



How To Use Tools Well, Part 2

(an excerpt from my upcoming book on marketing)

Branding in action

I hate the word “branding” because it has become so over-used and incorrectly used that it is almost meaningless. Nevertheless, what I have described with the kid shooter in my previous Manual is branding in action. Besides being a comprehensive marketing campaign, using multiple media, the use of a consistent set of colors and logotype and text treatments, etc., is consistent branding. And it’s important.

All branding should start with your VMS--after all, that is the promise you are making to yourself and your targets about who your business is. With that as your foundation, here is where spending money with a real designer will pay off. When you work with a designer to create your brand, you should be getting more than a logo and a business card out of the relationship. The designer, working with you, should develop a style guide for all your core materials. That is, you should have the set of PhotoYou colors, fonts, type treatments, logotypes (full and “bug” versions¹ if applicable) and a set of “rules” for how to use them.

When you have these rules and items, it becomes easy to be sure that every piece that goes out to the public, your targets, is always on-brand. If, for example, the rule is *the logo **always** goes centered above the business name*, then you’ll never use it to the left (or right or under or not centered) of the business name and it will always look correct--the same--regardless of what the medium or piece is you are making/sending.

Now every style guide (or style book or brand book, there are several names for these) won’t have every single use defined in it. New uses, new media, new placements come up and again, using a professional designer will help you navigate this better than going it alone. For example, let’s say that you hire a designer who does your style book (creates your logo, type treatments, etc.) and shows how the colors and graphical items are to be used on your business cards, website, portfolio, print mailers and email promos. Six months later, you decide to do a photoblog. Should it look identical to your main website? No, but it should be consistent with the site (and all the other pieces). Because you have a style guide, the original designer will be able to design this new tool for you in less time (and thus at a lower cost) than it would take if s/he was working from scratch. Even if you went to a different designer (because the first was run over by a truck--not because you are trying to save a buck, please), the style guide would still be extremely helpful.

Using consistent branding in your materials makes you look more professional. It definitely adds to your perceived value--no question--and it improves recognition even before the re-

¹ A “bug” is the easily identifiable part of a logo (or in some cases the whole logo, without accompanying text) that can be used as a stand alone--like the NBC peacock tail or the CBS eye or the Nike Swoosh.

ceiver gets to the meat of the item received. Think about the colors alone--most people know Tiffany's blue and there are promos I get from photographers that I recognize before I ever get to the name or logo, because of the use of color in the graphical elements. Working with a great designer will elevate all your tools, that is, it will make all your work look better.

Think Eliza Doolittle

As I've said a billion times already, your work is the most important factor to any target as to whether or not they are interested in hiring you for a project. But just as if you bury a diamond in a pile of poop, most people won't recognize the diamond, if you put your great work into a poorly designed piece, it will be harder to recognize its greatness. So, you need to show great work, your best work, but you need to show it well.

Imagine a supermodel in a t-shirt and sweatpants with no make-up. Sure, she's still going to have a great body and bone structure, but she won't be perceived as someone special. Now imagine the same model in couture clothes and fully styled. Or how about the guy in Wrangler jeans who pulls up in a Ford Focus versus wearing Armani jeans and driving a high-end Mercedes?

Does this mean we are shallow? Who am I to judge. It is, however, reality, and in the creative industries our clients (especially those in advertising and design) are particularly aware of style/design and appearance. These tendencies carry over strongly into how your targets look at your marketing tools. They expect your tools to reflect your taste and creativity and they expect you to understand the importance of design.

They are also very busy people. If they have to spend the time to get past the crappy design of a piece before they can appreciate the artistry of your image on it, you're dead in the water. They simply won't do it. Their business makes them necessarily more snap-judgmental than the average person when it comes to marketing tools. You have a very small window of opportunity with each piece to get in their radar. If you give them any excuse to chuck your mailer, delete your email, or click off your website, they will, and in a flash.

Your job, as a marketer to these people, is to make sure you:

- A) make and show the best work you can--your vision;
- B) show it in a way that at the very least doesn't hurt the work itself (preferably makes it look great);
- and,
- C) get it in front of your targets repeatedly and with brand consistency, no matter what tools you use.