

The art of the dotcom mark

Name development and logo design have become an art form. And it's not size or colour that matters these days - it's domain availability, adaptability and streetwise sensibility. Carmen Ler of FusionDesign talks about the importance of logo flexibility and markings that reflect the rule of the day: simplicity of design and a single marking that stands out from its competitors.

By [Carmen Lerm](#) 2 Sep 2002

The past decade has seen extraordinary changes in the composition and positioning of business. Start-up companies, established three-year-old companies ready to move into a target market, mergers and acquisitions, management buy-outs and corporate facelifts have all impacted both on corporate personae and on their symbols, icons and logos. Today, corporate signatures are more important than ever.

The ever-evolving market-place has thrown up many new challenges. Especially when it comes to domain availability. It's said that all the good dot.com and dot.co.za names have already been snapped up. Which isn't surprising when you think about the rate at which new domain names are registered globally every day. And which causes problems for established companies that might not have had the foresight to register the names and are now forced to change their names because other companies have registered the names! These companies then have to opt for a dot.biz or dot.net address. But we all know which address is really foremost in people's minds ... (When you developed a logo "in the olden days", foresight meant having a logo with a lifespan of 15 to 20 years!)

So, when developing a new brand or company name, you have to do a thorough Internet search to establish domain availability. Especially when you can now measure brand recognition and share by the number of hits to a website. This does, of course, slow down the process of name development: you might just come up with the perfect name or icon, find it's up for grabs on paper - but not on the triple W!

The modern world means change - at an alarming rate. No longer are people born and do they die in the same place, no longer do they work at the same company all their lives and drive the same car for as long as the mileage and engine allow. These days, people travel right across the globe in less than a day. Families are dispersed worldwide and relatives often live and die on different continents. It's considered a good thing to job-hop and gain lots of experience (and bigger pay cheques). Insurance companies recommend frequent car trade-ins for better and newer models.

It's in such a fast-paced world that thousands of logos are designed every day, churned out by designers who don't have the savvy to resolve their work, who are unable to take their designs those few critical steps further. Mediocre logos with lifespans of between one and five years appear every day. Few are really memorable. Amateur symbols based on casual thinking don't hold up in the complexity of today's markets. The demand is for strategic design.

Although there is a 50s revival - a return to fonts that were created then (like Chantilly and Futura), a drive for logos that are honest and transparent - our needs are different today because everything is in a state of constant flux. After all, the positioning of society directly impacts on and reflects the look and feel of a logo. Design inspiration is drawn from what is important and relevant to a community. There's a flux in spirituality, for example, with people exploring new forms like reiki, feng shui, Taoism, the yin-yang symbol. There's a crossing of cultures, with new sounds in music like Kwaito and new shows on television like Big Brother.

There's a plethora of sporting events and international conferences. Whatever the reasons behind the creation of a new logo, it's crucial - especially in this age of media clutter and hype - that you can immediately identify each logo. Visual definition must represent the core attributes of an organisation; they must tell a mini-story. You also have to consider all types of applications when you design a logo: large, small, 3-D, even 4-D, embossed, de-embossed, animated, billboard, architectural, lapel, website, fax, e-mail. There's no doubt that the design process has been affected in key areas. Internet time sets an extraordinary pace. And designing for a cross-platform world means that you have to understand the difference between hardware platforms and monitor resolutions.

But, after all's said and done, it's the conceptual and contextual connection between client and logo that still takes priority in the design process. And, because of the tight limitations, it's an even higher level of creativity than ever before that's needed to reach a solution that satisfies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carmen Lermis is the CEO of FusionDesign, a Cape based mid-sized design house, specialising in corporate identity and brand development. Carmen is an award-winning designer who trained in Holland, gaining international experience on several global brands. She was a finalist in the 1998 London International Advertising Awards for Telkom's "Nature versus Technology" phone cards. FusionDesign is situated in the Palms Lifestyle Centre in Woodstock and was formed three years ago. Carmen's philosophy is that nothing can be designed in isolation, extensive research, understanding and correct interpretation of a client's needs, together with design excellence enables her and her team to deliver creative work of the highest standard.

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