



Practical Guidelines for Corporate Graphic Standards
WHITE PAPER



RIGID FLEXIBILITY

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Objectives

Creating a corporate graphic standard is critically important toward establishing and reinforcing a company's brand. A consistent presentation among all elements of a company's communications firmly seats the company's identity in the customer's mind. Additionally, unifying the look and feel of materials throughout a company and its myriad of products and services clarifies the existing connections and synergies that exist to present a strong, cohesive identity.

A properly designed corporate standard will:

- Simplify and clarify information by standardizing its presentation
- Unify communications to reflect and contribute to the strength of the company's brand
- Reduce cost through the use of common design standards

While consistency is the underlying goal, this should not be taken too far. Standardization should be absolute on fonts, corporate colors, and on materials such as stationery. But on collateral, broadcast and electronic materials care must be taken not to design the company into a corner with inflexible formats. A carefully considered standard helps create strong identity while allowing for widely varied amounts of information, styles of art or photography, or, in the case of electronic materials, new technologies and effects.

A properly designed corporate standard will NOT:

- Enforce consistency to the point of sameness
- Restrict creativity in presenting ideas, products or services
- Prevent divisions or business units from developing a distinctive look within approved formats

Implementation

Each element of corporate communications has a unique set of considerations when developing a corporate standard. The starting point is the treatment of the logo.

The Logo

The standards for the colors and application of the corporate logo should be clear and inflexible once determined. As such, the standards must be carefully developed and drafted to prevent the need to work outside the rules. All applications must be considered, whether they be literature, Web sites, binder covers or signage. Decisions must also be made about the use of art effects on the logo. Will the logo standard permit drop shadows, embossed effects, patterns or metallic foils? In electronic use what Web-safe colors should be used for the logo, and is it acceptable to animate, morph or otherwise distort the logo for visual effect? For signs and vehicle lettering a standard should be established for the colors and suppliers of the approved vinyl, paint or Plexiglas® materials.

Stationery and Forms

This is one area that lends itself to strict guidelines. Color, format and paper stock should be clearly defined and enforced. This consistency is only possible if the design of the materials has taken into consideration the needs of users. In the case of stationery the format must allow sufficient space for multiple addresses, phone numbers, email addresses and long titles. The need to allow for additional logos, tag lines or other non-standard elements must also be considered.

Literature

The format of printed literature is one of the most important elements in developing a consistent standard, but it is also one of the most difficult. A successful standard will not only incorporate consistency in fonts and use of the corporate logo, but will offer a degree of flexibility in page format to allow for varied content and intent. By establishing one or more acceptable page format grids, consistency may be maintained through-out all promotional and technical materials. The grids also should offer sufficient flexibility to allow divisions or business units to develop their own distinctive style, without diluting the overall identity of the company.

The existence of multiple logos presents additional challenges. Will the corporate logo stand as the only logo? Or will individual groups and products be permitted to have their own distinct identity? Often the strength of the corporate brand will make this decision for you, but, whichever way you decide, the decision must be clearly defined and followed.

Advertising

This is an area where less is more. Less control, that is. Established standards for use and color of logo should be followed, but beyond that limitations should be few to permit and encourage creative solutions to promoting company products and services. That said, there can and should be a corporate vision concerning advertising. This may be provided as a supplement to the corporate standard, but guidance should be given as to how the company wants to be portrayed. The corporate branding strategy will provide the foundation for these decisions, as advertising consistency is more a function of a clear vision than rigid design standards.

Electronic Media

Web sites and interactive materials present their own challenges to a corporate standard. Limitations in color fidelity and font choices are offset by the ability to add animation, special effects, video clips and sound. As mentioned earlier, a Web-safe color should be selected to match the corporate color as closely as possible. Choices need to be made between the fast download of html and its limited fonts and the slower loading vector-based text that permits matching the corporate font. Here again a balance must be found between tight control and the development of fresh, innovative solutions to promoting products and services.

Conclusion

No standard can effectively address all contingencies. In reality the same may be said of a Corporate Standards Manual (CSM) in general. A CSM is at best an open framework for your company's communications and only time and careful supervision will fill in the gaps. As such the standard needs to be thought of as a living document, subject to ongoing refinement and clarification.



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