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Summary: First impressions and emotional impulse motivate prospective buyers. Entrepreneurial choices in advertising can make or break business growth, especially on the web.

Title: How An Entrepreneur's Choices Define First Impressions--Demystifying Business Identity

Word Count: 656

by Susan Kirkland

The mechanics' flyer used all the key words to convince me to take my car there. The two brothers who owned and operated this small repair shop for imported automobiles were factory trained, offered advance appointments and only used brand name parts. Why was I dragging my feet? Probably because the flyer was hand written by someone in a big hurry; it was sloppy and amateurish. I secretly suspected the same was true of their work, but I was tired of being ripped off by the car dealer, so I overcame my prejudices and reservations. I found a clean, professional shop with qualified, customer conscious mechanics eager to do good work. Their flyer was *clearly* no indication of the quality of their work and I became a repeat customer for the next fourteen years. But how many potential customers had they discouraged with their amateur advertising?

Desktop publishing has made it easy for entrepreneurs to sit down at the keyboard and make "almost" professional looking flyers; but professionals call them flyers because "they fly in and fly out." And in many cases, this is a good thing because those hastily composed flyers frequently do more damage than good. Let's examine a few details of advertising pieces and why your choices are more important than you may realize.

Every time you create a beacon for your business (*any* advertising in *any* media), you form an impression. The easiest way to create a consistent impression is to use a well designed logo. Professionally designed logos are an investment that develop equity just like a piece of real estate, growing in value as they bring recognition to your

product or service. Here are three requirements for a working logo. It should:

1. Serve your purposes for ten years without appearing dated.
2. Convey your industry or service at a glance.
3. Employ classic fonts (fad fonts are tomorrow's platform shoes).

How important is your company identity? Like every well-worn cliché, an identity performs the same base function of quick recognition. With an austerity of words, visual identities quickly associate and touch deep emotional centers. Instinctual reactions are not easily undone in the viewing public. Why is a picture worth a thousand words? Because pictures are received by the right side of the brain, your emotional center. While words must be translated through the logic center of your brain, pictures go right to the heart of the matter, so to speak. That means logos that are graphic rather than verbiage based will impress quickly. They will translate to your targets' emotional center with more impact and that makes accuracy in visuals highly important. Since it gets there quicker, it had better be right. Amateurs may stumble here if they accidentally cross social taboos or invoke subliminal prejudices. If you push the wrong button, your audience may unintentionally transfer their subliminal feelings of angst to your company without realizing it. Use a professional designer if at all possible even if cash flow isn't optimal; barter is always an option.

Here's a story to illustrate my point: A hundred year old funeral parlor installed new signage; the owner wanted something bold and black. After about a year of steady business decline, a survey was taken among families who had been customers for generations but suddenly took their business elsewhere. The participants responded they had a queasy feeling about the place; couldn't put their finger on it; they thought about dead children whenever they saw that new sign. The sign company followed the owners request and used a big, bold typeface—Cooper Black—the same font traditionally used on children's alphabet blocks (see below). How confident are you about advertising choices for your business?

Funeral Parlor or Children's ABC's?

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