

Communicating better by design

Have you heard of Milton Glaser? Perhaps you haven't heard of him by name, but you certainly have seen his work. Glaser was the originator of the I (heart) NY concept, the co-founder of New York Magazine, and designer behind Ms. Magazine and countless other publications.

Last night I watched MILTON GLASER: TO INFORM AND DELIGHT. What a revelation. Every communicator should watch this documentary to learn both how good design can transform, and the importance of communicating simply and directly.

Glaser rightly believes that design can transform the world, that better design leads to better communication. One campaign that gave him great pleasure was working on supermarket design—from the layout to the signage and the logo. He made it easy for people to find what they were looking for. We take things like this for granted, and we really shouldn't. How many times do we have trouble finding something because signage is lacking?

Glaser attended New York City's famed (and in fact on which the movie Fame! was based) La Guardia High School of Art&Music and Performing Arts. The high school approached him about redesigning its logo, and first he suggested changing the high school's name to LaGuardia Arts, as being simpler. And then he did a fabulous logo that he says can be sung. See it [here](#).

I have seen people take short cuts with design—trying to save a few bucks or thinking it is no big deal. But design is a big deal. Good design will make communication easier. For those of you who have clients who think this way, show them MILTON GLASER: TO INFORM AND DELIGHT.

Whatever do you mean?

Have you seen signs/logos/headlines that make you stop, and not because you are intrigued, but rather because you are confused? If you have, you know what I mean.

I just say a delivery truck with the following sign:

Sanford Foods

Poultry Distributor

Pork Beef Supplies

The “Poultry Distributor” part was highlighted. So I thought to myself, what is it? Poultry or pork? Yes, I know they distribute all of it, but why highlight poultry? My point is that there is too much contradictory information in a few words. It is not clear. They could have said: Sanford Foods: Distributors of Fine Poultry and Meats. And that would have been fine.

My advice is to have one overarching message in your logo or slogan. Too much is confusing.

Thoughts? Or better yet, examples?

How to: Develop a tagline

Does your business have a tagline? If yes, does it accurately convey what you do? If not, why not?

Every business should have a tagline, no doubt. **A tagline is an additional bit of information that clarifies what you do to your potential customers.** Now, a tagline is not a motto. Webster's defines a motto as "a short expression of a guiding principle." A motto could be something generic, like "we always do our best," which can be seen as something your employees rally around but that does not communicate anything about what your business does.

What is a slogan? Webster's gives three definitions: 1) a war cry; 2) phrase used to express a characteristic position or goal; 3) attention-getting phrase used in promotion. Clearly definition number 1 is not what we are after. And the difference between two and three is really the difference between a slogan and a tagline. A slogan should be unchanging, something that is more universal (your goals or your purpose) and your tagline can change for a particular ad campaign. And yes, a slogan and a tagline can be one and the same.

For instance, if you are a hospital or clinic, your slogan might be your commitment to a healthy future for all. If you are running an ad campaign, you might focus on a certain aspect of your practice like cardiology and your tagline might focus on helping patients achieve heart health. All the while your motto could be something about maintaining the highest standard in hygienic practices.

So, how do you develop a tagline? First make sure you are not developing a motto. Be more specific about what you are trying to communicate about your product or service.

Steps:

1) **Understand your product or service and its USP.** This seems fairly obvious but you would be surprised at how very few people can communicate succinctly what they do. You might start with a short description of your product and service. Think about attributes, descriptors and differentiators

2) **Brainstorm.** Write out 10-20 short lines (5-10 words) about your product or service. Incorporate some descriptors and attributes from above.

3) **Evaluate.** Which is catchy? Which is comprehensive? Which is too generic? Eliminate anything that is cliché, generic, or just doesn't say enough.

4) **Narrow down your list** to 3-5 choices and show them to your principal stakeholders.

5) Have a **vote**. Generally, one tagline will emerge as the best one.

One more thing. People often confuse logo and slogan. A logo is a GRAPHIC representation of your slogan/motto. A logo is never a written piece. And logos are best left to design professionals. I would strongly counsel you to not try doing this at home!



It's a Giant logo

Here in the Washington DC area, there are two major supermarket chains, Giant and Safeway. There are other smaller chains like Harris Teeter, and national chains such as Trader Joe's and Whole Foods. When I first moved to the area, I went to Giant. I was shocked and appalled—compared to the Publix in Florida, the prices were higher and the produce inferior. I pretty much abandoned Giant in favor of shopping in several other places. There doesn't seem to be one place that has it all. Trader Joe's has good prices but does not carry certain things and does not have good produce. Whole Foods has good produce at extremely high prices. And so forth.

Lately, Giant has been suffering from lost market share and has begun redesigning its stores, lowering its prices (supposedly) and now, redesigning its logo. The Washington Post reports that its old logo has been in use since 1963. It was certainly time for an update. The supermarket has also been advertising itself as the place for a bargain. The new commercials play on the economic climate. One of them says to the viewer that if he or she has been thinking of buying a cow to have cheaper milk, then he or she should just come to Giant, where milk costs XX a gallon.

Time will tell if the new look and logo will bring more customers in. And whether the store really has better prices. In a sense, supermarkets are in a hypercompetitive environment and apparently, customers are now looking for an "experience." Safeway also redesigned its stores to have wood floors and more upscale look. Overall, I think consumers are looking to save a buck and find what they need in one place. Giant and Safeway can look prettier and more inviting, but if the food bill is still expensive, then they will continue to lose market share. For one, I want to check out the "new" Giant. But whether I shop there, remains to be seen.

P.S. This more "positive" shopping experience, with brighter colors etc., has been played up by Bloom Supermarkets. I blogged a while back about their weird commercials and their "happy" shopping experience.