

# **Branding of The London 2012 Summer Olympics**

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## Background on Olympic Branding

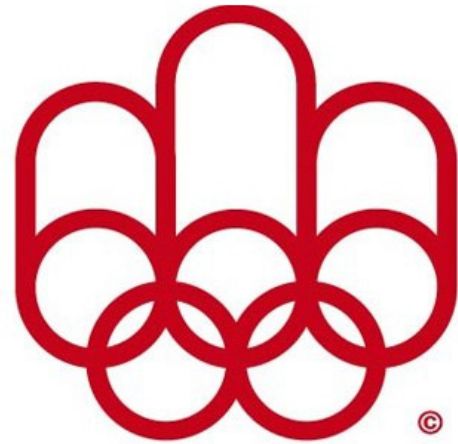
While on the surface, the Olympic Games are a collection of sporting events designed to crown champions, they also indisputably represent much more. Deriving from the historic roots of civilization in Ancient Greece, the Olympics uses sports to hold biennial, global and multicultural conferences of people, both spectators and participants. To fully understand the branding package assigned to the London 2012 Summer Olympics, it is critical to look at the brands of the past, and what they stood for.

When the games were reinvigorated at their birthplace of Athens, in the summer of 1896, there was actually no branding. The committee who oversees the Olympics, the International Olympic Committee, uses a poster to represent the games for modern purposes, but it is really just a cover from an analytical report on the event. The concept of a marketing strategy based upon logos, typefaces and such, didn't really appear until the mid-twentieth century.



(Olympics)

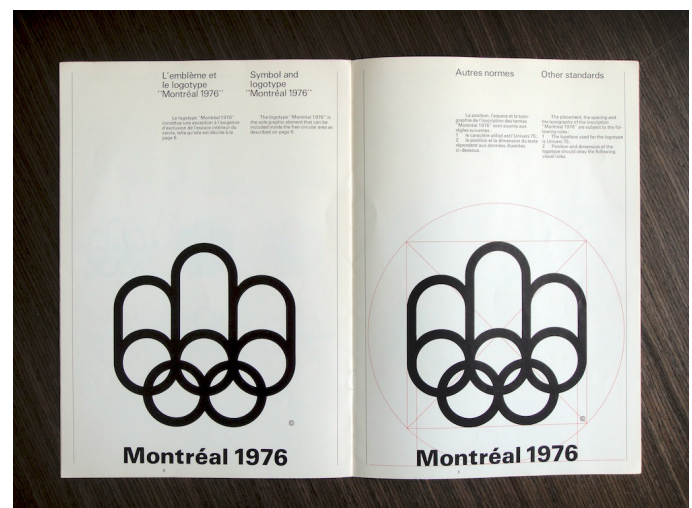
One of those earliest appearing examples is a piece of marketing material with unique intent behind it, the logo for the 1976 Summer Olympics in Montreal created by Georges Huel. It combines the classic Olympic rings with three curved pillars in order to form one simplistic piece. When the reader looks at it, they instantly recognize two meanings. First, they notice the Olympic rings at the bottom, affirming that it does in fact represent the games, but second they see the curves, leaving them with an impression of the logo's modernity and unique circumstance. The original design guide for the logo, the 1976 Montreal Olympics Basic Logo Standards, states that the pillars symbolize podiums that "indicates the crowning glory for the winners" and "the letter 'M'", the first initial of Montreal. (Huel)



## Montréal 1976

Desigend by Georges Huel (Olympics)

My favorite story behind this minimalistically beautiful logo is from an interview with the designer himself in Design Magazine. Huel says, in regard to the M design he implemented, that he was "tickled nobody thought of the design in time for Mexico or Munich." (Ferguson)



## Background on the London 2012 Summer Olympics Logo

By using the Olympics' history as a baseline, the analyzation of the 2012 London Summer Olympics is better executed. That's because with this event, there was an explicit focused on avoiding many of the characteristics that past brands had held. Wolff Olins, a design firm based out of London, was selected to create the logo in 2006. It launched just a year later, and it served as the corner stone of the other section of the games' brand identity.

"These Olympics were going to be much more engaging, existing everywhere and for everyone," (Kushins) said Brian Boylan in 2012. As one of the head creators of the logo, he had stayed quiet in the years leading up to its use. Public backlash over it had filled the talk of the designer world like a cacophony, as it was criticized for its disharmony with past brands. The IOC's previously established identity of internationality for the Games' had considerably been clashing with the prominent branding style of country specificity. They were also simultaneously facing viewership issues at the looming digital age.

his idea of a young and anti-establishment branding arose, to not just attract viewers, but to attract those that are of differing cultures and backgrounds.



Designed by Wolff Olins (Olympics)

One of the ideas behind the logo is described as energy. They use this to illustrate the jagged edges and lack of cohesiveness in the logo. There is no direct pattern between horizontal and vertical lines in each of the shapes, due to the randomness of how it was created. Brian says the logo, “came from an energy grid we drew of lines that moved around, contained within a rectangle, which we stopped at one particular moment.” (Kushins)

This idea of energy not only represents the lack of veracity they were aiming for, but also the age of technology that they saw approaching. Even in 2006, the Internet’s contemporary power had started to emerge through social networks and media websites. Fellow designer for Wolff Ollins, and member of London’s Olympic logo project, Ije Nwokorie stated that, “You could already see this explosion of people taking matters into their own hands, and the energy that people could throw at these things. The notion of energy was really at the heart of the mark itself.” (Kushins)

Another critical idea that the logo encapsulates is the lack of any primarily English symbolism. While most prior events manipulated city initials, popular landmarks, or recognizable symbols to formulate their Olympics logo, in a way that protrudes a connection to the location, this firm purposefully strived away from that. By making the symbol represent just the year of 2012, with the name London written in the upper left quadrant, the reader only recognizes it as an Olympic logo at first, not necessarily a British Olympic logo. Yet, it is important to note, that while there is a lack of primarily English symbolism, the designers did use some cultural characteristics of London when designing it. London is considered a capitol of punk, an identity genre that revolves around youthfulness, resistance to uniformity and disregarding institutions. The designers used that theme and its characteristics throughout the logo process.

## Analyzing Other Design Features in the Games' Brand

As mentioned, the logo strategically comes first to serve as the basis for all other features of the 2012 London Olympics' brand, one of which is particularly important is the typeface. A design feature that helps show brand unity through not only a repetition of themes, but also by how it was a victim of punditry.

The typeface, labeled as 2012 Headline, was hated before the games even begun. A modern, street art es-que look that resembles a parody version of Helvetica. In American media, Los Angeles Times reporter and author Simon Garfield challenged his readers, "Come to London today and you'll see it everywhere- every Underground tunnel, most red buses, every poster from the Games' many sponsors. I defy you not to feel queasy." (Garfield) Which, is a nicer quote than what he gave to the BBC to use in their piece on the smaller subjects of the Olympics, in which he says "I will admit it's a brilliant piece of corporate branding- I don't think anyone will confuse London 2012 with any other games past or future." (Westcott)

An extremely British burn for a typeface without much to like. Its uppercase letters have baselines that appear non-flat, the cap heights seem random and the special characters of the font look nothing like what they do in others.

*London Olympics 2012*  
*ABCDEFGHIJKLM*  
*NOPQRSTUVWXYZ*  
*abcdefghijklm*  
*nopqrstuvwxyz*  
*0123456789!/?#*  
*%&\$@\*(<|/))*

Gareth Hague's 2012Headline (Typographica)



## Ways to Improve the Overall Brand

During my journey of research on London's 2012 Olympic brand, I have seen a lot of backlash. And I get it, because I personally don't like what they chose either. There are two ways to change that though, one being significantly easier than the other. On the one hand, you could just go back to the field tested formula of Games' past. A blue, red and white color formula, a softer typeface that is less abrasive, and a symbol of London inside the logo. Whether it be Big Ben, the London Bridge, a Telephone booth or Nando's shop—just something less unrelatable than the edgy lines. That is the easiest way to change things though, with the hardest way being to stay true to their new design identity of internationality, people focused and punk. To do this, the typeface still needs to be changed into something more legible, but the logo could just be softened, and the color palette could change to a black, blue and white mix.

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