



Visual Identity: Fixed. Flexible. Simple.

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According to Harvard professor Gerald Zaltman, 95% of purchasing choices are subconscious. Princeton researchers also found that it took less than 0.1 seconds for people to form judgements about faces from pictures they were shown. The question is then, how do you appeal to customers' subconscious in little more than a split second?

A strong visual identity, that's how.

Firstly, we must be sure to differentiate between visual identity and brand identity. The latter is used to define how functions such as product design, audience targeting and employee relations contribute to the way brands present themselves and interact with audiences, while the effect of visual identity, while more quantifiable, is less palpable. It is how audiences' perceptions are subtly shaped to impart the narrative, emotion or personality of a brand.

Simple brands are great.

According to our consumer research, the most important characteristic of an instantly recognizable and memorable logo is simplicity. The most successful modern brands, including the likes of Nike, Apple and Coca-Cola, all exhibit this trait.

We live in times of over-complication. To cover multiple pillars, reach varying demographics and stay on top of trends, brands often find themselves being pulled in several directions. Stretched too thin, they sleepwalk into confusion and ambiguity.

Don't over-complicate.

Marketing Nutz CMO Pam Moore says that, on average, it takes five to seven impressions for people to remember a brand. Combatting or preventing overcomplexity in new and existing brands with simple, concise and appropriate communication helps audiences connect with your company's value, story and space within the market, making first impressions more impactful and increasing the likelihood of consumer familiarity in the future.

We believe simplicity comes from authenticity; uncovering a fundamental brand truth can lay the foundations for effective and impactful strategy, helping audiences understand and relate to your company's purpose. Our straightforward mantra of 'Simplify to

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Amplify' is based on discovering the core truth of our clients' brands before forming the optimal strategy and design for spreading awareness, ensuring this truth permeates all pillars, touchpoints and experiences. Our approach is effective in optimizing your ability to bring in results to grow business, raise awareness of your brand, build relationships with your customers and employees and facilitate future evolution.

Simplifying Complexity.

Before considering how to best amplify a brand, we must first cut through the clutter and find what runs deep. There are a number of ways in which a core brand idea can be unlocked, but we believe there are three key areas to be explored in order to ensure what is amplified is truthful and compelling. It is also important to remember that simplicity cannot be applied in isolation it must be fundamental to the core of your business philosophy, otherwise unity across all fronts of design becomes unattainable and messaging becomes confused, as do consumers.

Forming a creative platform from which the new brand can flourish, while ensuring all elements of the visual identity remain unified, is the first port of call. Identifying the key pillars of a company's work, character, ethic or ambition helps make this decision. Our process, however, is to identify a word or phrase that, by itself, speaks to the purpose of your organization's brand.

Choosing a simple truth ensures that all facets of visual identity align to the purpose and character of the company.

Sometimes a small change can make all the difference. When identifying a fundamental truth, we believe it's most important to find what makes an organization stand out from the pack. Stepping out of the shadows and daring to be different is what makes some of the world's most successful brands so appealing. In an Inc. article, Logan Chierotti writes, "emotion is what really drives purchasing behaviors, and also, decision making in general", underlining how important it is to create an emotional resonance with consumers. When teamed with a simplistic approach, a touch of adventure can capture the imagination of audiences, accentuating your brand in increasingly saturated markets and creating an emotional connection with consumers that can elevate perceptions enormously.

Once a creative platform has been established, it's time to bring it to life. Visual communication is an incredibly powerful tool for making your brand more visible and impactful, besides also being the quickest way to convey a message to an audience. Well thought out, focused communication is proven to make brands more memorable and, according to our research around logo design in particular, the most memorable marques are 13% more likely to get consumers' attention than those that aren't. As such, the work of the design team centers around ensuring perceptions are as close as possible to the essence of an organization's identity, bringing purpose into all aspects of design, making tangible the intangible.

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Amplifying what's powerful.

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Statkraft, had been operating in the clean energy space for over 125 years. However, they recognized that the landscape was changing, and recent acquisitions now allowed them to diversify into the electric vehicle charging market. They needed a progressive, optimistic and accessible brand to face this challenge.

Our single-minded idea of 'EV lifestyle' cut straight to the core of the identity of the new EV charging brand, Mer. A lifestyle brand, it is simple and empowering and required a visual identity that could reflect that. With a logo that represents the 'core idea, it seeks to remove the barriers to EV, with a delicately structured visual identity offering a beautiful, yet simple experience. This visual identity, which can be dialed up or down, contributing to the benefits of, and amplifies the core idea, 'EV lifestyle'.

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One way of achieving this is to adopt a fixed and flexible approach, helping us create and amplify messages in a way that drives audience recognition and engagement. Stories are what capture the imagination of consumers, precipitating personal investment and interest in a brand and ultimately driving business. Fixed and flexible assets can narrate a story, balancing familiarity with adventure. Allowing a brand's identity to be playful while remaining recognizable.

Some of the world's most ubiquitous brands follow the principle of fixed and flexible assets. The red and white stripe of Coca-Cola comes to mind, having been used since the brand's genesis yet remaining flexible enough to act as the foundation for a wealth of different campaigns, sub-brands and continuous brand evolution.

Reaping the rewards.

Changing perceptions can be tough for existing businesses. As we know, first impressions count for a lot, and the opinions people have on organizations can be difficult to change, even years down the line. With this in mind, an evolution of visual identity can be an incredibly powerful card to play.

Regardless of how subtle the change, in order to instill in an audience, the desired impression of a company it is important to first seek out that fundamental truth

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of purpose that runs straight to the core. In the case of CVS Health, we found that most viewed the company as a group of “doers that think”. However, we agreed that this perception didn’t hit the mark; “thinkers that do” seemed a more apt representation of the purpose, attitude and work of the company. That’s what we carried forward, ultimately creating a caring yet credible brand personality of “Leading with heart”.

Having established a creative platform, we worked at developing a visual identity to match. Starting with a bold, sophisticated yet universal logo to head up a library of icons and illustrations of the same style, representing the idea of simplifying complex concepts, not without a touch of playfulness to avoid full surrender to the healthcare brand trends of sobriety and functionality.

When CVS Health took the bold step of removing all tobacco products from their stores, it was a demonstration of what the brand stands for. This supported and authenticated the brand experience for customers and provides a clear link of the alignment of experience and visual identity.

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Applying simplicity at the core of your business reaps great benefits down the line; with no doubt hanging over the character of your business and a renewed sense of purpose and direction that your customers, clients and employees can firmly get behind, your brand will be consistent, pertinent and authentic across all touchpoints.

Brand Research + Strategy

Naming, Communications + Verbal Identity

Customer Experience

Visual Identity

Employee Engagement + Culture

Training

By embracing simplicity, brands drive results for their business, for their employees and for their customers, evolving through a clear understanding of who they are.

Siegel+Gale is a brand experience firm that collaborates across seven offices around the world - New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, London, Dubai, Shanghai and Tokyo. We have been leading brand programs for start-ups, global businesses and national institutions for fifty years.

