

# Sparkle and Spin



For the past 60 years of corporate identity—from IBM to AT&T, from Paul Rand to Saul Bass—the world of corporate symbols was essentially flat. Where form was implied, as in the case of the Minolta or AT&T logos, it was achieved through tapering lines.

Not long after the advent of the Web and the shift in focus from paper to screen, the world of corporate logos moved from flat to dimensional. Automakers like Nissan, Ford, GM and BMW replaced 2-D logos with representations of 3-dimensional hood ornaments. Apple's symbol evolved from multicolored stripes, to flat red, to a translucent reflection of the materials and form used in its product design. UPS traded its linear shield and humorous bow knot for a metallic shield with added swoosh. Cingular introduced a sprightly orange Jack.

Is this use of tangible and dimensional symbols a trend? Just as animation jumped from acetate cells to the computer screen and from flat color to 3-D objects rendered in intricate detail, so too have our corporate marks. Corporations are mirroring the language of our time in an attempt to convey brand personality and create differentiation.

Dimension is also being used in an attempt to signify relevance, and as the latest corporate facelift. It is leveraged in part to embellish the familiar brands that we take for granted, and it would seem to let a new CEO make his or her mark. AT&T added a shadow gradation to further enhance its linear globe, while the GE symbol has been polished under CEO Jeffrey Immelt.

Why dimensional logos? Does it help make the virtual real or the intangible tangible? The logo is no longer a passive stamp. It must entertain. It must “sparkle and spin.” One of the most visible and consistently used expressions of the brand, it is on every touch point—from product to mug, from business card to headquarters sign, from Web site to ad. It stands behind CEOs when they make important announcements; it is co-opted by protesters when they offer their pronouncements.

So, is the future of corporate logos in dimension? Is it in the tactile rather than the virtual? Representational vs. conceptual? Computer technique rather than inspired idea? As others follow suit, will this technique differentiate? Whatever the case, the corporate symbol in all its iterations seems to transcend CEOs, audiences and time.

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