

BRAND IT



2026 BRAND GUIDE
CRAFTING A BRAND IDENTITY
THE FORTUNE 500 WAY

A Note On This Years Guide

This is the fifth year I've published the BRAND IT Guide. As 2026 is designated as the Year of the Horse, it felt right to acknowledge what the horse has represented in my life. The cover was created using AI in Midjourney, with additional AI-generated graphics woven throughout.

For many years, horses were part of my everyday world. Loving them, caring for them, training them, and most of all, learning from them shaped how I understand strength, trust, and forward movement.

Those same ideas continue to inform my work in branding. Understanding comes first. From there, structure, language, and design can take shape with intention.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Margie Malloy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Margie" and last name "Malloy" clearly distinguishable.

THE COMPONENTS OF A GREAT BRAND

Logo
Color
Fonts &
Typography
Imagery
Voice
Design
Positioning

A BRAND IS THE SUM OF ITS PARTS



Logos

Why your logo is important

Your logo is often your company's first introduction to customers. It's a powerful tool that establishes your mark in the business world. It helps separate you from your competition, and it's something your audience expects to see.

"Don't expect your logo to communicate everything about your brand."

— Maryle Malloy

There are five different types of logos, ranging from literal and word-driven to symbolic, image-driven, and conceptually complex. We've described each of these on the next page.

Crafting a logo is a complex process and is best left to a professional. In my agency, we move through a comprehensive discovery process with each client before we begin designing a logo.

Whatever type of logo you choose for your business, remember that there is no right or wrong, as long as your logo is intentional in attracting your ideal client or customer.

Word Marks

Famous examples include the logos for Coca-Cola, Disney, Mobil, Canon, Sony, Visa, Google, Facebook, Yahoo and Pinterest.

Letter Marks

Famous examples include the logos for Cable News Network/CNN, Home Box Office/HBO, and Procter & Gamble/P&G.

Brand Marks

Famous examples include the Apple silhouette, the Target bullseye, the Nike 'Swoosh', the Red Cross symbol, and the WWF panda.



Combination Marks

Famous examples include the logos for Adidas, Doritos, Lacoste, Pizza Hut, Xbox, McDonald's, Walmart, Microsoft and Domino's Pizza.

Emblem Marks

Famous examples of emblems include the logos for Ford, Starbucks, Harley-Davidson, UPS, MasterCard, Burger King and the NFL.

Questions to Ask

1

Do you want your logo to be literal or more conceptual?

2

What story do you want your logo to convey?

3

What font type suits your story, serif, sans serif, or script?

4

Are you placing emphasis on the right words or symbols?

5

What do you want people to remember about your logo?

6

What type of logo will appeal to your ideal audience?

7

How can I make my logo stand out from my competitors?

8

Will my logo look good in black and white, color, or all white?

9

Will my logo look good both in print and online?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Color

There's a tremendous amount of theory and psychology around color, and it's important to understand that different colors appeal to different people. Having a basic understanding of color psychology helps you make more intentional choices for your brand.

Did you know that the brain reads color before it reads content?

Setting the mood

A strong color palette sets the mood and elicits an emotional response from the viewer. Because of this, the colors you select must reflect the type of services or products you're promoting and the audience you're trying to reach.

When selecting colors, consider the following:

- Understand your target market
- Possess a basic knowledge of color psychology
- Apply that knowledge to create a palette that aligns with your business and audience
- Ensure your brand identity translates well across both print and digital media

Color Psychology & The Meaning of Colors

Blue is most often associated with loyalty and trust. Brighter blues can be affiliated with communication, while duller and darker blues can be associated with sadness and depression. Blue is the most universally liked color in the world, which may explain why so many companies opt for blue shades for their branding.



Purple is another hue with varied meanings. It's long been associated with royalty and wealth (since the purple dye was rare in many ancient civilizations, it was reserved for royalty). But it's also associated with mystery and spirituality. Purple can also evoke creativity.



Color Psychology & The Meaning of Colors

Red is the color of danger and passion, as well as excitement. It's a very strong color and can elicit strong reactions in people. Lightening it to pink makes it more feminine and romantic while darkening the hue to maroon makes it more subdued and traditional.



Orange is a very creative color associated with adventure and youth. It's very energetic as well. Because of orange's strong ties to the 70s style, it can also evoke a retro feeling.



Color Psychology & The Meaning of Colors

Yellow is happy, optimistic, and cheerful. It's popular in designs for children and adults alike. More pastel hues are often used as a gender-neutral baby color, while brighter yellows are popular in creative designs. Darker shades of yellow become gold, which is associated with wealth and success.



Green has varied associations. On the one hand, it provokes feelings of wealth and tradition (particularly darker hues), while on the other hand, it's strongly associated with environmentalism and nature. Lime greens are often associated with renewal and growth.



Color Psychology & The Meaning of Colors

Black implies sophistication and luxury. It can also be tied to sorrow and negativity, however. Depending on the other UX colors being used alongside black, it can feel modern or traditional, formal or casual.



White is tied to purity, innocence, and positivity. White is also very popular in minimalist designs, due to its neutrality and simplicity. Like black, white easily takes on the characteristics of other colors it's used with



Color Psychology & The Meaning of Colors

Gray has varied meanings, depending on context. It can be conservative and sophisticated or dingy and dull. It can be emotionless or moody. It can also be associated with sorrow and sadness

Brown (which is a dark shade of orange) is associated with being down to earth and grounded. It's also associated with nature and even coziness. And, of course, it can be affiliated with being dirty or dingy.

Do your brand's colors "jive" with this information?

Questions to Ask

1

Do you want your brand to have a singular color or a range of colors?

2

Are your colors consistent across all your media in print and online?

3

Have you tested them in various media?

4

Is your brand better suited to cool colors or warm colors?

5

Are your colors complementary colors, hues, shades, tints?

6

Do you need to check the symbolism of your colors in other countries?

7

Are your colors flexible enough for a range of applications?

8

Do your colors support your brand's style (architecture)?

9

Do you need to use different colors to differentiate different products?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

**cold,
smooth
& tasty.**

ANGELO BREWING

**love,
peace,
and joy**

FROM THE FITZGERALDS

DAZZLE

eau de parfum

**welcome
little one!**

BABY TAYLOR FINN

Fonts & Typography

What's the difference between a font and a typeface? And does it really matter?

The two words are often used in the same context, but technically they have different meanings. So let's clarify these two very important design terms. The main difference between a font and a typeface is that the former exists as part of the latter. Say what???

Many of you may be familiar with the typeface called Helvetica. It is a complete set of sans serif characters with a common design. However, Helvetica is made up of a whole collection of fonts, each in a specific weight, style, and width (such as condensed), as well as italic versions.

For instance, in creating a brand board for a client where we are using Helvetica, it would be described as the typeface chosen for the project, while the paragraph style of the content is described as the font, Helvetica Regular, set at 12-point.

Takeaway: A typeface is the overall design. A font is a specific variation of that design.

hugs + kisses

COMING YOUR WAY

Real Love

A GLOBAL CRISIS

783 million people do not have access to clean and safe drinking water globally according to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Report

KIDZ

Fonts & Typography

When looking at a font to match your brand's personality and messaging, consider the design of the font itself. Is it bold, like "Cold, Smooth & Tasty"? Is it a bit sloppy, like "Real Love"? Or is it geometric, like "A Global Crisis"?

Do you think the graphic shown here complements the typeface KIDZ? Does it work for a kids' clothing line?

Each of these attributes has its associated connotations, so use them to your advantage and create a brand experience that includes typography suited to your brand.

What do you think of the logo and typeface for KIDZ when paired with this image?



Questions to Ask

1

Are your fonts distinctive? That may be good or not depending on your market.

2

Are you using too many fonts? We recommend 2-3

3

Does your font match the style of your industry or profession?

4

What characteristics does your font represent? Bold, conservative, modern, classic?

5

Are you using your fonts consistently across all print and online media?

6

Is all your content written with your typeface legible?

7

Does the typeface complement your logo?

8

Does your typeface include matching glyphs (bullets, symbols, numerals)?

9

Is the size of your font meeting all legal requirements on your products or in your content?

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Imagery

Imagery is a graphic designer's idea of heaven! And, yes it's true that an image is worth a thousand words, and a video, well, even more.

What is the story you're trying to tell and does your imagery complement your story?

We can imagine all sorts of things when looking at this photo, and that's the point. The relationship between the child and the horse, the sense of trust, care, and steadiness, are immediately clear.

This type of imagery could support a range of animal-centered and values-driven businesses.

- A riding school, youth horsemanship program
- A family-owned ranch
- A heritage or Western brand
- A saddlery offering clothing and equipment
- An agricultural organization
- A nonprofit supporting youth-animal connections or experiential learning



Voice

Voice is how your brand sounds when it shows up in the world. It's often described as brand voice, but at its core, it's simply personality.

Just as imagery tells a story without explanation, voice does the same through tone, language, and attitude. It shapes how your brand is perceived before anything is fully read or understood.

We recognize voice instinctively. Some brands feel bold and aspirational. Others feel approachable, refined, or grounded.

Think about how competing brands use voice to appeal to different audiences. The products may be similar, but the personality is not.

- Nike vs Adidas
- Starbucks vs Dunkin' Donuts
- Apple vs Dell
- Shopify vs WooCommerce
- PetSmart vs Petco
- Dior vs Versace

When voice is intentional, it does the work. It attracts the right audience, creates familiarity, and builds trust over time.



Questions to Ask

1

What are the 5-8 words that describe your brand's personality?

2

Do your images describe your personality? Look at your messaging, is your personality coming through in the content?

3

Is your voice consistent in all your messaging both online and in your marketing collateral?

4

Is your voice appropriate for your industry or profession? Does it stand out from the rest of your competitors?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Design

"Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works."

– Steve Jobs

In branding, design shapes how information is understood, how experiences unfold, and how effortlessly people engage with your products or services.

As an established branding and design agency, we know that most clients don't come to us speaking the language of design. They come seeking clarity, cohesion, and results. That's where thoughtful brand architecture and intentional design make the difference. When design works, it supports understanding, builds trust, and removes friction.

Good graphic and web design guide attention, reduce friction, and make it easier for people to engage with your products or services. It's not just about how something looks, but how effectively it communicates and performs.

On the next page, we'll look at how design can enhance the delivery of your products or services.

Questions to Ask

1

Does the design and layout communicate your brands voice and message?

2

Does the layout of your brand enhance the information and the viewers experience?

3

Are products/services that generate the greatest revenue displayed most prominently?

4

Do you have systems (funnels) in place for nurturing leads and turning them into sales?

5

Are your designs and brand consistent across all channels, online and offline?



[illegible]



Positioning

Brand positioning is the way a brand expresses how an organization is different from its competitors. Effective positioning influences how a viewer reacts each time they encounter the brand. Does it meet their needs? Does the product or service provide value? When the value is clear, people are more likely to choose what's being offered, and may even pay a premium price.

"You don't market a business, you market what a business does."

— Kevin Geary

Brand positioning is a marketing strategy that begins with an internal process. It's used to identify a target audience and define the key factors that establish what a business offers, how it's different, and why it's the right choice.

Successful marketing requires reaching the right people, at the right time, with the right message. Positioning yourself to do that requires rigorous internal research and thoughtful planning.

Key Questions to Ask & Answer

- Who is your target audience(s)?
- What problem do you solve?
- Why should people listen to you?
- What makes you or your company credible?
- What differentiates you?

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Continuing the conversation

Whether you are building a new business or strengthening an established organization, I hope this Guide has helped you think more clearly about your brand and the relationships among promise, positioning, audiences, messaging, identity, culture, and experience.

Brand clarity develops over time. As an organization grows and conditions change, new questions emerge and decisions become more consequential.

You can explore additional guides, frameworks, and practical resources from Wide Web Advisor.

Explore resources

When an experienced outside perspective would be useful, contact us with the issue, decision, or opportunity in front of you. We will review your inquiry and, when an introductory call is the appropriate next step, send scheduling information by email.

Request introductory call

With appreciation,

Maryle Malloy

Founder, Wide Web Advisor

BRAND IT

2026 BRAND GUIDE & WORKBOOK



wide
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