

The Brand Amplitude Series:
Tools for Brand Practitioners

Part 1:

HOW TO ENSURE
CONSISTENT BRAND
EXPRESSION

By:

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What Is Visual and Verbal Brand Identity?

In a brand audit, the brand's elements: name, logo, URL's, symbols, jingles, spokespeople, taglines, sub-brands, sounds, colors, characters, endorsements, partners, and more are inventoried. Taken together, these elements ensure a consistent, identifiable presentation of the desired Brand Identity: your brand's visual and verbal identity.

Today, brands are increasingly global and cannot always depend on nuances of language. As a result, non-verbal design elements are as important as voice and verbal style in expressing the brand across cultures. Some brands create a 'visual brand language' for ensuring their products look like they are part of the same family - specifying shape, form, color, materials and components. The famous BMW grill is an example of an element of visual brand language. Sounds -- music or custom tones -- are another potent non-verbal branding element. What would Harley be without its distinctive growl? Even smells can be considered aspects of brand expression -- Cinnabon anyone? Virgin is an example of a brand that has an identifiable verbal and visual style. Apple's distinct, clean and appealing visual style contributes to its equity.

A clearly defined Brand Identity is the most important guide for developing and choosing brand elements. Blackberry was nearly called 'PocketLink', as it suggested connectedness, a key element of the desired identity. However, 'PocketLink' did not reflect other aspects, such as approachable, friendly and fun. By adhering to all the facets of its identity, RIM was able to choose a powerful and evocative name.

A brand's name is arguably its most important element of its verbal and visual identity. Naming a brand is more difficult, and less important, than it appears. There are two main categories of brand naming selection: those that help maximize appeal and those that help defend a brand from being compromised by competitors. The difficulty in naming is in finding a name that meets all the criteria. Few names are perfect. An appealing name is memorable, meaningful and likeable. 'Apple', 'Amazon', 'Google', 'Pixar' and 'Yahoo' all meet these criteria. They are likeable and memorable because they are short, easy to spell and say. But they don't have a lot of inherent meaning. For that reason, they are more difficult to defend, adapt and protect. Apple has had to defend its brand from competitors, including Apple Records, in court and agreed in 1981 not to enter the music business. Oops. A Canadian pipeline company is challenging Pixar. 'Best Buy' has more inherent meaning but is less memorable, because it is so generic. When all is said and done, a name is what you make it. As long as the company can claim ownership of the URL and the name for their category, its success will depend less on its inherent qualities than how effectively it is marketed. Would you name a brand "Milk Duds" today?

A final consideration in naming a brand is ownability. All proposed names should be searched, starting with a simple URL search and advancing to TESS, the US Government Electronic Trademark Search System. (<http://tarr.uspto.gov/>) Names are trademarked within specific categories, so even if a URL is taken, it may be possible to register ownership of the name for your category. Once you have identified a name, be sure to get legal help securing it to protect your firm's investment.

What You Need To Know

In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald writes, “Personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures.” Similarly, a brand is the result of consistent presentation of its Brand Identity. Once brand elements are chosen, *consistent use* is critical to establishing the brand’s visual and verbal identity. Since many people are part of creating products, communications and experiences, it is important to have a set of brand guidelines that apply across all touch points, campaigns, web sites, products, etc. Brand guidelines specify what is and not allowed in terms of fonts and colors, voice, logo usage, photography and more. Disciplined permission and review processes ensure standards are enforced. Enforcers often come to be known informally as the ‘brand police’. Nevertheless, these processes can be critical to avoid losing valuable trademarks and brand-related intellectual property through improper or inconsistent use.

Brand elements are dynamic and need to be updated and refreshed periodically to keep a brand contemporary and relevant. While a handful of brands still use their original logo (Coca-Cola), most do not. Betty Crocker has been ‘made over’ at least seven times since ‘she’ was introduced in 1936. Pepsi ‘refreshes’ its look every few years.



Tools and Frameworks

Six criteria that can be applied when choosing brand elements. Here is an explanation of each one:

Consumer-Facing Criteria

- Memorable: Easily recognized and recalled, ‘sticky’
- Meaningful: Descriptive, informative, no negative connotations
- Likable: Fun and interesting, rich imagery, aesthetically pleasing

Company-Facing Criteria

- Transferable: Can extend across product categories, geographic boundaries and cultures
- Adaptable: Flexible, updateable over time
- Ownable: Legally, competitively defensible

Brand usage guidelines help ensure brand elements are used consistently. Guidelines are often published on a company intranet so everyone who is charged with creating brand communications, products or experiences can easily access them. They typically include examples of what is and is not allowed. Here is a list of topics typically addressed.

Examples of Applying the Frameworks

YMCA

In 2011, the YMCA created a style guide to ensure consistent execution of its brand elements nationwide. Note the use of specific examples.



WRITING IN VOICE

The Y is open, friendly and caring. And our communications should be, too. So always focus on our audience's needs and desires first, rather than talking about ourselves. Just look at what a difference that makes.

BEFORE

Across the United States, 25 million members are part of more than 2,600 local YMCA associations. Each association is different, reflecting the needs of the local community. Your YMCA in your community may have a facility with a gymnasium, pool, child care center or even a school. It may be a storefront operation delivering community-based programs such as job training or youth and government. It may be a camp, or it may be a satellite program in a local school. It may be all of these things.

AFTER

Since no two communities are exactly alike, no two Ys are exactly alike. We bring ideas, science and creative spirit like you together – and our shared commitment to our communities ensures the opportunities we create for all are yours and theirs.

- OBSERVATIONS
 - Speaks with casual, not staid, diction.
 - Speaks with confidence.
 - Is welcoming and inclusive.



WHITE SPACE

COLOR FAMILIES



WHAT WE CALL OURSELVES

Do you have a nickname? You know, the name your closest friends call you. We've decided to adopt our nickname – the Y – because it suggests a closer, friendlier relationship with our members. Of course, we're still the YMCA, but only when it's part of our formal name. Here are some helpful rules to guide you.

the Y	YMCA	Y-USA
<p>Join the Y.</p> <p>Ys across the country have a new look.</p> <p>Meet me at the Y.</p>	<p>The YMCA of Greater Louisville welcomes you.</p> <p>YMCA of Greater Spacina members. Renew your YMCA membership today!</p>	<p>Neil Nicoll was hired as president and CEO of YMCA of the USA in May 2008. He joined Y-USA following 14 years as president and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Seattle.</p>
<p>WHEN TO USE the Y</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refers to our collective presence and is used when writing about our culture and brand promise, our values, and values or our overall impact as the nation's leading nonprofit. 	<p>WHEN TO USE YMCA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of the formal name of locations, associations, branches and camps. • In text only, to describe signature programs and events that we want people to immediately associate with the YMCA. 	<p>WHEN TO USE Y-USA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As an abbreviation for the National Council, since the formal name YMCA of the USA has been used. • For formal organizational names in joint communications to avoid confusion.

OUR IMAGERY




Part 2: How to Ensure Consistent Brand Expression


University of Notre Dame

The University of Notre Dame has an extensive online style guide to ensure coherence across departments and agencies. The guide, as well as rules for co-branding and licensing and examples, can be accessed at <http://mark.nd.edu>.

▼ Logos



Academic Mark PNG [Download](#)



Monogram PNG [Download](#)

[Learn more about Notre Dame's Logos](#)




▼ Brand Typography

Adobe Garamond
Official serif font
Acceptable substitute: Georgia

Galaxie Polaris
Official sans serif font
Acceptable substitute: Arial

Galaxie Polaris Condensed
Sans serif secondary font


▼ Official Colors

	Pantone	RGB	CMYK	Hex
	Official Blue			Pantone 289
	Official Gold			Pantone 117
	Metallic Gold			Pantone 10127

[More information on official colors](#)

▼ Photography

Capture and share the Notre Dame story by showcasing campus life, research work, and our positive impact on the world with approved photos taken by the University's official photographer. [Visit the Brand Standards Photography page to learn more.](#)



What is the personality of the Notre Dame voice?

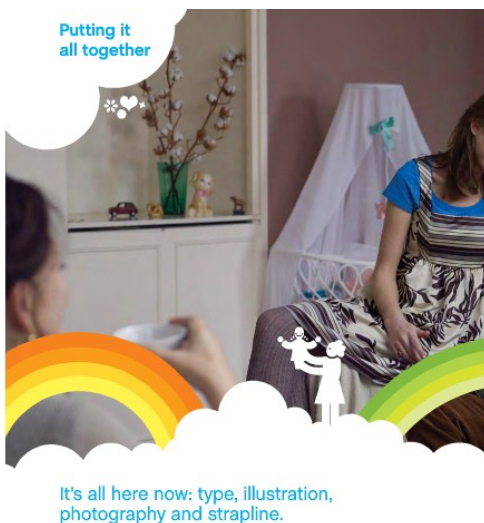
- **FOCUSED:** the message has a clear hierarchy that allows one strong point to rise to the top.
- **TIMELESS:** our writing is not trendy. It gives a nod to our rich heritage and Catholic faith tradition.
- **MOTIVATING:** our writing should inspire action. It should be clear what we are asking the reader to do.
- **POWERFUL:** bold statements capture attention.
- **TRUTHFUL:** our copy is rich with proof points and emotive stories.

Practice Applying the Tools

Skype makes its brand book available online. Actually, it is two books: ‘How We Look’ and ‘How We Think’. Together they convey both the Brand Identity and its Visual Identity. Both are written in a fun, accessible voice. How We Look contains clear rules for applying Skype’s main visual elements - logo, colors, typefaces, clouds, rainbows, rainbow embellishments, and photography. Even without the logo, note how these images clearly convey ‘Skype-ness’.

How We Think: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/55552478/Skype-Brand-Book-Think>









How We Look: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/12970995/Skype-Brand-Book>



Using the grid below, try assessing each of these elements using the six criteria for evaluating brand elements described earlier. Not every element will do well on all six criteria, but together they should add up to a likeable, memorable, meaningful and ownable brand. In addition, think about how each element fits the strategy and whether it needs updating.

Then try applying these ideas to your brand.

Part 2: How to Ensure Consistent Brand Expression

Visual Brand Element	Image	Assessment				
Logo						
Typeface						
Primary Colors						
Secondary Colors	<p>These colours only appear in rainbows.</p>  <table border="0"> <tr> <td> Skype Yellow Pantone 105 C CMYK 0/100/0/0 RGB 255/255/0 HEX #FFD700 </td> <td> Skype Green Pantone 375 C CMYK 0/100/0/0 RGB 0/255/0 HEX #00FF00 </td> <td> Skype Orange Pantone 105 C CMYK 0/100/0/0 RGB 255/165/0 HEX #FFA500 </td> <td> Skype Purple Pantone 264 C CMYK 100/0/0/0 RGB 160/0/255 HEX #800080 </td> </tr> </table>	Skype Yellow Pantone 105 C CMYK 0/100/0/0 RGB 255/255/0 HEX #FFD700	Skype Green Pantone 375 C CMYK 0/100/0/0 RGB 0/255/0 HEX #00FF00	Skype Orange Pantone 105 C CMYK 0/100/0/0 RGB 255/165/0 HEX #FFA500	Skype Purple Pantone 264 C CMYK 100/0/0/0 RGB 160/0/255 HEX #800080	
Skype Yellow Pantone 105 C CMYK 0/100/0/0 RGB 255/255/0 HEX #FFD700	Skype Green Pantone 375 C CMYK 0/100/0/0 RGB 0/255/0 HEX #00FF00	Skype Orange Pantone 105 C CMYK 0/100/0/0 RGB 255/165/0 HEX #FFA500	Skype Purple Pantone 264 C CMYK 100/0/0/0 RGB 160/0/255 HEX #800080			
Strapline (slogan)	"Take a deep breath™"					
Clouds						
Rainbows						
Other Visual Elements						
Photography						

Note: Assess the brand elements for their: Memorability, Meaning, Likability, Transferrability, Adaptability and Ownability

What Other Experts Say

“(Brand Identity is) the marketing of sensory experiences that contribute to a brand or corporation’s identity... The tools have changed. The fundamentals have not. The questions are the same whether you’re on Facebook or in Shanghai: Who are you? Who needs to know? How will they find out?”

--Alina Wheeler, *Designing Brand Identity*, 3rd edition (p.142)

“To me, marketing is about values. It is a very complicated world, a very noisy world, and we’re not going to get a chance to remember much about us. No company does. And so we have to be really clear on what we want them to know about us. Now Apple is fortunately one of the half a dozen best brands in the whole world, right up there with Nike, Disney, Coke, Sony. It is one of the greats of the greats. But even a great brand needs investment and caring if it’s going to retain its relevancy and vitality.”

--Steve Jobs, address to Apple, 2002 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmG9jzCHtSQ>

“Many firms have unnecessarily constrained their brand because they formulated a graphic charter before defining their identity. Not knowing who they really are, they merely perpetuate purely formal codes by, for example, using a certain photographic style that may not be the most suitable.”

-- Jean Noel Kapferer, *The New Strategic Brand Management*, 2012, p. 150

“The stronger the aesthetic and the more it is manifested in more and more identity elements the easier it is to protect from a practical point of view. It is unimaginable that a competitor could imitate the whole of the sensory elements and aesthetics of a successful company.... The Absolut campaign has revolutionized liquor marketing through its aesthetic strategy.”

-- Berendt Schmidt and Alex Simonson, *Marketing Aesthetics*, 1997, p.22



Part 2:

How to Ensure Consistent Brand Expression

Resources to Go Deeper

1. Berendt Schmidt and Alex Simonson, Marketing Aesthetics: The Strategic Management of Brands, Identity, and Image, 1997

This is a classic work describing the importance of aesthetics to brand strategy. Schmidt was among the first to identify the critical role of design in creating a competitive advantage. This book is full of examples of how Absolute, Nike, the Gap, Starbucks, Cathay Pacific, Lego and many other brands developed distinct corporate identities that set them apart from competitors.

2. Alina Wheeler, Designing Brand Identity: A Complete Guide to Creating, Building and Maintaining Strong Brands, 3rd edition

This is a beautifully designed book full of examples and helpful frameworks. Wheeler's goal was to create a reference book that is also a "disciplined process to create and implement an effective brand identity." Wheeler's Twitter page says she is working on the 4th edition.

About this Series

The ideas in this How-To series are based on frameworks we use to teach the principles of brand strategy to upper division undergraduates and MBA students. Understanding the ideas we discuss requires basic familiarity with the principles of marketing, but does not require that you have years of marketing experience. We assume the reader knows that brands are more than logos and taglines - that they are intangible assets embodying a promise and a relationship between the brand 'owner' and brand users.



Most of the ideas are not original. Rather, they reflect the cumulative distillation of what we think is most valuable and useful from the vast literature on building great brands. In writing this book we drew on close reading and personal application of the ideas of many brand strategy practitioners, professors and writers, particularly the work of David Aaker, Kevin Keller, Jean Noel-Kapferer, Jack Trout, Philip Kotler and others too numerous to name. We list some of the most relevant works for those who want to 'go deeper.'

Finally, this work represents our own independent effort conducted on our own time, and neither UC Berkeley nor The University of Notre Dame paid us when we compiled it for use in our courses. We feel privileged to be a part of these great institutions but this series does not have their official endorsement. We hope you enjoy reading it and most of all that you find it useful in developing an effective brand strategy for your business or organization.

- Carol Phillips (left) and Judy Hopelain (right)

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