# Making Your Mark with a Fitting Logo

A LOGO IS THE THE EMBLEM THAT REPRESENTS YOUR BUSINESS. IT'S TELLS PEOPLE WHO YOU ARE AND A WELL DESIGNED LOGO WILL HELP TO ATTRACT THE CLIENTS YOU WANT.

Although I have designed logos, I don't consider myself to be a logo designer. Creating a logo requires uncommon graphical abilities. A designer must consider how you see your brand, what competing businesses use (to avoid duplicating their style), which colors are appropriate, and a lot more

On-line logo design tools claim to allow you to design your own logo in 10 minutes or less. The resulting design is usually uninspired and often inappropriate. I used an on-line service to create a logo for *Joe's Plumbing* and was unimpressed with the results.
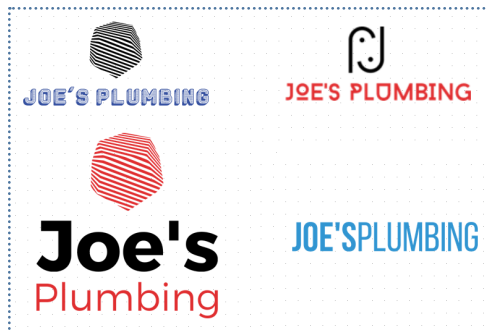
An even worse option involves using tired, old clip-art images. A talented, professional designer is far from free, but spending the time and money to get it right the first time will pay off. The designer will ask a lot of questions about the business and your brand's personality, about what makes your business
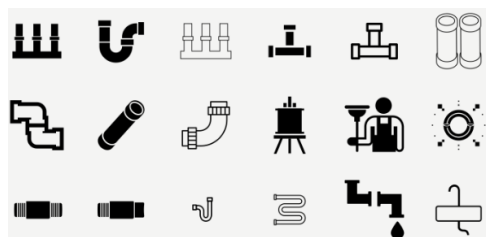
unique, and about your specific products and services.

The designer may then brainstorm with you or with the design agency's staff and present several rough-sketch ideas for consideration. This process, and the designer's experience, are what you'll be paying for.

The designer will also consider how the logo will be reproduced: It may need to be suitable for use in full color magazines, on the website, on your stationery, and on the product.

Consider the logo Henry Ford started with in 1903, a busy design (top left).

A few years later, the script lettering (generally believed to be based on Ford's signature) was being used (top right).

By 1917, the *Ford in an oval* design had appeared (bottom left). Little has changed since then, although the company limited the use of the logo on cars in the 1930s and 1940s, used a rounded rhombus instead of an oval from 1957 to 1961, and experimented with block lettering in the 1970s.

The chrome reflection effect developed in 1976 (bottom right) was toned down considerably in 2002, but continuity has been maintained by the script design for 107 years. That's uncommon and it clearly illustrates the company's heritage.

Consider your designer's fee well worth it if your logo is in use for 15 or 20 years. Some companies "freshen" their logo every few years, but rarely make dramatic changes and almost never change colors because those kinds of modifications confuse customers and prospects alike.

Does the Design Work?

Look carefully at your designer's suggestions. Even the best sometimes make mistakes, so take the time needed to think about what you're seeing.

- Is the name immediately legible?
- Does the design communicate what your business does?
- Is the design sufficiently versatile that it can be applied to all of your products and services and in every medium you plan to use?
- Is the design or any of the wording similar to that of a competitor?

Beware **Ooooops** Moments

It's all too easy to overlook something because you know what message you were intending to communicate.

This is problem that affects writers, editors, and designers.

Many photos have been taken of the front signage on a Megaflix video rental store in Port Ritchie, Florida. There's nothing wrong with the name *Megaflix*, but using all capital letters, not paying attention to the letter spacing, and selecting a typeface that doesn't differentiate between some letter forms resulted in a most unfortunate message.

The person who created the design probably failed to notice that the capital letters L and I, when placed close to each other can resemble the letter U. That's an *ooooops*.

Likewise, it's important to look beyond the logo design. A company named Pen Island Pens needed a domain name and selected penisland.net. This can be read two ways, of course: The way the company wants you to read it (Pen Island) and the way a lot of people will see it (Penis Land).

The logo for a website that identifies the agent who represents actors, singers, and dancers looks fine, but the resulting domain name (whorepresents.com) can be read as Who Represents or Whore Presents.

So it's wise to hire a designer with a dirty mind, one that will see the unintended, unfortunate meanings in what would otherwise be entirely innocent terms.

If You Must Do It Yourself ...

The first thing to do is stop and think about whether you really must do it yourself. Design has a major effect on how you and your company are perceived. Do you trust yourself to do a professional job?

Here are some points, in no particular order, that must be considered if you design your own logo.

- **Use a program that creates vector images:** Vector images can be scaled large or small without losing detail. A small logo designed in a raster graphics program will be rough if you have to scale it larger.

  Avoid programs such as Word and Powerpoint. Using one of these applications to create business-oriented designs all but guarantees that the design will look amateurish.
- **Stick to just one or two colors:** Just because your computer can create 16.7 million colors doesn't mean that you have to use them all. Take a look at logos from large companies to learn how colors are used.
- **Stay away from clipart:** Some clipart images have been around since the 1930s and they were trite back then. It's better to create a logo consisting only of words unless you're an artist.
- **Pay attention to the typefaces and colors:** Some typefaces should simply be avoided, either because they are inappropriate for business or because they're overused. These

include Comic Sans, most "handwritten" faces, Papyrus, Curlz, Arial, Times New Roman, typewriter faces, and such.

If you can't imagine Microsoft, IBM, or Amazon using the typeface, avoid it. Colors need to be legible and it's a good idea to avoid colors used by your competitors.

- **Use, at most, two typefaces:** As with colors, the fact that your computer has 10,000 installed typefaces doesn't mean that you need to use them all.
- **Be unique:** Take a look at what your competitors are doing and then be careful not to create a similar look. You can get good ideas from other logos, but don't plagiarize words or designs.
- **Keep the logo simple:** Cramming too much information into a design ensures that it will communicate nothing. The same is true for business cards, which should contain minimal information, not a list of every product and service you offer.
- **After creating the logo, try printing it at different sizes:** This is important because seeing the logo at various sizes will reveal legibility problems.

Perhaps the most important point to recognize is that, unless you're a trained designer, you're not a trained designer. So don't try to create something that will win a design award.

In art school, future designers are given challenging assignments that require them to think before they start creating. For non-designers, a good oobjective is simply to *avoid designing something ugly*. I have to credit author and conference host Rick Altman for that term. He's used it for a long time and it has served him well.

Design isn't rocket science! It's much, much harder. Rocket science is precise. Take this action; get that result. Although I sometimes play at being a designer, I understand that there's a lot I don't know.

Fortunately, 30+ years of working with real designers and attending a lot of seminars have been sufficient for me to master the art of creating a design that isn't ugly.

At least most of the time.

If you can afford to hire a true graphic designer, the results will be better. If not, just avoid the uglies. Ω