

10 Tips for Designing Logos

by DesignShack

So you're designing a logo. It sounds like an easy enough task, right? Draw a circle, type in the company name and you're done.

There are a million people in the logo design industry today dishing out crappy logos in bulk for crowd sourcing sites. How do you as a serious professional stand out from the crowd and produce quality logos that don't suck? Read on to find out.

1. Use a Visual Double Entendre

Some of my favorite logos in the world utilize a technique that I like to call a visual double entendre, which is an overly fancy way to say that it has two pictures wrapped into one through clever interpretation of a concept or idea.

The [WinePlace](#) logo below is a perfect example.



This logo takes on the shape of a thumbtack, which suggests "location" or "place," but it also clearly looks like an upside down wine glass. Logo designs that use this technique come off as clever and memorable. Viewers love the little mind game that you're playing and are more prone to appreciate a design because of it.

In the past, I put together a post of [fifty fantastically clever logos](#) like the one below. Check it out if you love this type of logo design as much as I do!



2. Color is Vitally Important

One of the most important considerations for logo design is the color palette. This is not a superficial decision, color carries meanings and communicates ideas.

Sometimes you're pegged to the colors of a brand, but other times you'll have the freedom to explore. I love the rich palette used in the [Zion logo](#) below.



The colors here grab you and pull you in, they bring life to the illustration and give further context to the shape of the landscape. That being said, remember that a good logo is versatile and will still function well in grayscale:



Beyond a grayscale version, come up with a true single color version, using only black and negative space. This would be a little tricky with the logo above, but definitely possible.

NOTE: Think about FAX...you will want a logo that can easily translate into a black and white image for adding to the top of a fax cover sheet.



Always consider what it is that the logo will be used for and whether or not the various use cases require different versions.

3. Avoid the Cliché

Every few years or so, some new fads come along in logo design. I personally love to study design trends and you might even find me suggesting jumping onto a few bandwagons to keep up with the times, but with logos I just hate it when a bunch of designers use the same idea over and over.



The basic archetype above is being used again and again in logo design right now and it's getting old fast. Why not use a design that you actually thought up yourself rather than ripping off what everyone else is doing?

We have an entire article dedicated to showcasing [logo design clichés](#), be sure to check it out to make sure you're not guilty of uninspired logo design.

4. Make it Ownable

I don't believe that "ownable" is a real word, but you nevertheless hear it quite a bit in marketing (marketers love to make up words). The concept is definitely an important one that ties closely to the previous tip.

Rather than following the herd and using a cliché design, you should instead strive for something that is uniquely recognizable. I've always appreciated the Evernote logo in this regard:



It's really just an elephant head, which doesn't sound like a very unique concept. However, the way it's drawn with the curled trunk and page fold in the ear makes it instantly recognizable.

Try filling a notebook page or two with some rough sketches before choosing which ideas to pursue further.

5. Everybody Loves Custom Type

While we're on the subject of being unique, there's almost nothing that can give your logo a unique feel quite like some awesome custom lettering.



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Custom type helps ensure that your unique logo will stay that way. Lowlife designers will rip off your work in a heartbeat if they discover which typeface you're using, but it takes some real skill to mimic custom hand-drawn type!

Keep in mind though that if your logo is famous enough, people will always try to rip it off. This certainly holds true for my favorite script logo:



The image shows the iconic Coca-Cola script logo in a vibrant red color. The letters are highly stylized with elegant curves and flourishes, particularly in the 'C's and 'o's.

The awesome Coca-Cola script has been stolen countless times in awkward parodies throughout the last few decades.



6. Keep it Simple Stupid

In this situation, remember these four powerful words: keep it simple stupid! Simple but powerful logos permeate the business world and always prove to be the best icons for standing the test of time.



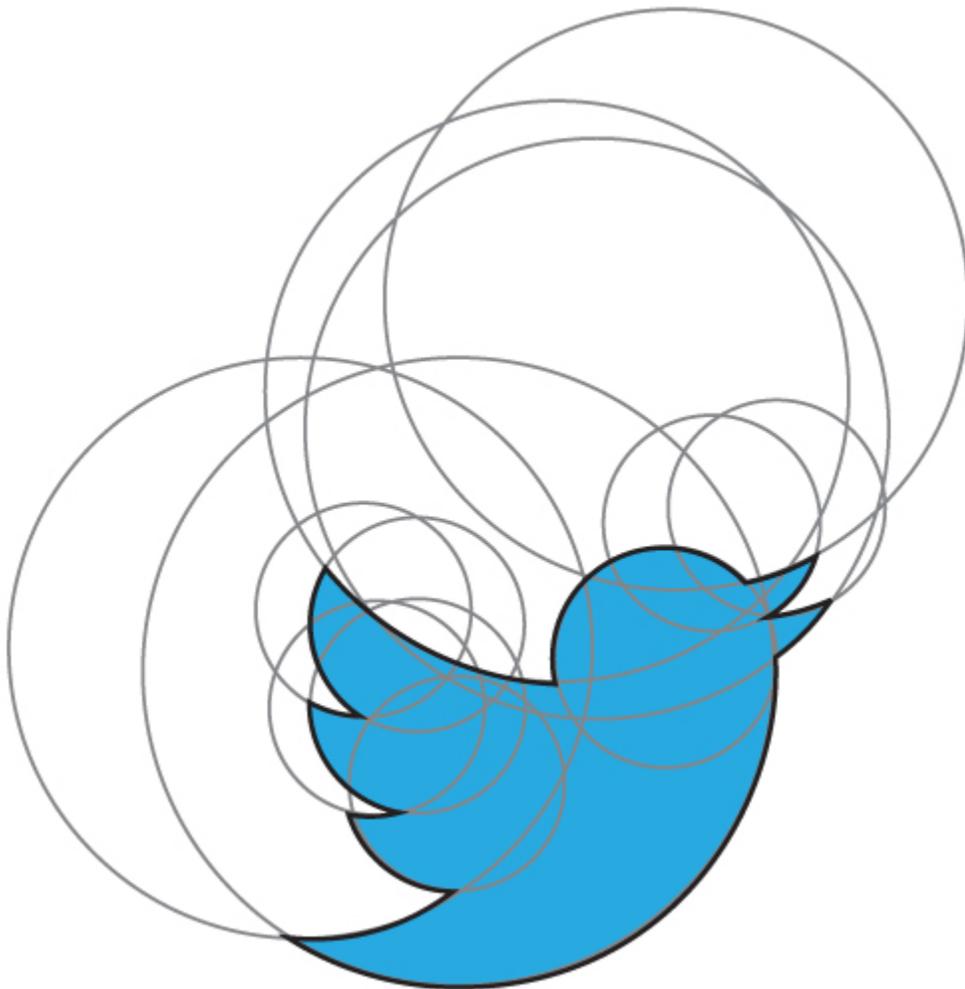
In considering how to construct one of these types of logos, let's discuss the Apple logo. The silhouette of an apple is nothing special or memorable:



It's that missing bite that takes it to the next level. It gives the logo character, makes it unique, and drives the meaning deeper (computers and bytes, get it?). Without the bite, the apple is boring, with it, the apple is suddenly iconic.

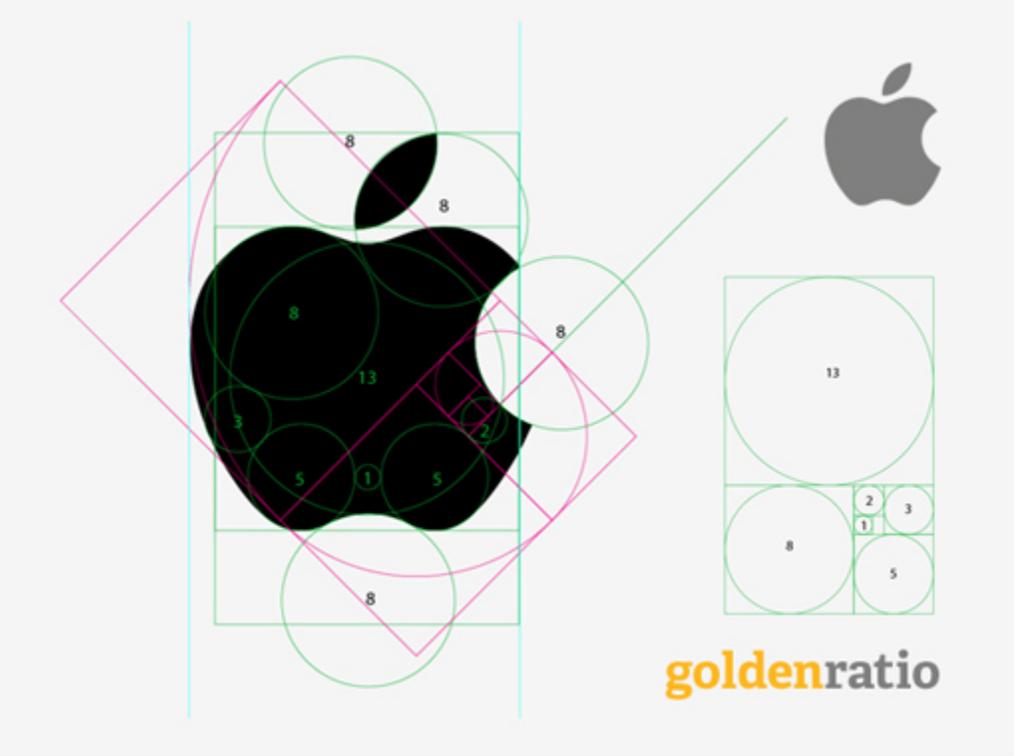
7. Consider Proportion & Symmetry

Some people can get carried away with discussions of proportion and symmetry (see the new Pepsi logo pitch), but if we strip out the crazy, there's still some important lessons here. Consider the new Twitter logo as an example:



Here circles aren't used to convince you of some strange cosmic tale that makes no sense, they're simply used as a guide to create a well balanced logo with consistent curves and arcs.

Despite the fact that the bite seems to violate the symmetry of the Apple logo above, if we dig deeper we can see that there was still a lot of through put into proportion and symmetry here ([image source](#)):



8. Think About Negative Space

Along the same vein as a double entendre is the age old trick of utilizing the negative space in a logo in some clever way. The industry standard example for this technique is the FedEx logo and its hidden arrow.



Don't see it yet? Keep looking, it's there. That's what I love about this logo, the use of negative space is so subtle. Most people in the U.S. see the FedEx logo daily or weekly for years as it drives by on the side of countless trucks and they never even notice the arrow.

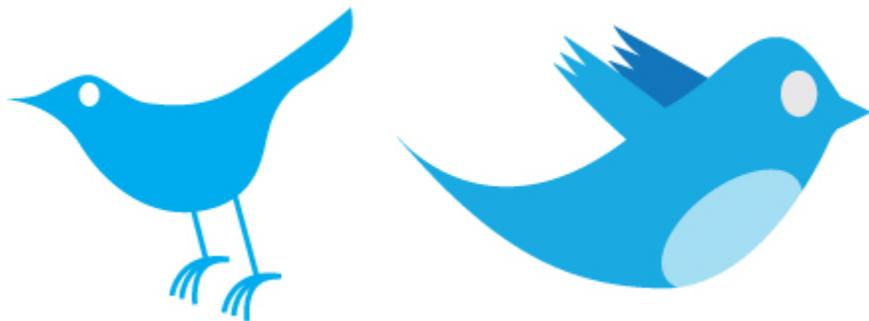
Check out good logo design utilizing negative space below, which blends together the idea of bull horns and a wine glass.



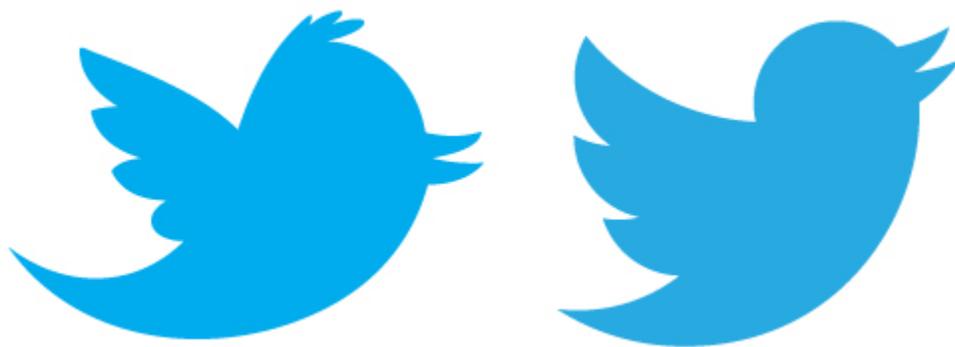
9. Passive vs. Active

One interesting facet of logo design that I've been considering a lot lately is the concept of instilling motion or a sense of activity into a logo. This isn't always appropriate (such as with the Apple logo), but sometimes it can really give a logo the boost it needs, both from a visual and conceptual standpoint.

As an example, let's look again to the Twitter logo. Way back in the early days, the bird went from sitting perched and passive to becoming active and taking flight.



In the most recent iteration, they took this concept even further by pointing the bird in an upward direction to indicate that it's climbing into the air rather than floating along the same old trajectory.



A sense of motion is especially important when it comes to logos with mascots. The image of the marlin below doesn't depict the fish merely lying still, instead it's leaping into the air in a victorious pose.



This concept even extends to typically inanimate objects. Consider how much better the logo below portrays the concept of “rough house” by instilling a sense of motion.



10. Know What it Means

Every good logo has a story. Far beyond simply a pretty sketch, strong logos are filled with meaning, both obvious and hidden. We discussed this in several cases above. The FedEx logo's arrow indicates moving forward and making deliveries, the Apple logo has a "byte" missing, and the Twitter bird is flying in an upward trajectory.