

Getting the Look

Six little secrets for coming up with a great logo without breaking the bank.

Michael Bierut, a partner at Pentagram, an international design consultancy based in New York City, offers the following tips about logo design:

1. Be Simple. Some of the best logos are the simplest. One of the oldest is the mark used by the Bass brewery: a red triangle. Target has made a red circle with a red dot in the middle seem the very essence of affordable, hip practicality. Now H&R Block is trying to claim a green square. It will probably work. Simple things are easy to remember and tend not to become dated quickly.

2. Leave It Open. Don't try to make a logo that will explain at a glance the complete nature of your company. A logo that raises a question and is open to interpretation is better than one that attempts to contain all the answers.

3. Be relentlessly consistent. Companies that have strong graphic identities have built them through years of use. Pick a typeface. Pick a color. Use them over and over and over again, on everything. Before long you'll find yourself with an identifiable look and feel. That's more valuable than a logo, and anyone can afford it.

4. Don't be embarrassed about design. Things like logos and colors can be considered "cosmetic," and hard-headed business people sometimes avoid focusing on them. But most design-driven companies got to be that way thanks to a highly placed advocate, such as Thomas Watson at IBM in the 1960s or Steve Jobs at Apple today. For a design program to work, it needs to be seen as important to important people. Care about it.

5. Get good advice. You can go pretty far with common sense. But sooner or later, you'll need to hire a professional graphic designer for help.

6. Don't expect miracles. Your company's image is the sum total of many factors. Sticking a clever logo on a stupid piece of communication gets you nowhere. Make sure that your company looks, sounds, and feels smart in every way, every time it goes out in public. That is actually much better than a logo.