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**Corporate Identity / Branding for Small Business
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GRAPHIC DESIGN
CORPORATE IDENTITY
WEB DEVELOPMENT

BRANDING and IDENTITY: MORE THAN BUZZ WORDS FOR SMALL BUSINESS

Use of effective identity design and branding strategy can elevate your small business to the next level of success and take you head-to-head with larger competitors

Though often overlooked or undervalued by small business owners, brand and identity are essential in the effort to stand out in an increasingly competitive marketplace. And, proper implementation of these fundamental tools can have a powerful impact on your company's strategic advantage.

Corporate identity, or brand identity, is the graphic and verbal representation of your company. It visually conveys who you are and what you do, communicating the essence of a brand. The root of a company's identity is its logo, usually consisting of a name and unique logomark. Other core elements of a standard corporate identity package include business cards, letterhead and envelopes. Identity materials can extend to web sites, signage and other marketing collateral which, together, project the company's image in a consistent and professional manner. Identity is a vital asset that must be invested in, leveraged and managed to ensure a company's success. At its foundation, compelling brand identity increases recognition and awareness and builds businesses.

Branding, on the other hand, is the cultivation of a *feeling*. It is the creation of expectation, a promise of quality – the emotional response of your audience to your company and products. Since brand consistency ensures that consumers will easily recognize your products and advertising, branding is especially important to young and growing businesses. For the long term, branding standards must constantly be maintained throughout the life of a business. A corporate style guide should be used to dictate execution of a company's identity across various mediums and applications.

Sound identity and branding also offer tangible competitive advantages. Good design can make a small business appear much larger, enabling it to compete more aggressively with bigger companies in a specific market. Professionally crafted identity can also help project a more credible, professional corporate image, increasing consumer confidence and awareness. Most significantly, branding your company successfully will help differentiate you from competitors, even in a dense market.

Often treated as an afterthought, many new businesses create logo and identity materials on the fly as they grow. However, developing effective identity is a thorough process of research and discovery, rather than a simple matter of putting images on paper or a screen. Professional identity designers know that, before the design process begins, the essence of a company must be discovered and key messaging defined. Careful consideration must be given to shape, colour and font choices, all of which must reflect the unique nature of your company, its goals, audience and industry. Each element plays an important role in influencing the perception of your company, its capabilities and level of professionalism.

The identities of two well-known companies, Home Depot and UPS, illustrate the value and influence of colour. Home Depot's logo and signage use orange as the primary colour, a shade noted by colour psychology and marketing experts to indicate a good value or a bargain. UPS' signature brown, likewise, is associated with reliability, a quality at the heart of that company's services. Industry and target demographics help determine the most appropriate colour and shape selections for a particular company or product. Choices made for a product marketed to young men will vary dramatically from those aimed at an older female audience.

Shapes, which the brain recognizes first, followed by colour and words, can be even more important in successful branding. Some of the most effective brands, such as Nike and McDonald's, need no longer even include the company name in their advertising to be immediately recognized. BC Hydro is a local business whose logomark effectively identifies the company even when it appears alone.

A small business can expect standard pricing for the design and development of a logo and identity package to range from a low-end of \$3,500-\$5,000 to a high of \$9,000-\$12,000, with an average investment of \$7,500. While these figures may seem surprising to some, and vary based on complexity and time required for research, a company's identity – the very core representation of its essence - is an investment where cutting corners could mean the difference between moderate success and competing at the top of your market.

Whether starting a new business, launching a new product or service or revitalizing an existing company, branding and identity should be an integral part of your business plan from the start. Using good design as part of your marketing strategy, when competitors may underestimate its value and effectiveness, can give your business a much-needed edge on the road to success.

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