



BRANDING: Two Out of Three Isn't Bad...It's Worse.

Barry Ridge, Principal, Barry Ridge Graphic Design

Branding...seems to be the buzz word of today's business strategies. But what exactly is branding? How does it shape perception of a product or service? What distinguishes a great brand from a not-so-great one?

We all saw the news footage and photos of the Enron® corporate headquarters during that memorable shake up. The Enron logo was central to it all: stylized three dimensional, "E" tilted up to suggest onward and upward positive intention. Funny how intentions can take you places you never intend to go. When the house of cards came crashing down, that good intentioned logo became a symbol of corporate greed and financial disaster for the thousands of people who had placed their trust in the Enron brand and its promise of prosperity.

Brand Does Not Live By Design Alone

We all learned in grammar school that fire could not continue to burn if you removed one of its three essential elements from the mix: heat, oxygen or fuel. Successful branding is also a function of three essential elements: Design. Promise. Delivery.

A brand is not solely a function of great design. It must be backed by a promise – and made viable by delivery on that promise. Enron got two out of three. Not bad, but obviously not nearly good enough.

THE DESIGN must convey intent to your audience. It is your banner your flag your signature to the world. And in today's multi-lingual marketplace, symbols that faithfully represent and accurately connect ideas have true value. Symbolism is a language beyond words. Visuals often contribute more to the understanding of a brand message than words.

Color is certainly a major ingredient and can shape the "tone" of a brand. Take, for example, the hockey team that chooses to brand itself with a cuddly, baby lamb rendered in soft, pastel colors. This is not a design that is representative or suggestive of any intent on the part of any self respecting hockey team. It will not command loyalty, motivate the desired fan base or strike terror in the hearts of opponents...and is therefore destined for failure.

THE PROMISE defines -- initially with words and later by association -- exactly what a customer should expect from your company. If you make the statement "We do pizza better than anyone else," you sure as sugar better be prepared to fulfill that promise. Clarity of message through the ranks of any business, large or small is vital. Your promise must be part of everything you do...integrated into any message you send out...defined by every job you take on.

How do you answer the phone? Something along the lines of "Good Morning. Polly's Pizza -- we do pizza better than anyone else. May I help you?" would be in order. Should your logo -- your company colors and design -- incorporate a visual representation of what you do into its makeup? Absolutely. A truly representative, simplified logomark has tremendous value over time. The ultimate goal here is to instill an emotional brand loyalty in every one of your customers.

THE DELIVERY is arguably the most important element. It's also the hard part. Being prepared to deliver on your brand promise is only part of 1/3rd of the success equation. Contrary to what some misguided business owners still persist in believing, you do have to actually deliver on that promise.

Follow-through -- via planning; monitoring; brand compliance; and staying "on-message" while maintaining the ability to redirect with ever-evolving market conditions -- is what completes the picture. The ultimate goal? Customer satisfaction, of course.

Something as simple as maintaining consistent color in the logo can make all the difference. Building and archiving a library of digital content and printed samples helps ensure compliance and constancy of message and effectiveness of campaigns over time. As response is gathered and evaluated, message can be reviewed and directed as needed to reach (and satisfy) customers more effectively. Without these checks and balances, your brand is in danger of at worst, communicating the wrong message and at best, communicating no viable message at all.

Keep Your Promises, Grow Your Company

Design. Promise. Delivery. These three components, fully realized, will produce the fire needed to propel a company forward and upward (as the Enron "E" intended). If an original design is produced with meaningful, targeted symbolism, backed by an emotion-stirring promise and validated by faithful delivery on that promise, it can and should live on (with minor adjustments along the way) to display a healthy, vibrant, up-to-date representation of company intention and values. And after all, that's really what you want from any branding effort, right? Right.

Barry Ridge is the founder/principal of Barry Ridge Graphic Design in Camarillo, CA. Celebrating it's 29th year, his company specializes in all aspects of design strategy and management, including brand identity, color consultation, corporate communications, direct mail, display and signage, print management and product packaging.

Barry is also a senior chair holder in the Color Marketing Group (CMG) -- an international professional association specialized in providing insightful color and trend forecast information for application in a wide variety of industries.

(805) 764-2440
barry@ridgedesign.com
www.ridgedesign.com
www.colormarketing.org

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ridge BARRY RIDGE GRAPHIC DESIGN

Camarillo, California 93012

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