

# Practical Tips for Logo Design

By Susan Akers and Michael Fasig

In the past few years, many libraries have implemented nicely-designed logo marks. This has been a commendable step in communications and is a valuable part of identifying the overall brand of the library.

What is the purpose of a logo? Logos are used to establish identity. The logo aids in immediate recognition and differentiates the organization from others in a similar market. A good logo is distinctive, appropriate, practical, graphic and simple in form, and it conveys the library's intended message. A concept or "meaning" is usually behind an effective logo.

In the late '90s, the Anderson Public Library communications manager recommended that the library move away from simply using the initials "APL" in its print material and to engage the services of a professional designer. Someone suggested the library offer a logo design contest to the community. Although at first blush, it may sound like a good deal, the quality is usually far from what you would want for your organization.

In those days, the Internet was really beginning to take off and affect the way businesses, libraries, and other organizations served customers. The concept of technology at the library was relatively new then, and staff wished to position the library as a portal to the world. This concept, along with the library's mission, was communicated by the library's marketing manager to Honeymoon Image & Design in Indianapolis, a husband-and-wife graphic design team.

The pair produced several designs options and colors for consideration. After process of elimination the final vote came down to two designs. The final design was a royal blue "A" with fuchsia-colored stardust crossing through the "A" and the tagline of "The World Within Reach." This highly successful logo was used on banners, stationary, fliers, Website, and many other communication pieces for more than a decade.



A short educational session for the staff was developed, along with a graphic standards manual. The APL logo was attractive and easy to reproduce in a variety of formats and was effective without color.

A logo design takes thought and creativity, along with several other elements to be effective. Ideally, a design team will take the time to research the history and culture of an

organization that is requesting a new logo. An effective logo reflects the character and sensibilities of the company it represents, and can even help initiate a change in company culture when implemented.

## *Indiana Library Federation example*

Recently, the director at the Indiana Library Federation decided it was time to retire the organization's logo (a circle of capital Ls) which was about 11 years old. When approaching a new design, the director originally believed that since technology is so prevalent in libraries it would be favorable to include a symbol to denote technology. The graphic imagery of an arch was considered, too, since the ILF is an umbrella organization with several associations within.



Over several weeks, the designer developed four possible logos to represent the organization. The director obtained feedback from board members and met with the designer to develop further discussion and deeper insight into the brand. Taking the time to communicate and to further explore the culture of the organization led the team to new directives. Since the majority of members and the library community knew and referred to the organization as simply "ILF," the decision was made to focus on that acronym in the new logo.



Once the designer was no longer locked into trying to capture technology, progress was made using a modern font, the ILF's initials and a vibrant color scheme. Further, ILF staff developed an idea to use a key in the logo. This key could be useful in creating slogans for educational activities, i.e., "Your key to professional development" and so forth.

Additionally, the design offered the flexibility to vary the use of color to help identify individual divisions in the ILF family.

The ILF's designer wanted to ensure that the final design met the needs of the ILF. He was committed to the process even though it took longer and no doubt included some frustration.

A good designer will research the industry itself. Looking at logo designs that have been successful and at current styles and trends may help, but it is advisable to keep in mind

longevity in logo design, not trendiness.

One of the most important parts of the design process is to capture the spirit of the organizational mission within the logo design. A good logo is distinctive, appropriate, practical, simple in form, and it conveys the intended message.

*Principles of good logo design.*

**Simplicity** -- A simple design makes an easily recognizable, versatile and memorable logo. The best logos are not too busy and are easy to understand.

**Timeless, versatile** -- An effective logo works across a variety of media and applications. A logo should look good in black and white as well as color. Think about how it will be used. Will it be used on tee shirts, invoices, receipts? It should be flexible enough to look attractive in a 3/4" size and on a billboard.

One way to create a versatile logo is to begin designing in black and white. This allows the designer to focus on the concept and shape, rather than color, which is subjective in nature. Also keep in mind printing costs: the more colors you use, the more expensive it will be to reproduce on printed items.

It can be especially helpful to have alternative versions of a logo available for use in various applications. If a logo design is primarily horizontal in shape, a vertical iteration of the logo may be useful for applications where the horizontal format is not ideal.

A professional designer uses a process that can take weeks, or sometimes, even months to complete a logo. Be patient as great design will be worth the wait.

Once your designer has supplied your completed logo, be sure to adhere to their rules for use of the logo. The design team should establish a clear set of guidelines for use of the logo. Be careful not to allow the logo to be distorted or altered.

Another "don't" is using online stock imagery in your logo. Ensure your design is original and not stock imagery which could look like many other libraries' logos. In closing, taking the time and energy to ensure open dialogue with the designer, in addition to obtaining points of view from a small focus group or staff, assists in identifying the logo mark that captures the essence of the organization.

*A logo doesn't need to say what an organization does. Restaurant logos don't need to show food, dentist logos don't need to show teeth. Just because it's relevant, doesn't mean you can't do better. The Mercedes logo isn't a car. The Virgin Atlantic logo isn't an airplane.— David Airey*

#### **Bios:**

**Mike Fasig**, along with his wife Rhonda, owns Honeymoon Image and Design, Inc. He has a B.S. degree in Visual Communications from Ball State University. Mike worked for two Indianapolis design agencies in the 10 years after graduating from Ball State. Then, in 1992, he and Rhonda started Honeymoon out of the sunroom of their Broad Ripple home. Honeymoon continues to operate on the north side of Indianapolis, providing graphic design and advertising services for many local and regional clients. Clients of note include: The Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Reisch Nichols Jewelers, COS-Xerox, Riley Children's Foundation, Indianapolis School of Ballet, Indianapolis Airport Authority, Lumina Foundation, and, of course, the Indiana Library Federation.



**Susan Akers** has been ILF's executive director for six years. Prior to that position, she was employed by Ball State University's library and by Anderson Public Library both in communications management positions. She received an M.A. from Ball State in public relations in 1999. Her expertise is focused in non-profit management and marketing, strategic planning and brand management.

