



# ONLINE DESIGN ELEMENTS YOUR BRAND ABSOLUTELY, POSITIVELY NEEDS

BY

PHILIP VANDUSEN





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## Nine Design Elements Your Brand Absolutely, Positively Needs

Consistency is the gold standard of great brands. It doesn't matter if you are a solopreneur with a personal brand or a Fortune 500 company, the rules are the same. Visual consistency makes you look professional and speeds customer recognition across media channels.

Your brand's logo is just the tip of the brand design iceberg. There is a broader palette of visual design elements that go into making a visual identity system. Creating a fully considered set of these elements to use for your brand will give you the consistency you need to succeed. It also has the added benefit of making creating new brand materials easier than having to start from scratch every time.

In the best-case scenario you will have these elements designed right when you launch your brand. But the more common situation is that we have some, but not all. Or we have just expanded into a new channel or brand touch-point that requires new assets. If you've found your brand design starting to look visually scattered and confusing, take this list to heart: The time you spend on the front-end developing these tools will pay you back 100 fold, saving you time, money and headaches over the life of your brand.

## The design elements your brand needs:

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### Logo | Identity



The core visual identity or logo for your business is undoubtedly the most important visual branding asset you must develop. Whether this is a “wordmark” – simply the name of your brand or company in a specific font treatment, or a “lock-up” of a wordmark in combination with a icon that used as a unit.

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### Alternate Logos



Once you have the main logo, you may need to develop alternate versions of it. Possibly a version that works in a square format or one that works in a long horizontal format. It is not uncommon for a brand to have up to 2 alternate layouts of their logo for specific usages. It is strongly advised not to go overboard here – you don’t want to confuse your customer. If your logo has one or more colors in it, it is also a good idea to have a version that is only black and white.

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### Usage Guidelines | Yes/No Rules



Once the logos are designed, you need to have a document created that is a set of instructions illustrating exactly how they are allowed to be used. Can your logo have a drop-shadow added to it? Will you allow people to stretch the logo out vertically? Should they be allowed to fill the letters with a photograph? No “not allowed” rule is too ridiculous to show. You would be alarmed what people will do to your logo – to be “creative” or to “make it special for just this one use”.

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### Fonts



Outline exactly what fonts and sizes are allowed to be used on your brand collateral materials, website, of products. There should be an absolute maximum of four. But I suggest you limit it to two fonts: a primary and secondary. A main usage font for titles and headlines and a secondary or text body copy font.

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### Color Palette



Choose a palette of colors that are to be used in your brand materials. Specify the exact Pantone Matching System name (or similar color system), as well as hexadecimal numbers for digital usage. These should be colors that are used in your logo and well as any additional colors, secondary or tertiary that design partners will need to create your branding materials. Spend time getting them right. Next to smell, color is the strongest driver of primal emotional reaction. Don’t go overboard here. Four or five colors is all you need for 90% of brands. A main brand color, a couple neutral colors, a “pop” or bright color, and a darker color. (Try Adobe’s Kuler.com, an amazing tool for generating complementary color palettes)

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### **Pattern + Texture**



It is a good idea to create a pattern or texture that will be used with your branding. Having a pattern to use in backgrounds on websites, brochures, banner ads, will come in handy. You don't want to leave this type of a design decision to your design partners every time they create something for you. You will inevitably get something different every time. Over time the lack of consistency will greatly reduce the quick recognition of your brand when a customer comes in contact with you. Ideally you want visual recognition of your brand to be instantaneous and unconscious.

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### **Graphic Elements + Icons**



Designing or choosing a style of icon to be used with your branding materials is an often-overlooked part of brand design. The need for iconography has become even more necessary as brands operate more and more in the digital realm. When it comes down to it, people don't want to read. They want cryptography. They want to be able to navigate with pictures. What will the style of your icons be? Cartoony? Technical? Hand illustrated? One color? The choices you make here will reflect on your brands personality.

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### **Photography**



Choosing a photographic style to become associated with your brand is an opportunity to elevate your brand beyond the competition. How many brands that you see every day use the same old cheesy stock photography style? Take a look at banking sites. They all look the same! You don't necessarily have to spend tons of money getting everything shot custom for you. But carefully selecting the style of photography and developing guidelines showing how to use them will make your brand stand out from the crowd. It can be as easy as how they are colored. Are they retro and faded? Bright and deeply saturated? Two-toned? Black and white? Is the style amateurish and spontaneous? Polished and posed? Action-packed? You get the idea.

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### **Usage Examples**



Create examples of what your branding, logo, fonts, color, palette, etc. look like when they are actually used. This will give aesthetic guidance to your future design, marketing and advertising partners. Design a mock-up of a few items that illustrate how your brand could appear. Try a T-shirt, signage, a full-page magazine ad, a billboard, delivery truck, Facebook banner. It doesn't matter whether you actually will be using all of these in real life. It creates a picture of your brand ecosystem. You will be surprised how designing just a few examples will begin to provide a clear idea of how your brand "looks and feels".



## Message from the Author

Hi there!

Thank you so much for downloading “9 Design Elements Your Brand Absolutely, Positively Needs”.

My goal is to help your brand succeed.

My plan with this checklist is to give you an overview of 9 design elements branding agencies create for visual identity systems. These tools cost large corporations hundreds of thousands even millions of dollars to design and deploy.

In my career, I have used this checklist at some of the most successful corporations and global branding agencies with clients like PepsiCo, Chevron, GE and Honda. I assure you that they work. It doesn't matter if you are launching a new brand or product for a \$1B+ company or a solopreneurial brand. The elements are the same.

A clear brand design system is the basis for all creative, design and marketing work that you, or anyone else does for your brand. Without it, you run the risk of spending a lot of time and money on projects that will not advance you towards your goals and could confuse your customers in the process. I assure you, that is not a good design strategy.

The descriptions of the design elements in this checklist are not exhaustive. But I have set you on a path to creating a consistent brand design ecosystem that stands out in the market place and will endear you to your customers.

As always, I welcome your feedback and hope you will join me in exploring and celebrating the best that the design, branding and marketing world has to offer.

~Philip VanDusen

