

# Logo design: Who is your target audience?

*Is it the client, or the client's target audience?*

An interview with Dan Antonelli, President and Creative Director, Graphic D-Signs, Inc. and SignShopMarketing.com

**A**s logo designers, we're often asked to balance the perceived requirements or design parameters of the business owner with the needs of their target audience. Sometimes these needs are unfortunately at odds with one another. How do you go about striking a balance—or educating the client about the proper direction in which to take their new identity?

**Set the tone** Your portfolio must set the tone in establishing your expertise. If the client is unconvinced of your capability, things will go downhill right from the start. You've all experienced what happens when clients let you do your job, and trust your know-how. (After all, isn't that what they hired you for?) Usually you create something stellar. I think some of our best portfolio pieces are from instances

when the clients have said those magical words: "You guys are the experts. Do what you think is best..." Yes, we are experts. After 300+ logos, we'll know more about logos than the client ever will.

**Leading them down the path** But the 300 logos do not always immediately convince them. After writing two books on the subject [*Logo Design For Small Business, Vol. 1 & 2*, both available from *SignCraft*] and winning several national awards, you'd think we would hear those magical words every single time. Those assets are clearly in our favor, and we're certainly going to play those cards as needed. But how great we are is of little consequence to the client. What they really care about is how your expertise will translate into helping them build a better brand—which will translate into more sales for them.

## **Ask the questions, establish your expertise**

The logo design process should begin by asking the hard questions of a business owner that they may have been avoiding for several years. If they're in your shop, they may have been thinking about these questions already. Or maybe they believe they already need a new identity. That makes the process a lot easier. Here's a few key issues related to the



After the logo was created, we designed their business card and truck lettering. We also developed their tag line to work with their butterfly icon. Note the synergy between the print design and vehicle layouts.



Part of your job in branding a business is to insure that the image and identity translate well across many different mediums. A consistent look and feel is imperative to establish a firm's image.

identity of an existing business that should be discussed with the owner:

**1. Does the current image reflect the direction they want to take the company?** So often for us, our clients come to us to help “take them to the next level”. While that’s a great goal, we’re often hamstrung by their current identity. For a lot of potential clients, we tell them we can’t achieve that with their current logo and it first needs to be redesigned to accomplish their goals.

We’re apt to repeat a mantra frequently heard in our office: “Success in spite of a poor image is not an excuse to perpetuate it.” Clients either believe it and are excited about our ideas to rebrand, or they don’t, because their own success has tainted their ability to look at their own image objectively. Which





Business card: front



Business card: back



For this established landscape business, we were given free rein to do what we thought would work best. Since integrating the new look, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. We're currently designing their collateral and Web site, which will carry the same look and feel. We had John Aiello, Lightning Signs, Pompton Plains, New Jersey ([www.lightningsigns.com](http://www.lightningsigns.com)), install the graphics.

begs the age-old question: “If you know so much about this, why are you here?”

**2. Does the current image feel fresh, or does it look and feel dated?** Did they hire a professional to design and implement their brand across different mediums, or was this something a printer or T-shirt shop threw together that somehow evolved into their “logo”. Is it using old, tired typefaces and/or color combinations? These flaws need to be pointed out.

There’s no ego at play here. I don’t care who designed it before – the client, their nephew, or their friend who’s a graphic designer - whatever. My job is to help their business grow – not worry about someone else’s ego (including the client’s, since he may have hired the last logo designer). For me, it’s cut and dried, and I don’t hold back. If you know what you’re talking about, it will come across, and people will understand.

**3. Does the current logo appeal to the demographics that the client is servicing or wishes to serve?** Here’s a question that serves to establish where your motivations lie for the client. You’re interested in redesigning their logo because their current logo does not appeal to their target audience. Frequently, a current logo was designed because they liked the way it looked. Well, once again, my primary job is not to design something *the client* likes—unless they happen to fall into the exact target demographics we’re trying to reach. Of course, it’s hard to sell a client on a logo he personally dislikes, but you’ve got to strike that balance between their personal (and sometimes irrational) needs and the needs of their audience.

About two year ago, we met with a high-end landscaper, who was primarily installing elaborate hardscape brick paver patios, which usually sold in excess of \$30,000. Knowing that his target audience was usually a woman, we designed a logo that had a butterfly element in the design. We presented the comps, and a day later got a call. “My friends don’t like it - they think it’s too feminine.” Undeterred and believing strongly in the design, I simply said “I don’t care if your friends like it or not - they’re not the ones buying \$30,000 patios.” He relented and let us build a campaign for him around that butterfly.

Years later, he still can’t believe how the new identity has helped his business and how positive the response from women has been. He’s a true believer in our expertise. But it required him to trust us and let go and to let us do our jobs.

**Give them what they want, or have the courage to say no.** Of course at the end of the day, it’s sometimes easier to give the client what they want instead of what they need. It’s not a position we’re happy about, and more and more I’m able to spot these clients before signing them on. If I sense early on that we’re not going to be given the latitude we need to do our job, then I’ll gracefully decline their work. Fortunately, because we are so busy, I’m able to do that.

I’d rather not take a job that all of us wouldn’t be proud of when completed. If a client wants to sit behind someone at a computer and tell him or her what font to use or where to put the graphic, it’s just not going to work. We’re certainly not above listening to client feedback, but you have to laugh sometimes when you’re asked to “Try this color...” or “Try moving the graphic here...” We’ve been “trying” things for over 10 years. The final design solutions we advocate are arrived at only after “trying” dozens of alternatives that we’ve already rejected.

#### **We’re their advocate—not adversary**

If the tone of the initial conversations with a prospect are focused more on price than ideas for helping their business, they are simply viewing your services more as a necessary evil. Unfortunately, they are usually seeking the least expensive way out. I’ll gladly explain our fees and how we arrive at them, but if they’re not looking to truly partner with us in this endeavor, then they should use an Internet logo factory. That’s truly a better match for their needs.

Our best clients come to understand that we probably care more about their image and protecting their brand than they ever will. Do you think an Internet logo mill cares about the company whose logo they designed? The difference for us is our client relationships are personal. Nothing is more satisfying for us, than the success of our clients. And knowing we’re partly responsible for their success is what gets our team excited. •SC



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