

The Quick Guide to

BASIC LOGO DESIGN



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Basic Logo Design:

What you should know about logos.

By Maria Poulos

Logos seem simple enough. Copy some clip art, add text and, voilà, a logo. Well, not quite that simple. Yes, logos contain text, they contain graphics, they also send a message. They also convey a feeling along with that message. Does that logo symbolize honesty, reliability, or fly-by-night shady? Logos do a lot of things.

Why are some logos better than others? Usually because they are well thought-out and designed by a professional. Good logos are recognizable as belonging to a company. They broadcast; “this is me”, “you know who I am”, or “I am trustworthy”. They are created to reproduce easily.

In this book, I’ve outlined a few concepts on logo design with suggestions on how to use a logo. Take what you can from it. This is what I’ve learned from my experience, other designers may have differing opinions. I hope this advice will be helpful.

Who this book is for:

Business People

Those who have a business and already have a logo, or might be thinking about getting a new one. Here you will find general information about logos.

Up-starts

If you’re starting a company, promoting an event or otherwise think you need a logo. This guide gives some insight to acquiring a new logo, or choosing the right graphic designer.

Graphic Designers

Those who have a background in design, but are not specifically versed in graphic identity and logo design. Here I share some ideas about designing a logo.

Agencies

Account managers who want basic knowledge of logo design but want to learn more about the process. This is the short story.

Web Designers

A quick guide on logo use and restrictions. Getting access to, and modifying source files. Using copyrighted, or trademarked art.

What is a logo?

We think of a logo containing text and/or graphics that identifies a company. True logos contain text, they contain graphics, sometime both, or one and not the other. But the logo also tells a story. It's a picture symbol.

A tree expert might use an image of a tree next to the name of their company. However, if this tree expert wants to define their business as one that specifically plants trees, a logo can express that deeper message.

A logo is a graphic identification symbol.

Elements of a well-designed logo.

A simple, easy to reproduce logo is a well-designed logo. We want our logo to look distinctive in a positive way. There are logo packages and online logo tools which will create a logo in minutes. They do not necessarily make good logos. They often use run-of-the-mill generic designs and/or use “fancy type” often hard on the eyes. They are somewhat looked down upon by the design community because we know what trouble lies ahead in a poor design. However, there is nothing wrong with using a common simple logo if it reproduces well.

Whether you hire a graphic designer, a logo designer, or buy a logo off the shelf, the logo must reproduce well and must be copyright-free (which is discussed later). Multi-colored logos can have their own set of problems. When I design a multi-colored logo, I always offer a one-color version — usually a black version. A multi-colored logo will look great on a website – when you have a million-color display — but there may be instances when a one-color version is needed.



Logo mark presented in multi-color, half-toned, and one color.

Visualize the logo embossed on a box or book cover. This will give you a good idea of how well it will reproduce. Though there are companies that will never use an embossed logo, it's best to prepare for that one time a solid one color design will be needed.



A balance is created between the logo mark and the type.

The text and graphics on a logo should be a balanced. The logos pictured above are examples of a two-lines logo and a three-line logo. The logo at right, with the tag line, uses a smaller text size. There is a balance of weight between the text and the art in both examples. Color will also play a part in achieving balance.

Format

The overall shape of the logo — square, round, rectangular, oval — is what I call format. Knowing where, and how, the logo will be used will determine format. Will it be used on a Facebook page or on a Google+ business page? Check where the logo is uploaded and placed against the overall shape of the logo. Will there be a mobile app? Then a square logo may be the best design choice.



How a logo is used will define the overall shape and format.

Color

It's best to have your designer appoint a specific, standardized, color — using a Pantone Matching System (PMS).

There's a whole slew of information on the psychology of certain colors, or the astrological alignment with your birth chart, but this is not discussed in-depth here. Basically, red is angry, passionate, and if it's the "right" red, it looks great on a pizza box. Blue is trust, supposedly. Green is growth (yet we can be green with envy). Yellow, orange and bright colors are happy. There are different tones and hues, but if you want to make life simple pick a color which is easy to reproduce, on a website, brochure, mug, or shirt. That means, use a color easy to match.

The color of the logo should to be consistent across all media without color shifts or color replacement. Using a standard color palette will help identify a business and build a company persona. Color creates mood and feeling.

You wouldn't want a muddy looking blue, or a green that looks green on paper, but yellow on the web. Consistency is somewhat important. This is essentially the beginning of a building a brand.

With most marketing going to the web, color will shift from device to device. On a tablet or computer screen, color is adjusted by the user (or per factory settings), so there isn't much color control in what the end users sees.

Size

A well-designed logo will reproduce well at a small size. Therefore, I emphasize simple, simple, simple. Complex designs look great large, or on a giant flag. As these complex graphics get small the detail gets lost. Too small a size will be unreadable.

All logos have a point of reduction where the logo is too small to use. Reduction size should be a major consideration in choosing or designing a logo.

Typeface

Type style is a choice, it can be formal or crazy, serif or san-serif, but it needs to read well. I'm not going deep into type design here. Just don't get stuck on a typeface. Certain industries are compelled to use typefaces which are "industry standard" so to say. Financial institutes use formal styles, whereas hair salons or restaurants can be a bit more casual, but stay away from trendy if you want your logo to hold up over time.

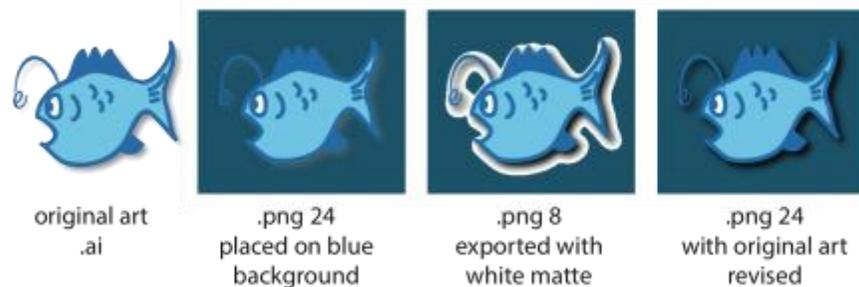


The fonts on the left are more suitable to logo design than the fonts at right.

Ease of use

This means two things to me. It's easy to plop down on any background without a hassle. Also, easy to edit, change color, or revise if needed. This means you need a well-executed vector file or source file when making edits. A source file with hidden masks, screened overlays, shadows, gradients, or compound shapes are mind boggling for the novice to change.

Let's say you have a website with a dark blue header you want to put your logo on it. You use the .png that came with the design package which has a nice drop shadow (on a white background). When placed on the blue background the shadow gets lost, even though it is still present. To adjust the shadow on the logo you would need to open the source file to make the edit.



Source files are needed to modify a logo and save it in the appropriate format.

In the example above, the original art (at left) was opened in Adobe Illustrator and the shadow was darkened (at far right). Once edited, the image was saved out as a web-friendly transparent background .png 24 to create the desired effect. I supply source files with all Flying Cloud Design Shop logos. Drop shadows are not easy to work with but they are not impossible to use.

Much like drop shadows, multi-colored logos with a gradient can cause headaches. In the old days' gradients were a just no-no and many designers have not let that go. Today with digital printing and web-based everything, shadows and multi-colors are not so much a problem to reproduce, that is, if you have a competent graphic designer in your corner. However, logos with gradients or drop shadows can become logos which are hard to work with.



Logo design with gradient placed on a simple textured background.

Ease of reproduction makes a good logo design.

How to use a logo

If you want your company to look established, reliable, and all the good things a sound business should be, use logo design standards to formalize how it appears. We talked about color and size, but there are other standards to think about.

Placement

The logo should be prominent but not over bearing. A small logo at the top of the web page is fine. If you're launching a new company, you may want it to fill the landing page with a giant logo as a holding page. Whether on a page, truck, building, door, or any other marketing material the logo should be in an obvious place. No need for overkill or modesty, size the logo appropriately for the object it's sitting on.

Exclusion zone

Watch the space around the logo. Keep other elements on the page from crowding the logo. Take care when placing the logo on a very ornate background. The logo should not fight with the background. The logo should stand out without being obscured or overpowered. If there's no way around using a fancy background, try to make the background as subdued as possible.



An exclusion zone around the logo makes it stand out and eliminates crowding the logo.

A logo should stand out without being in your face.

Modifying a logo.

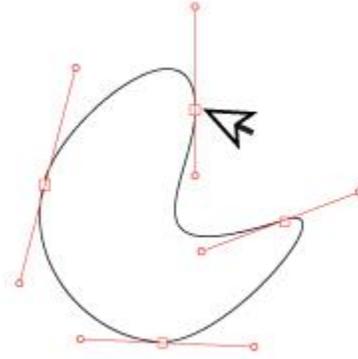
Vector art is necessary when modifying a logo. That's why I always include the source file with my logo sets. I usually include: .ai, .eps, .svg, or editable .pdf, and a set of low res web files: .gif, .png, .jpps. You must keep the vector source file of your logo safely backed-up.

I occasionally come across people who have a logo with a white background which they want changed to a transparent background. This usually means they have a bitmap file and not a vector file. There's some Photoshop alchemy that can remove the white background, but what is really need is a vector file.

Vector vs. bitmap

If you don't know the difference take a logo file and place it into a word doc (or another app) and enlarge it. If the edges start to get jaggy it is not a vector file, it is a bitmap.

Vector images use an algorithm that draws a line between two points.



Points in vector art are used edit graphics.

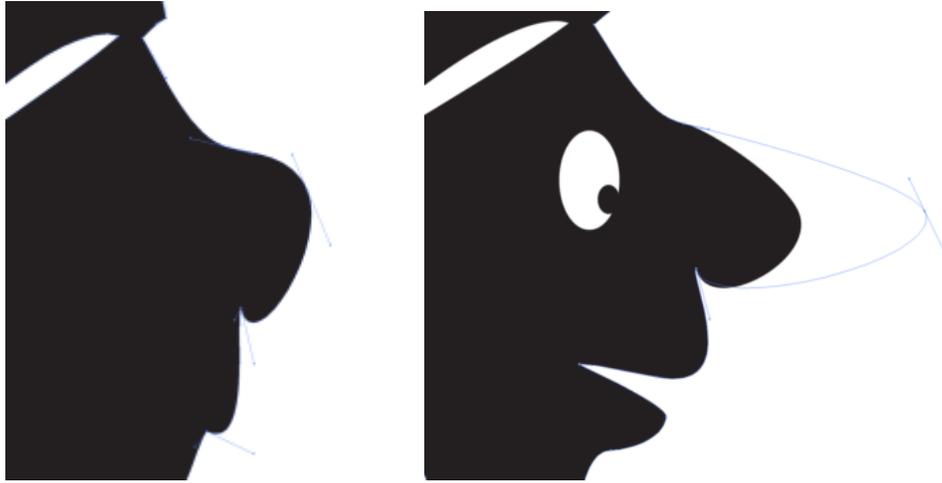
The image is re-drawn as it enlarges and reduces. This means no matter how big the image is enlarged the line between two points is smooth.



The clean lines of vector art left, compared to a rasterized bitmap file.

A vector image will hold a clean line as it enlarges. It can be placed on different colored background. The art may be modified, easily.

Bitmap files or raster files, pixilate as they enlarge. They are best used for screen viewing, low resolution applications, or when small file size is essential.



Use a vector editing program to adjust and modify vector art.

A vector file is needed to modify a logo.

How type is used in logos.

There are many references on the web that help with typeface selection. I'm not going to give a lesson on typefaces here (maybe another book). I just want to go over the way type is used when creating a logo.

The royalty-free logos I sell in my shop (or the logo you buy from your designer) usually break the type into shapes, or they "outline" the text. This is done for two reasons.

One, so the font always looks the same. It doesn't distort as it's sized. Also, you won't get a "missing Font" warning as the file transfers from one computer to the other. Many times, the font is tweaked, the ascenders or descenders are modified, the kerning adjusted, etc. This is done by converting the typeface to vectors and carefully modifying the shapes. Some type is extremely modified to the point where it would take many hours to recreate or to edit.



The logo above shows the original font at far left. The font has been broken into vector shapes (at center) and modified with a distressed screen. This allows for easy sizing and color changes.

Second, not all fonts are free. Some typefaces come from type foundries and are licensed and cannot be copied and shared. You may need to purchase a font to change the text yourself or go back to your designer. Additionally, the font can be switched with a similar free version, if the change will accommodate a new font.

Usually I reference the font on the art board in the source file — sometimes including the URL address of where to buy the font. It's so much better to give it all up than to keep the font a secret.

Logo text is usually converted to shapes, manipulated and not easily edited.

Royalty-free logos vs. original art.

Copyrights

OK, we've come to the fun part. Can you use someone else's logo? I see logos miss-used all over the place. Say a designer was commissioned to create a flyer for a travel agency advertising Disney World. This does not necessarily give permission to the designer to use the logo anywhere they like.

Before you use someone else's logo, think "don't". Unless you have specific permission to do so, do not use someone else's logo. For instance, the NFL protects their logos. They make millions on swag — shirts, mugs, stickers — and they don't want you cutting into their profits. Corporate sponsors, who donate millions of dollars to a NFL team, still need permission to use a NFL logo on their advertising, website, or promotions.

Royalty-free

Using royalty-free clip art from various sites around the internet is the next hurdle. There are many stock art sites that license their art for commercial use. You can buy royalty-free art and use it on a poster or website, but some stock art has restrictions on logo use. The last thing you need is to implement a logo, use it everywhere on everything, then get a cease and desist order.

My logo shop at FlyingCloudDesignShop.com, offers royalty-free logos. The art may be used as a logo. I have restrictions on anyone re-selling the logo. Meaning, a customer can't buy the logo and sell it to someone else, this include printing it on something then selling the item (this does not include swag and give-a-ways promoting the customer's business). There are many sites that offer logos online. Just read the fine print.

Original art

Creating original art is the best way to avoid copyright infringement. When you hire a designer, make sure the ownership of the art is transferred. That the person buying the art has full rights. As I designer, I always state "full-rights" on my estimate. However, I add a clause that I may use the logo in my portfolio.

Fonts and typefaces

One last note. Some typefaces may also have restrictions. Typically, these fonts have been created specifically by a type designer for a specific purpose. Many movie titles, such as Star Wars, or other movies have uniquely styled type. Some fonts are specific about logo use. So check.

Read the fine print when using existing art. Get permission before using someone else's logo.

Hiring a logo designer.

The best way to acquire a logo is to hire a graphic designer. They will create a logo from original art specifically designed for the company. They will consider the industry you're in and your company goals. Often a new client will send me samples of what they like, or a competitors' logo. It's good to see how your new logo stands up to the competition. There should be some visual resemblance you're in the same group with your competitors.

If you want to trademark, or copyright your logo, you will need to create unique art. You can use a graphic designer, or design one yourself. Be cautious of using crowd sourced online logo-contest style resources. A designer who was competing in a crowd-sourced contest once contacted me about someone copying my art and using it in their entry. Sometimes a designer will bang out a logo, then later realize they saw it on a cereal box or something else. So be careful who owns the art.

The 'for hire' designer will give you a record of how the logo was developed into a final design.

Hire a graphic designer if you need to trademark your logo.

Summary

Logos come in many shapes and styles, from ornate to simple designs. Originality and the ability to reproduce well is the gold standard of a good logo design. How the logo is used, where it is placed, and what it is placed on, will help define graphic design standards which will make a company look important and established.

Logos don't need to be expensive, or elaborate but be cautious of using copyrighted art. When buying art, buy vector files so the art may be modified if needed. When hiring a designer, make sure the ownership of the design is transferrable.

Lastly, before using a new logo design, take a long look and see if it can be viewed, in any way at all, as offensive. Some logos are very abstract. Show it around. Get the janitors opinion, they may see something you don't.

The purpose of the logo is to relay a positive enduring message.

About the author.

Maria Poulos is an artist, graphic designer and owner of [Flying Cloud Design](#). She has thirty years' experience working as a freelance graphic designer in the many aspects of graphic design services. Her

clients include multinational corporations in technology, healthcare and the financial industries, as well as many start-ups and small businesses.

In her spare time, she blogs at mariapoulos.com. She's growing an online logo design shop at flyingclouddesignshop.com which makes quality logos accessible to small start-up businesses who, like herself, enjoy owning a business.

Her photography is online at photogeoia.com.

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