

For new businesses, name and logo say it all

Experts say design and name should be simple and clear

By Candace Goforth
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AKRON, Ohio — If a company's name and logo are its fashion statement, a lot of businesses are parading around in plaid pants and loud ties. Small startups and established corporations alike struggle to get noticed. The challenge is to find the edge between catching a prospective customer's attention and looking like you're trying too hard — or not trying at all.

Marketing consultants insist it can be done, even by the most budget-challenged organizations, as long as you follow a few basic branding guidelines: Remember your audience, plan for the future and, in designing the logo, keep it simple.

"Most of the time in conversa-

tion, how people say things is almost as important as what they say," said Michael Houseman, president and creative director of the Akron advertising and design firm Trendesign LLC. "That holds true for marketing, too."

Often, entrepreneurs aren't prepared or willing to devote scarce resources to marketing. They figure, if they can just come up with something to get them started — say, something pieced together on a PC — they can make a bigger investment later.

But by that time, Houseman said, the company already will have made its first impression. And there's a good chance it won't be a good one.

Still, cash-strapped businesses may not have the luxury of making a large investment right away. But even if they can't afford an expensive advertising campaign, they don't have to settle for something amateurish, Houseman said.

The secret to an inexpensive but effective logo is simplicity.

"Nobody ever got in trouble

speaking simply," Houseman said. "People get in trouble when they try to speak over their heads."

Using flowery typefaces and trying to execute something really elaborate is generally not a very good idea. You want to project a professional image.

He encourages do-it-yourself designers to keep their personal taste out of the designing process as much as possible.

"If you love something, there's a really good possibility that someone out there really hates it," Houseman said. "Go to the middle of the road, and don't let the message get cluttered by the visuals."

Houseman said simplicity should be a guiding principal for anyone designing a logo — and that includes professionals.

"This is all about communication," he said. "It's not art."

Perhaps not. But it is a creative expression of a company's identity.

For that reason, a professional designer is often better equipped

to help develop an image that speaks to an organization's target audience, said Bob Piks, president of the Advertising Federation of Greater Akron.

Tony Ciccarelli recently worked with Piks' advertising firm, All Aboard Promotions, to create a logo for his new venture, Triad Mortgage Group LLC.

"This isn't something you throw together in 10 minutes," said Ciccarelli, who ran two other mortgage firms before launching Triad. "It's like naming your kid. It's something that will be with you forever."

That's all the more reason to choose a name and logo that will retain its relevance even as the company evolves, said Jack DeLeo, president and CEO of Hitchcock Fleming and Associates.

He said organizations should avoid trendy gimmicks that might lose their appeal in 10 years.

A minimalist, straightforward approach might be best for logos, particularly the homemade variety.

But the process of naming a company calls for absolute freedom from restraint, said Daniel Altman, creative director for A Hundred Monkeys, a naming company based in Mill Valley, Calif.

Altman said the most effective names are the ones that reflect the personalities of the business and its people — even if they don't describe exactly what the company does.

Some marketing experts advise companies to play it safe and consider every possible negative connotation for a name before they choose it.

Altman comes from a different perspective. Too often, he said, the naming process becomes political, and companies end up with names that are sanitized, boring and meaningless.

A name has to be interesting, but certainly some degree of consideration is necessary.

Hitchcock Fleming & Associates' DeLeo warned that business owners should choose names that will cross borders if the organiza-

tion ever has the good fortune to trade on the global market.

General Motors learned that lesson the hard way.

In October, the automaker announced it will change the name of the future Buick model LaCrosse in Canada because the word is a Quebec slang term for masturbation.

The reasons behind most name changes aren't that dramatic.

Sometimes, mature companies find their image simply hasn't evolved with their business. In some cases, rebranding accommodates a company's shift in focus or products. In others, the market itself forces a change.

Carter Lumber, under pressure from the home-improvement behemoths Lowe's and Home Depot, altered its name and logo to appeal directly to its customers.

Working with DeLeo's Hitchcock Fleming and Associates, the Kent, Ohio company rebranded itself "The Yard," a reference to the phrase builders often use on the job site.