

The 9 Advantages to Using a Visual Vocabulary in Brand Identity Design

Visual elements are a major part of your business's brand identity design. The keystone of that design is the logo, but in many cases, the logo isn't enough to convey all of your brand attributes. A visual vocabulary is a way to reinforce and add to the messaging that is contained in your logo.

A company's visual vocabulary consists of the secondary design elements that are used in conjunction with your logo to form your brand identity. The visual vocabulary is composed of font styles, colours, shapes, layout conventions, backgrounds, photographic library, text treatments (such as taglines) and even the type of paper you choose.

These elements should be used consistently throughout your stationery set and marketing collateral and have the following 9 advantages over use of a logo and text alone:

- **The elements of your visual vocabulary become a graphic language, which takes your viewer deeper into your graphics and materials.** They add visual interest and continue to tell your business's story. They are another way that you can communicate about your business with potential clients and prospects, aside from the actual words and text about your business.
- **Graphics in a visual vocabulary are a method of communication that's more quickly understood than text alone.** A viewer can absorb the meanings of colours, symbols, photos, shapes and even font types much more quickly than by reading text. So, in cases where time is of the essence—when you're marketing to busy people, creating motion graphics such as animations or commercials or designing items that people will quickly pass by, such as car graphics or billboards, this is an important consideration.
- **Many people have a deeper emotional connection with graphics than they do with text.** Customers will be more likely to form an emotional bond with your brand and company if you use more graphics, as opposed to just using your logo and text on a letterhead, business card, datasheet or brochure. Colour and photography are two of the most effective visual vocabulary elements to use to affect this emotional brand connection.
- **You can communicate some of the "personality factors" of your business through your visual vocabulary.** You can make your company look more professional or people-oriented, more contemporary or traditional or communicate any of your company's values by varying the shapes, colours and fonts used as the surrounding visual vocabulary. So, if you choose your vocabulary elements carefully, the story of the personality of your company can be told through those elements.
- **Using a visual vocabulary consistently** throughout all of your corporate materials will automatically make your materials look more coherent, credible and professional, through the repetitive use of consistent elements.
- **The right combination of visual vocabulary elements can also make your materials more eye-catching.** When your materials are in competition with others—in a stack of proposals, on a table with other brochures or even a postcard coming out of a crowded mailbox—they'll have a better chance of getting noticed when they are designed with stunning and unique visual vocabulary elements.

- **Forty percent of viewers better remember visual elements.** A visual vocabulary will increase the memorability of your materials as well, since people will have more visual elements to remember in your materials.
- **Elements of the visual vocabulary can reinforce your logo to help quicken the brand recognition building process.** One common way that we do this is to use a large version of the company's logo, or a portion of the logo, as a watermark on the letterhead, business card, envelope or website. Not only does this vocabulary element effect add visual interest, but it will help to speed the time that it takes for your potential customers and existing clients to recognize and remember your brand.
- **A visual vocabulary becomes a tool kit from which you can easily pull visual elements to create new marketing materials.** If you have a business card and brochure and need to create a post card quickly, then many of your visual elements, such as colour scheme, font styles and even layout and photograph choices can be pulled from the existing marketing materials and rearranged to create a new piece. This is especially convenient when you have a short time or low budget to produce new marketing materials.

The bonus function of a visual vocabulary is that when you're doing a special promotion, launching a new product or extending your services or product line, you can vary elements of the visual vocabulary or even develop a new set of visual vocabulary elements, to make the materials for your new promotion stand out. While consistency throughout a campaign is important, the elements of your visual vocabulary aren't as set in stone as your logo. This is especially effective when you work just with the colours and drawn elements and leave the text and tagline treatments the same. That way, your materials will still be partially consistent with your other company materials, but you can give your new product or promotion's materials a voice of its own.

Adding some visual vocabulary elements to your brand identity makes communicating with your audience easier, quicker and more emotionally charged. This gives you a highly effective way to increase your visibility and memorability. When used correctly, they can increase your credibility as well. They even can help add some personality to your brand identity and can make future marketing materials easier to develop. And, unlike your company logo, you can modify the visual vocabulary elements you use from time to time to spice up your business communications.

9 Keys to Building a Stand-Out Brand Identity

Brand identity is the combined effect of visual elements in your marketing materials. A basic *brand identity kit* consists of a logo, business card, letterhead, and branded envelope. This basic set of materials can be extended to include a website, brochure, folder, flyer, or any other professionally designed pieces.

A successful brand identity is built around the following 9 key characteristics:

Unique in "look and feel" and message about your business. Make sure that your business's graphics stand out from and cannot be confused with those of the competition, and that the ways you talk and write about your business are uniquely yours as well.

Repetition helps potential clients—and current clients—to remember and relate to who you are and what you do in your business. Experts say that it takes somewhere between 6 and 12 "impressions," or contacts with your business, for customers to truly remember you and connect with your business.

Consistent use of your logo, tagline, and materials and what you say about your business. You will only be able to build a strong brand for your company by designing unique visual and verbal elements and then repeating those elements through all of the materials that you create.

Memorable elements help your business to stand out as well. You'll be able to create brand memorability through consistency, repetition, and uniqueness of your graphics and materials. Make your graphics memorable by creating a unique logo and using a consistently strong Visual Vocabulary. Create memorable text by using alliteration (repeating similar sounds, such as using words that all start with the same letter), repetition, unique word combinations, and lively imagery in your copy.

Meaningful graphics make your company's message come to life through symbolic graphics, colours, and type choices in all of your marketing materials. Meaningful text will express what your business is really all about, and help to give some depth to your developing brand. And, perhaps more importantly, your audience will be able to understand the meaning in your graphics and text — it will be accessible to your target market.

Clear graphics and text communicate your message in an understandable way. Make sure that your graphics are crisp, clean, simple, and meaningful. And make sure that your text expresses your point and is not confusing — that it explains your point well.

Honesty in your brand identity materials. If clients do engage with you and then you don't live up to the *brand promises* you made in your materials, then they will feel alienated from you and your company... or worse. This can really damage your relationships and your overall brand, so make sure you can stand behind your brand and deliver on your promises before you distribute your branded materials.

Personality for your business helps make sure that you don't look like everyone else, so that potential clients can immediately tell that all of your branded materials are coming from your business. If you're the owner of a one-person business, your brand identity might resonate with your own personality. If your business is larger, or if you want to make it appear larger, you can create your own brand personality to connect with your potential clients.

Professionalism in all things, from the quality of your graphics, to the way your text is written (proofreading is essential!), to your personal presentation: the way you talk, dress, and speak. Professionalism in customer service and in the way you treat people you meet is also important. Follow through on your offers and promises.

INTEGRATED CREATIVE DESIGN: 10 STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

As an interior designer working in an architectural firm, team integration is the fundamental secret to success. The more “embedded” you are day-to-day with the project team, the better your chances for creating a successful project. Here are some tips to consider for achieving this integration:

1. **Know the big picture.** There is always a big picture surrounding any project. The more you know about it and how it fits in with both the client’s and the firm’s larger goals, the more you can align your design with those ideals.
2. **Humility goes a very long way.** No one wants to work with an egomaniac. If you are in a position of power and influence, people may tolerate your abundance of self love, but they will not respect you or follow you willingly. If you are not in a position of power and influence, you will just be dismissed outright. An abundance of ego always creates animosity and alienation. Humility always wins in the long run.
3. **Be invested.** I’ve never met a good designer that was not completely invested in what they were doing (architectural, interior, industrial, graphic, etc.). Being a designer is not just a career choice, it’s a lifestyle and a mental state of being. The more invested you are, the better your chance of success will be. If you can’t get personally invested in what you are doing, do yourself and your co-workers a favour and find a career you can care about.
4. **Listen and learn.** Chances are you work with some very talented people of all ages and skill sets. These people can help you expand your skill set and they can teach you a lot. Usually all you have to do is ask. You’ll be amazed at what you can learn when you stay open to new possibilities.
5. **Know your limits.** Knowing your own boundaries and skill set is critical. If you over-promise and under-deliver, your initial ambition will be simply regarded as failure. If you don’t know how to do something (and can’t learn about it quickly), don’t be ashamed to admit it. It’s much better for your team to understand your skill level from the outset than expecting you to deliver beyond it.
6. **Regular communication.** This always reminds me of my days in the Army where I was taught that if you don’t communicate, you die. I know this is extreme, but it definitely underscores the importance of this issue. Architecture is rarely a life and death occupation, but that does not negate the need for thorough communication with your team. Working in a vacuum wastes time and fee, and usually gets you in a heap of trouble.
7. **Concept and detailing saturation.** Your design concept will fall flat on its face if you don’t carry it through your project. We’ve all seen projects where the designer had a great idea for the lobby, but didn’t carry the big idea through to any other space. This should never be an acceptable option, no matter what your budget is. There is always a way to create a cohesive design solution, you just have to be willing to do the work.
8. **Ruthless coordination.** Inter-discipline coordination is probably the most critical factor to creating a cohesive design. You should be coordinating with anyone that will have an impact on your design—first and foremost, your architectural team. You can’t afford to assume that everyone on the team is thinking critically about the spaces they are designing. They should be, but this is not always the case. You have to check and keep checking. You will also need to make sure you spend a good deal of time working with the MEP contingent. You need to ensure they understand design expectations and that what they document is what you agreed to. Obviously there are more disciplines to coordinate with, but the ones mentioned here will have the biggest influence on the permanent elements of your design.
9. **Keep your commitments.** The only way to build trust with your teammates is to consistently deliver to expectations and to ruthlessly keep your word. If you can’t follow this rule, you might as well take your toys and go home.
10. **Be a resource.** If you can help your team in ways that exceed the traditional role of the interior designer, then, by all means do it. You might just learn a new skill set, or at the very least, polish your

existing skills. You will also help to convert the line of thinking that puts so many designers into the “decorator” category. Just remember that the more you are willing to take on, the more valuable your role on the team becomes.