

How Design Helps Create Memorable Brands

Creating the Preeminent Global Brand

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The powerful role design plays in a brand's image is illustrated by the Penguin book story, well known in publishing circles and mentioned recently in a New York magazine article. While being held hostage in Beirut, the Anglican clergyman Terry Waite requested some reading material. His jailer spoke very little English, but Waite managed to indicate he'd like to read a book. He drew a penguin with an oval around it, telling his captor, "Find any book with this symbol and it will be a good one." That kind of reputation and recognition is available to every company. All that is needed is a dedicated strategy for building a brand.

Design doesn't make the brand any more than clothes make the man—or woman. But as the Penguin anecdote illustrates, distinguished brands are synonymous with memorable design and for good reason. In the public's mind, design is interwoven with a brand's personality, representing its character to an audience that is awash in a mounting tidal wave of images. With more mediums for the message than ever in the history of modern times, the potency of good design extends well beyond aesthetics. In companies where it is valued by senior management, design is a bona fide strategic tool.

All the physical components of a company, including products, promotional materials, packaging, Web site presentation and architecture, combine to form an overall impression of some kind, which suggests that a synchronized design program is an efficient way to communicate a brand's promise. Managed cohesively, design serves as a growth lever, making the brand understandable to a broad cross-section of domestic and global audiences. Similarly, as the construct of a brand's overall presence, design can be a prudent use of communications budgets.



What great design won't do is make up for a flawed brand strategy, mask a subpar product or service, excuse inadequate customer relations or counter an inept advertising campaign. Nike has learned this the hard way, seeing its brand image tarnished by accusations of Asian labor exploitation.

For design to make the maximum contribution to a brand's acceptance in the marketplace today, a

company's chief brand steward, the CEO, must assign the function of design a priority rank. As *Business Week's* editorial page editor, Bruce Nussbaum, points out, too few companies, maybe 20 to 30 percent, really utilize design properly, if at all. "If design is a peripheral function, the company will only get about five percent of what design can deliver," said Nussbaum in the Corporate Design Foundation's publication, *@ Issue*.

Many components constitute a brand's identity, beginning with the assumption of quality. It is the cumulative sum of tangible and intangible identity elements that creates a brand's distinctive tone and manner. When managed systematically for all it is worth, a powerful and valuable brand identity reverberates to the corporation over all. A brand name becomes a keystone design element when transformed into a distinctive logotype. Coca-Cola's script is recognized the world over—even when translated into the native tongue of far-flung foreign lands.

Thanks to Owens-Corning's pink panther, a brand can legally "own" a color. Could UPS be anything but brown? Is there any mistaking a Tiffany package? As with a shape, sound or fragrance, a brand's color can be registered as a trademark when it distinguishes a particular product.



Symbols are the world's design cues. They facilitate communications, breaking down linguistic and cultural barriers and reinforcing a brand's core attributes that appeal to multiple audiences. Nike's Swoosh, Texaco's Star, FTD's Mercury Man, Apple's Apple, Starbucks' Mermaid—these symbols stand on their own because they are visual representations of their brand's essential character and personality, and they have been promoted with consistency and assertiveness.

The form and function of a product or the plan and look of a retail outlet enhance accessibility and use, and provide a three-dimensional context that invites the user to experience the brand's positioning.

A brand's design vocabulary—the selection of secondary colors, typography, graphic elements and style—combine to reiterate core messages.

Intangible elements also build a brand's image. The pleasure of reading a Penguin novel, the smell of Starbucks coffee on a lazy Saturday morning, how Siemens' employees bring the corporation's values to life, the memories of good times drinking Coca-Cola. These are personal experiences that accumulate to form brand expectations.

The companies profiled in this issue of *Sense* are vastly different. Yet the CEOs share an unqualified understanding of the powerful role design and identity play in creating, furthering and sustaining memorable world-class brands in the global marketplace.