



Principles Great Brands Apply to Their Graphics

...and how you can steal their secrets.

Hello,

Over the past four years I've grown my little freelance design business from making a measly \$8,336.76 in it's first year to a full 6 figure salary. I didn't do it by going viral or paying for Facebook ads... ... I studied HARD and figured out (sometimes the hard way) how to apply simple principles to the problems my clients were facing. I've put the four major principles I apply to the brands I work with on a daily basis in here for you.

I'm excited you've downloaded this little resource. Feel free to pass it on to your friends. It's free, so do whatever you want with it, please just do me a favor and don't sell it, change it, or pass it off as your own.

Thanks!

Jeff



There's a reason my clients come to me with design direction that sounds like "you know how **Apple** does it?" or "I saw this **Nike** ad the other day" or "I want to be like, the next **Gary Vee**". It's because these brands communicate their message strongly and clearly, and when a brand does that, it resonates with their audience. It's hard to deny that consumers are attracted to confidence.

Good business owners understand the value of a strong brand.

I'm sure as soon as you saw those three brands names you could immediately visualize their aesthetic.

- Apple?

Clean, modern, light grey, white and black, technology, the future

- Nike?

Shoes, sportswear, colorful, trendy, fit, active, bright colors, bold, street.

- Gary Vee?

(look him up you'll see what I mean) Red, black and yellow, bold fonts, strong quotes, strong images, motivational, brash.



So what's the secret? How have these brands burned themselves into our consciousness with such great power? And more importantly, **how can YOU apply the principles they use to your brand and its visuals?**

I'm going to outline just four principles these brands use in their communication and design and tell you exactly how you can start integrating those principles into your brand today. It may sound easy, but there's a reason only a few brands "make" it and are considered trend setters. It's hard, it takes a lot of self control, discipline, patience, and confidence.

When I learned these principles I immediately deleted the long list of services I offered off my website and it paid off big time. More on that later.

The principals I'm going to dive into are: **repetition, simplicity, personality, and clarity.** I'm going to take you through each of these principles and we'll explore some examples and how you can apply these four principles to your business. These principles are closely related, you'll start to see some themes develop as you read through what I've compiled here. I'll encourage you by saying this: **even if you can take ONE of these principles and implement it, your brand will be better for it and your customers will be happier.**

Let's dive in!

Rep-

eti-

tion



Well let's start with the biggest secret first. Repetition. EVERY graphic designer, when they ask their client what logo they like, the client will almost always say "I just love Apple's logo".

There's a great reason for this and it's not because everyone likes the silhouette of an apple (believe me, an apple as a tech company's logo **is** odd)- they've seen this logo over and over and over again, and they associate it with things that they like and trust. How many people see that apple every day? For a lot of people, **it's the first thing the see in the morning.**

There's actually an easy explanation: repetition and association create meaning. Repetition and association create meaning. Repetition and association create meaning.



A great designer once said that (and I'm paraphrasing here) "The point of a logo is not to communicate, it is to identify - **a logo is given meaning with repetition and association**" (told you ;)). In other words, if we want our company, that sells bricks, to have a meaningful logo, we shouldn't make the logo an illustration of a person laying bricks (imagine if the FedEx logo was an illustration of a person delivering boxes with a hand truck, it'd feel cheap). **A logo should be simple and memorable, we GIVE it meaning through repetition and association.**

So here's the plan for your brick company: put a (simple but memorable) logo on an image of bricks, then put it in front of the public- do it again and again and again until you're sick of looking at it then do it some more. Nike knew this, so they put that swoosh next to pictures of athletes over and over and over and over until now, when you see Nike's swoosh on a blank page, you don't even have to wonder what it means, it's been given meaning and you immediately think of athletes. Heck, put that swoosh on an empty page and we'd think it's brilliant.

So how can we apply this principle to our brand? It sounds easy, but it's pretty difficult and requires a lot of trust in the process. We provide consistent images to our customers and clients over and over and over again, so that when they think about bricks, they think about your brand. And years from now, when they see your logo on a blank page, they'll think about bricks.

sim-

poli-

ty



I think that this is one of the hardest principles to apply. **It takes guts and confidence to be simple. BUT, with high risk comes high reward.**

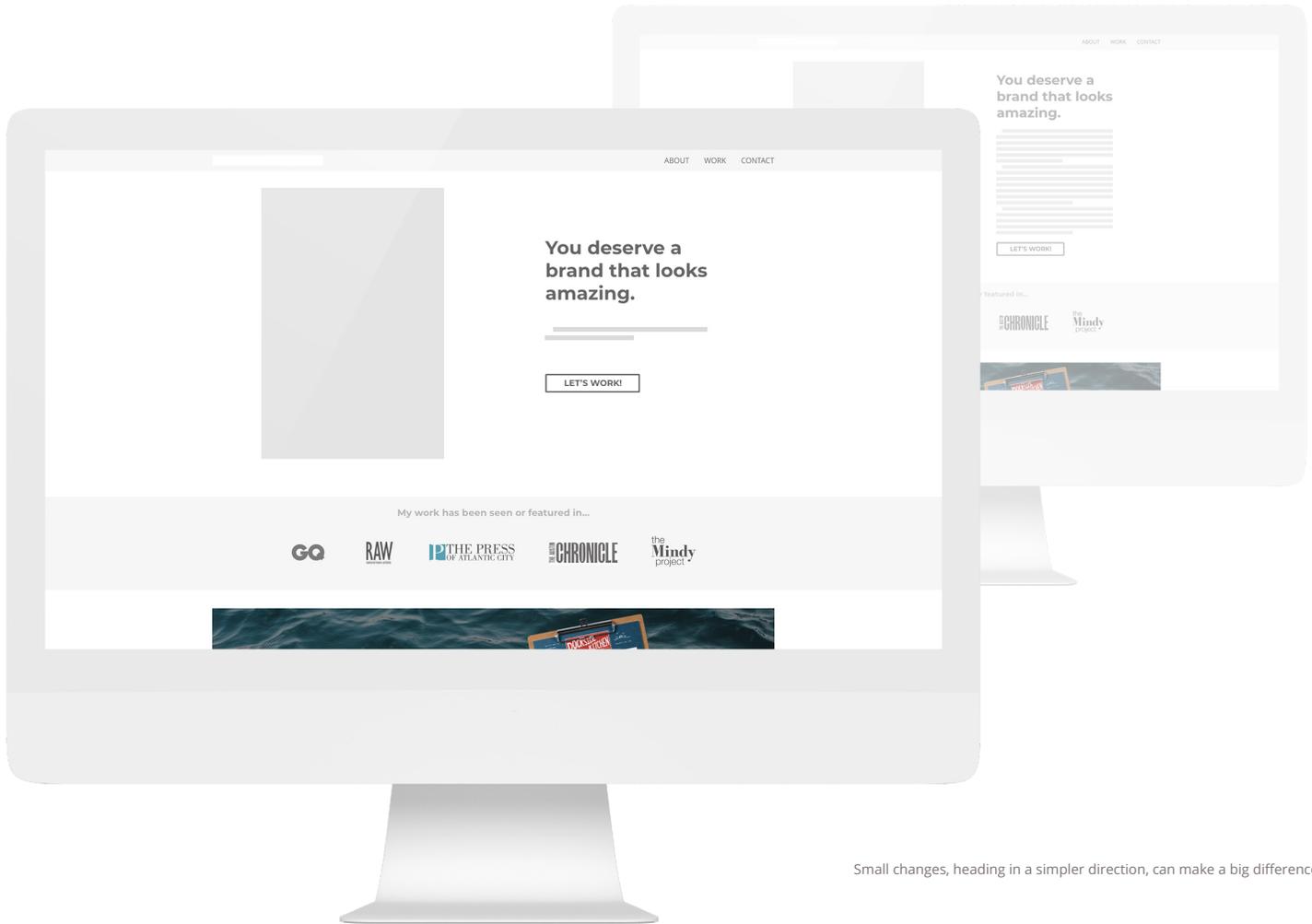
If you provide a service for your customers you know this struggle - trying to communicate that, most of the time, simplicity is just better, takes asking your clients, who may be a bit insecure, to trust you.

Have you ever walked into someones house who has hired a professional interior decorator? It's AMAZING! Everything feels so effortless and easy. Ask me to decorate your house, though and I'd just fill a room with stuff I like to look at a call it a day. You'd be left with Norman Rockwell prints and some Vespa paraphernalia- probably some ugly couches and a lamp from Ikea. My friend who is a professional interior designer though would tell me to take all that stuff out and only leave what serves a purpose- whether aesthetic or functional- to put effort into simplicity.

This is the difference between a professional and an amateur : pros know that simplicity is better.

Our brains just can't take in too much information all at once, so we default to blocking everything out. We shut down and nothing gets in. It works the same way with your brand, if you want a professional brand, learn to simplify... simplify EVERYTHING.

Want a true lesson in simplicity? Look up the evolution of the Starbucks logo.



Small changes, heading in a simpler direction, can make a big difference.

When I first started to apply this to my personal brand a few years ago, It took me so long and it was so hard to take three or four paragraphs of copy that was at the top of my website and just leave two sentences there. No one was reading them, I knew, but I was so attached to all the copy on my site and I thought it was a part of telling my story.

Sure, my daughter is the cutest in the world, but clients checking me out really didn't see her as a part of solving their problems, and when they saw that huge block of text they just moved on. It's too much effort. I'm asking too much. When I did simplify my messaging, things changed and I started generating more leads (magically?!?).

We're wired to skip over what our brain perceives as unimportant and pick up on what we think will help us survive. Too much information causes STRESS. I like to say that if everything's bold, nothing is bold. Oren Klaff, in his book "Pitch Anything" calls it "the crocodile brain"

Of course I made some other changes on my site and in my positioning, but boiling down everything to its simplest form was the most seminal, and, ultimately, it made everything easier on my clients. Now, when someone comes to my site, they don't have to exert any energy at all figuring out what I do.

This sounds like a bold statement but when you confuse your customers with options, they hate you for it. Nothing turns a customer away faster than confusion and stress. No one wants to burn calories trying to understanding what you do as a business and how you can help them - Apple knows this, Nike knows this, and when you apply this principle to your messaging and your graphics, you'll see what I mean.

Per-
son-

ality



It's sometimes very hard to pinpoint exactly what we do or don't like about a brand. For example, I LOVE Waffle House, and at first I didn't know why. No, I mean, I REALLY love the brand they've created. Fiesta Omelet and hash browns aside. Totally underrated brand. (pro tip, if you eat there, you can buy a coffee mug for like 5 bucks).

Here's the deal though, when I first moved out of my parents house in New Jersey I was 21. I moved to North Carolina and lived in a small town called Hickory with my buddy Mike. In NJ, we don't have Waffle House's, we have Diners (like, Greek-owned 24 hr diners... you know, mean waitresses and all). I don't think Waffle House really trusts that they'd do well here in New Jersey (wrong, I'd keep them in business).

Anyway, when I moved to NC I used to eat at a Waffle House down the street from my apartment on Saturday mornings. I remember crisp mornings in the foothills of the Appalachian mountains, sipping bad coffee by myself, treating my hungover, wannabe Kerouac self to some GREASY omelet. The brand is so full of southern truck-driver charm. It's so happy, but not in a corny way- it's all business, but not in a rude or stuffy way - the employees always come ready to work, they're efficient, there's not really any fluff about the brand and it feels intrinsically like a part of the American culture. I'm just saying. It's the best brand in America IMO.

Imagine, though, if one Saturday I went into Waffle house and the waitress offered me a latte and eggs Florentine or quiche. Or better yet, what if their menu was redesigned and now they were using a lot of pink and green in their design instead of the yellow and black they've become known for. Or maybe they were playing smooth jazz and there was white tablecloths. It'd be confusing, right?



This may seem obvious, but what attracts people to your brand is the personality of it, and a lot of times that's communicated in very visual, and tangible ways.

Now we can't just apply personality haphazardly, there has to be a few rules... you don't want to be that teenager brand that might be wearing black lipstick one day then a cheerleaders outfit the next....

Strong brands have rules around their personality. Their marketers don't let the mood of their day effect how they design for the brand, and if a store manager one day gets the desire to put out white tablecloths at Waffle House, they refrain, because they know it goes against the personality of the brand. Strong brands are true to their personality and they know the value of **consistency**.

One way brands achieve this consistency in their personality (some call it "brand voice") is by setting visual guidelines. This is just a document (sometimes long, sometimes short) where they keep all their brand assets like their logos, any brand illustrations or fonts they use, a consistent color guide and usage guidelines. When they go to design new assets, get new shirts printed or update their website, they can refer to this document/file and maintain a level of consistency across their brand - think of it like a brand anchor.

clear-

ity



I think this last principle really is a result of the last three that we've gone over. The brands we love are focused and communicate clearly. Clarity in your brand is a gift to your customers both present and future - it keeps your brand memorable and no one has to strain themselves figuring out who you are and what you do.

Clarity is brought about when the messaging is simple, the personality is strong and repetition is practiced. **Clarity and simplicity go hand in hand**, I think of clarity as the husband or wife of simplicity... or maybe it's the kid. Either way.... related.... closely.

Let's talk about all that copy that I removed from my site. When I first started freelancing I was faced with a dilemma, I did so many different things (illustration, graphic design, print design, design for web etc) and I wanted to let everyone know about all my skills. I wanted people to know that I could make a custom Snapchat filter OR I could design their website. My portfolio was all over the place. When I tried to communicate all these skills, my message just got muddy, clients got confused and I lost a lot of potential business.

It wasn't until I really matured in my understanding of my clients' needs that my business took off. Remember those paragraphs in my website I talked about? I boiled them all down to one sentence: I work with businesses to refine their graphics and create memorable brands.

Brands are simply stronger when they can clarify what they do. Customers don't want to spend any more than a half a brain cell trying to figure out what you offer and the more clearly you can communicate that, the more you'll see potential clients opening their wallet for you. What I mean by "what you do" is the deep, internal problem you solve in your customers' lives.



If you need help with any of the above points, reach out to me and we can set up a meeting. I'd love to help guide you as we take your brand to the next level together. I'm, at heart, a graphic designer who cares about seeing you get what you deserve: a great brand that looks amazing- one that you're proud to own and operate.