- Our two other blues (PANTONE® 287 C and PANTONE® 284 C) are acceptable if necessary, though NOT preferred. They may be used in restricted instances, such as in materials for services, for example.

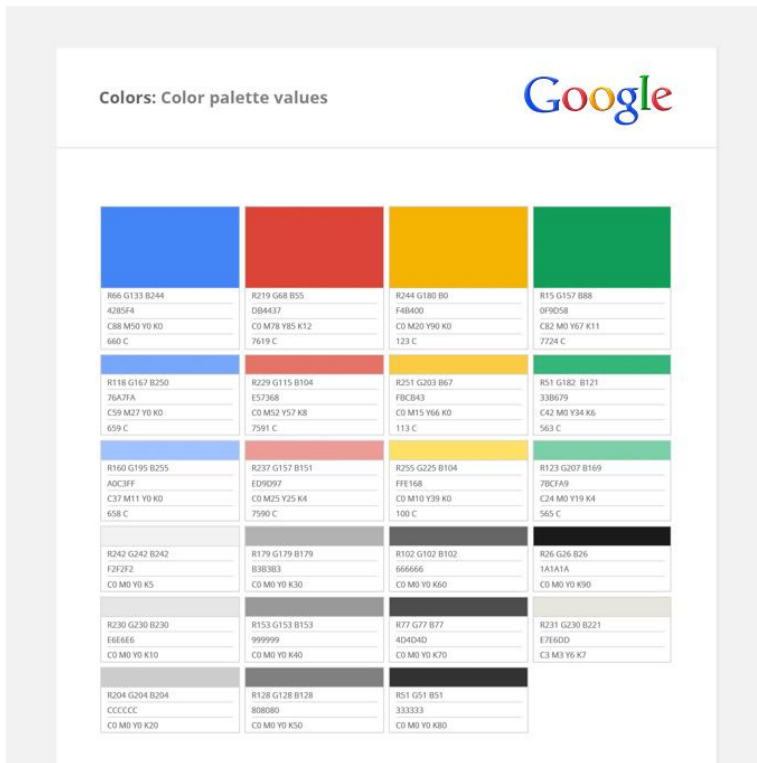


#### Clear space

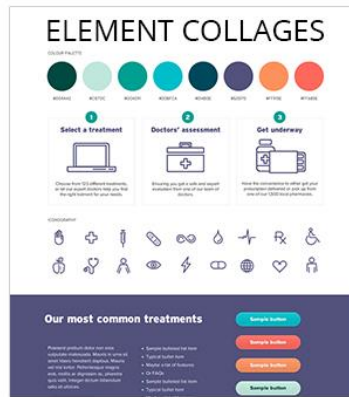
- Always maintain clear space around the Walmart signature to protect the logo from distracting graphics or typography.
- For the signature, measure clear space by the height of the "r" in Walmart for vertical space, and the width of the "r" for horizontal.







These days, the documentation that a designer must deliver has a heavy digital skew, with an emphasis on development-ready files, such as [Style Tiles](#), [Element Collages](#), [Style Prototypes](#), [SASS documentation](#), a Logo/Brand download page, among others.



Don't forget to check out our simple [Creative Market brand page](#), and download the logo if you want to promote and share Creative Market.

## Phase 3: Monitoring & Rebranding

Lastly, after a new brand identity has launched, it's important to monitor and care for it, as it's a living and breathing thing that interacts with your customers. Honestly, that's a loaded statement as there are many ways to properly care for a brand. Regardless, over time, if your target audience shifts, the market evolves, or the brand's products and services change, it may be time for a rebrand. The main challenge with rebranding is trying to maintain familiarity and consistency so that your customers will remember you.

There are two really awesome sites that give an inside look when prominent brands get rebranded: [Rebrand](#) and Under Consideration's [Brand New](#). Here is a quick sampling of their short before and after case studies:



1. [Emma](#), 2. [Bishop of London](#), 3. [Apple Worldwide Developers Conference 2013](#), 4. [Cancer Research UK](#), 5. [Google SketchUp](#), 6. [oDesk](#)

# Resources for Brand Identity Design

If you're starting a new brand identity or rebrand project, here are some Creative Market resources that might help get you started.



# Take a Brand Identity Design Class

Want to learn the ins and outs of creating a brand identity for a business or yourself? Sign-up for this new Skill share class by our friend, [Courtney Eliseo— Beyond the Logo: Craft a Brand Identity](#). Get 20% off using the special discount code **SKILLS**. There's still time to sign-up before the class begins on Mon, Aug 26th, 2013! New to [Skillshare](#)? Learn more about [how it works here](#).

[Courtney](#) is a talented, respected designer. She runs the popular design blog [Design Work Life](#), and produces well-designed, thoughtful brand identities alongside her husband at their 2-person studio, [Seamless Creative](#).



BEYOND THE LOGO SKILLSHARE

## Crafting a Brand Identity

COLOR PALETTE

TYPOGRAPHY

SUPPORTING GRAPHICS

WITH Courtney Eliseo OF SeamlessCreative + designworklife

Want to learn how to design a brand identity? Sign-up for **Beyond the Logo: Crafting a Brand Identity** on [Skillshare](#) using this special discount code to receive **20% off = 'SKILLS'**

## Extended Reading

- [Brand Thinking and other Noble Pursuits](#) by [Debbie Millman](#)  
This book describes itself as a series of illuminating and spirited conversations on branding with 22 top design executives, strategists, and critics. Debbie interviews an all-star cast that makes purchasing this book a must!
- [The Brand Gap](#) by [Marty Neumeier](#)  
Neumeier has been an expert practicing in the field of brand identity, and this timeless book offers a unified theory on brand-building.
- [Dynamic Identities: How to Create a Living Brand](#) by Irene Van Nes  
This book has many examples of dynamic brand identities that are malleable, creative systems of visual identification.
- [Branding Matters](#) by [Jason Van Lue](#)  
Jason explores the core essentials to the purpose of good branding for small businesses, offering easy access to design exercises that will you shape your brand's vision, strategy, identity, experience and interaction.
- [Logo Design Love: The Book](#) by [David Airey](#)  
This valuable resource outlines the steps of creating an effective logo, and offers valuable insights, exploration processes and more.

- **Designing Brand Identity** by Alina Wheeler  
Alina's book is a well-rounded, deep dive into the world of designing brand identities with tons of great examples. Alina's expertise shines as she explains the brand identity design process through the phases of ideals, elements and dynamics. Thanks to **Ben Tibben** for recommending this resource.