



LOOK BEFORE YOU LOGO



## THE POWER OF A LOGO — AND THE TEMPTATION OF A NEW ONE

When you walk into the office in the morning wearing a Patagonia vest, sporting a Timbuktu bag, and sipping a Starbucks coffee, you're wearing your brand affinities for everybody to see.

A logo can communicate your values ("I chose safety over luxury by driving a Volvo"). A logo can stand for trust ("No one ever got fired for picking IBM"). A logo can make you feel comfortable, confident, or cool. It can make you reach for a certain product on a crowded shelf or stop scrolling when it comes across your feed.

But, when it comes to your company's brand, maybe you don't think your logo is working as hard as the examples above — or as hard as your competitors' logos. Maybe it's time for a brand-new one. Or just a quick little "refresh" or "evolution."

So, let's start designing some options, right? Not so fast.

"Identity is the cause, brand is the effect. The strength of the former influences the strength of the latter."

— Larry Ackerman, *The Identity Code*

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## A LOGO CHANGE MEANS SOMETHING ELSE HAS CHANGED

A brand is a lot bigger than a logo. But a logo is an important part of any brand. Before you change your logo, it is important to take a clear-eyed look at the role your logo plays in your broader brand arsenal, and what you hope to accomplish by changing it.

A helpful way to frame this question: What evolution in your brand do you want to communicate with your new logo? Updating a logo can be a long and arduous process (more on that later) — nobody does it just for kicks. In every case, a logo change signals a shift in how the business wants to be perceived:

- To move away from old associations (Uber)
- To reinforce a broader product offering (Dunkin')
- To remain contemporary in a quickly changing industry (Google Chrome)
- To clearly define brand architecture — especially for M&A activity (Apple and Virgin)
- To drive consistency and accommodate new channels (Fidelity)
- To reinforce a rallying cry for internal and external audiences (Starbucks)
- To serve as touchstone for brand platform (Deloitte)
- To stand out from the competition (Natixis)
- To recognize times have changed (Pearl Milling Company)

A logo change is never just a logo change. What shift in your business do you want yours to communicate?  
If you don't have a solid answer, now might not be the time for a new logo.

"Branding is about signals — the signals people use to determine what you stand for as a brand. Signals create associations."

— Allen Adamson, *BrandSimple*



## BUY-IN AT THE END REQUIRES BUY-IN FROM THE START

Most logo projects land squarely in the lap of marketing. And while that makes sense, it is critically important to get executive leadership aligned before initiating work. The first answer you need buy-in on is the one discussed above: What is this new logo solving for?

The next big question your team needs to get on the same page about: How will potential logos be evaluated? There is subjectivity in judging any creative output, of course. Everyone has their own taste. But if everyone has their own objectives and criteria for reviewing the work, you're on the road to a slow, costly, unproductive logo process.

Your team must come together around objectives and evaluation criteria before you start looking at designs. Answering these questions is a good place to start:

"I'll know it when I see it."

– The most common, and often doomed, approach to evaluating logo designs

### Business Strategy

Where does the business have equity and what needs to carry forward?

How will business priorities and goals shift over time and/or impact where you play and what you want to be known for?



### Brand Strategy

How does the logo need to deliver on the brand strategy?

What are the primary brand drivers and attributes the logo needs to address?

What role does the logo play alongside other brand elements?

What's the competitive landscape like?



### Design Implementation

How and where is the logo going to be used? (audit)

Are there other logos, brand names, or assets that need to be defined as part of a logo rebrand?



## THE ANATOMY OF A LOGO



# THE FOUR PHASES OF THE LOGO DESIGN PROCESS

OK, so you know that you need a new logo — and why. You have buy-in from your leadership team on the objectives and evaluation criteria. What's next? Think about the process in four phases.

## 1 THE BRIEF

A logo can visually represent one aspect of your brand, maybe two. But it can't highlight all of them (unless you want an extremely busy and unattractive logo). So, there are hard tradeoffs to be made. Writing the brief is the time to make them — not when you're evaluating designs. For a smooth and successful logo process, your team must hash out those decisions at the start and arrive at a brief that is, well, brief.

**You're ready to move on when:** You have a brief that zeroes in on 1–3 brand attributes that are authentically linked to your company's DNA, and that can coexist with each other (*you can't be modern and traditional at the same time, for example*).

## 2 CREATIVE IDEATION

This is where the process goes wide. While all options should align to the brief, this is when you see the most creative range. Remember, in order to evaluate logo designs, you should look at them in a variety of ways they would appear including large, small, and in the context of environments like social media and your website.

**Criteria for narrowing down options:**

- Best aligns with brand and brief
- Competitively distinct
- Flexible and scalable — with a digital-first orientation
- Relevant to all the markets you serve
- Can stand the test of time — rule of thumb is 8–10 years

**You're ready to move on when:** You've landed on 2–3 contenders that check all the boxes for your brand.

## 3 LEGAL AVAILABILITY

Now that you have a few logo options you're excited about, it's time to check in on what's legally available. Spoiler alert: Every logo is going to remind someone of something. But is it too close to a competitor? Are you (unintentionally!) ripping off a logo that's been done before? Before you start ordering those custom-branded Yetis, it's time to bring in your legal team for a thorough review.

**Criteria for narrowing down options:**

- Legal availability

**You're ready to move on when:** A logo passes your lawyers' sniff test, and they begin the trademark process.

## 4 ACTIVATION

This is the tweak and stress test phase. How will your logo look across a broad range of branded assets? Is it adaptable enough to work in every environment where it will appear? Are there additional design adjustments needed before you're ready to show your new logo to the world?

**Criteria for narrowing down options:**

- Works across all assets
- Adapts without losing consistency
- Creates an organizing principal for other related assets (brand architecture)

**You're ready to move on when:** You're done iterating on the logo design, and ready to develop guidelines for how, where, and when it will be used.

“A logo becomes a visual shorthand for the meanings people attach to a brand. A logo will play up some aspects of the brand but will not be able to communicate others.”

— Walter Landor



## TL;DR (TOO LONG; DIDN'T READ)

- Think before you act on a new logo project. What do you want to accomplish by changing your brand's logo?
  - A phased process to the logo work keeps your team aligned, makes evaluating options easier, and gets you to the finish line faster.
  - Think long term. It takes time and money to launch and establish your new logo. You want it to hold up for at least 8–10 years.
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