

History of Logos

One important area of graphic design is Logo Design - the art of visual identity.

What is a Logo?

A logo is a sign, symbol, trademark or badge which conveys the identity or ownership of a product, company, campaign or concept in as memorable a way as possible.

How are logos used?

A logo can be used in many different forms, sizes and contexts. For example, the logo for a hotel could be printed on a letterhead or menu, embroidered onto a napkin or jacket, embossed on metal cutlery or illuminated as a huge neon sign on the side of the building.

What are the basic qualities of a logo?

A logo should be simple so that it retains its clarity of design in different contexts. If it is too complicated, its details may be lost when it is reduced in scale. Also, a simple logo design is faster to read, easier to remember and consequently more instantly identifiable.



The 'I Love New York' logo by Milton Glaser, one of the most reproduced logos ever, illustrates most of these basic qualities.

What is the main function of a logo?

A logo should convey an immediate and memorable identity and must connect with its target audience in a positive manner.

How have logos evolved?

Logos have been around in one form or another for several thousand years. The Ancient Egyptians are known to have branded domestic animals with hieroglyphs to mark their ownership. The Ancient Romans and Greeks marked their pottery to identify the manufacturer. The great faiths of the world have all adopted symbols for ease of recognition.



Symbols of Faiths

From the 12th century onwards through medieval times, heraldic designs (coats of arms) were used to identify the status and property of the nobility.



Heraldic Designs

In general, however, the most common early logos were trademarks signifying the origin or quality of a craftsman's product. Hallmarks, which testify to the quality of precious metals, are a good example of this practice.



Silver Hallmarks

At the start of the 20th century with the introduction of colour printing and the birth of the advertising industry, logo designs tended to use a vocabulary of national, nautical, heraldic, and agricultural images. The public readily understood the meaning of these symbols. National and heraldic symbols (crowns, flags and coats of arms) meant dignity and status while nautical and agricultural symbols (seascapes, life buoys, wheat stalks and farm animals) represented purity and freshness.

Logos Today

Over the last century, our lifestyles gradually became more complex. Conversely, the design of logos became simpler for ease and speed of recognition in a faster world. The evolution of the Shell Logo throughout the 20th century clearly demonstrates this effect. In fact, the art of logo design illustrates the design concept "Less is More" better than any other graphic form.



Logos, as we know them today, are intelligent graphic images that are carefully designed to impart their concepts, both consciously and sub-consciously, for immediate recognition by a specific target audience.