



**what makes a**  
**GREAT LOGO?**



# simply put

## **Logos and brands get their value from the products and/or services that they represent, not vice versa.**

Chances are, your business or the company you work for has a logo. But is it doing its job? Is it pulling an oar? After 25 years in graphic design, we've seen some sweet logos. We've seen some duds. And we've seen some of the best logos left on the table. So how do you arrive at an effective logo?

Simply put:

Good designers make good logos.

Great businesses make great logos.

Translation: the best businesses put the time and energy into making a great logo. When combined with the enthusiasm and expertise of a good designer, you have the recipe for a brand that can build tremendous value.

If you Google 'good logo design', you'll find numerous articles that give the attributes of what makes a good logo. When we completed the exercise to see what you would see, almost all of the good ones point to the writings of Paul Rand, one of the fathers of modern graphic design. So instead of just putting our twist on his principles and taking credit for his great writings, we will outline and expand on them here briefly.



# an effective logo is:

**Distinctive.** Does your logo imitate the look of a successful competitor or another brand you admire? Are you secretly trying to steal someone else's success?

We cannot tell you how many times clients have asked us to add mountains or a swoosh to a design. The point of difference, or distinction, is lost when you imitate another business or design. If it is distinctive, it probably should make you a little uncomfortable because the frame of reference is new or unique. Remember when the new Ford F150's came out? The design was unique, it was, and still is, more ownable.

**Visible.** When given the proper amount of space, does your logo ask your audience to take note? Does it have an impact or gravity? Can you truly see it?

**Usable.** Is the logo easy to use? Generally, the more visually complex a logo, the harder it is to use. Does it feel the same in different applications?

**Memorable.** Is there something a little bit special about the visual? Does it reward the viewer with an unexpected twist? Or point to timeless qualities?

**Universal.** Is the logo understandable by the target audience? If your market is a small niche, maybe you can tip your hat to an inside understanding. If it is quite large, will your logo appeal to the young and the old? Blue and white collar workers? Men and women?

**Durable.** Is this design going to hold up well? Does it work well large? Does it work well small?

**Timeless.** Is the logo trendy or timeless? Paul Rand designed the ABC TV logo in 1961 and it has remained virtually unchanged for 50 years.

All of the above are a given when you work with a professional designer. Here's the kicker: at any point, your business and your employees can add more to the logo's effectiveness than any designer could just by the

way you treat your logo—our earlier point about a good logo versus a great logo. Logos are badges of pride.

Think of how you feel when you see the American flag versus how the Japanese flag makes you feel. You probably have a deeper emotional connection to the American flag even though the Japanese flag is much more visually impactful, agile in infinite applications and regarded by many communications experts as the best designed flag. It's not so much the way the American flag looks, but rather what it represents that gives it power.

It's time to give your logo the Spaghetti Sauce test. Which of these is the better ask?

"Oh man! You have got to taste this! This is the best sauce I've ever made!" Or, "I think this smells funny. Do you think it's going bad?" A lot of the success of your logo/brand identity rests in how much pride you and your company are able to put behind it. If you treat it with respect, others will too.



# a couple of pointers for logo owners.

**Be consistent.** Be consistent to the point of boredom (at least in your eyes). Think of the poor guy at the Campbell's Soup factory. He's probably tired of seeing the same old soup can. But consumers have come to rely on it. No scanning the soup aisle, which means less chance of the consumers discovering and buying something different. The consumer only sees your messaging occasionally. About the time you are getting sick of it, others are just starting to take note.

Don't ask your logo to do too much. Good logos identify, they do not describe or illustrate. What if the Nike logo was a cool 1970's shoe illustration? It would be very hard for them to turn around and sell \$100 dress shirts or software years down the road.

**Don't ask your logo to sell. Take note of the great brands.**

**If you are not sure, make it a little smaller.**

Most good designers will consider the environment that a logo will exist in and develop comprehensive designs to help you visualize the new work in context. If you have a logo and are not really sure how to use it, ask a graphic designer to create a visual identity package. Consider asking the designer to work on trade dress (brand-friendly packaging or design) at the same time. One of the reasons Coca-Cola has been able to stay contemporary without discarding the equity they have developed in their logo is that they change their trade dress (packaging) occasionally, but in keeping with the brand. It helps keep things fresh on the shelf while staying true to their well-established roots.

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I believe every company can benefit from brand development before the brand identity is created. Brand development is a group of processes that define the personality or values of a company. Brand identity or visual identity is the process of taking the discovered brand to a tangible, tactile form. At Stan Can Design, we have developed a very straightforward process for defining a business's mission and vision (the starting place of your brand), and the words and images that express your brand.

Like us on Facebook and you can download our Mission and Vision Worksheet free of charge. You can take the results to any designer or ad agency and it will take a lot of the subjectivity out of the creative, strategic process and add clarity to your brand.





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brand discovery and development

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