

# 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.

Throughout the year, I'll be expanding on the ideas introduced here through Brand Aid, my bi-weekly newsletter. Topics will include brand discovery, brand architecture, graphic and web design, AI, and marketing. Additional insights will also be shared through eBooks on my website and in LinkedIn posts and articles. A subscription to the free newsletter is available on my website.

**Thank you for being part of this journey.**

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Maryle Malloy". The signature is written in a dark color, likely black or dark blue ink, and is positioned below the text "Warmly,".

*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 your company's first introduction to customers. It is a powerful tool that establishes your mark in the business world. It separates you from your competition, and it is expected by your audience.

*"Don't expect your logo to communicate everything about your brand." ~ Maryle Malloy*

here are 5 different types of logos, ranging from literal, word-driven, and conceptually simple, to symbolic, image-driven, and conceptually complex. We've described them for you on the next page.

Crafting a logo is a complex process, best left to a professional. In my agency, we move through a comprehensive discovery process with a client, before we attempt to design a logo.

Whatever type of logo you choose for your business, please remember, there is no right or wrong here, 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?





# Color

There's a tremendous amount of theory and psychology around color and it's important to know that different colors appeal to different people. It's also important to understand basic color psychology.

DID YOU KNOW, that the brain reads color before it reads content?

## Setting the Mood

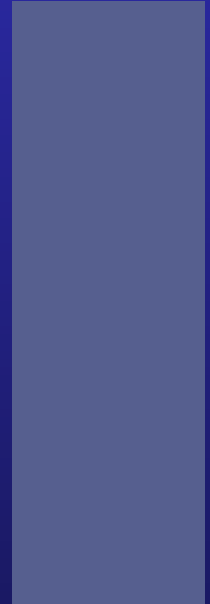
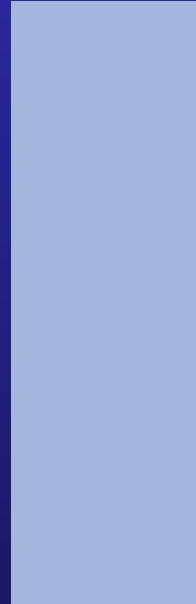
A great color palette sets the mood and elicits an emotional response from the viewer, so the color palette you select must reflect the type of services or products you are promoting.

Key factors to consider when selecting colors for your brand identity.

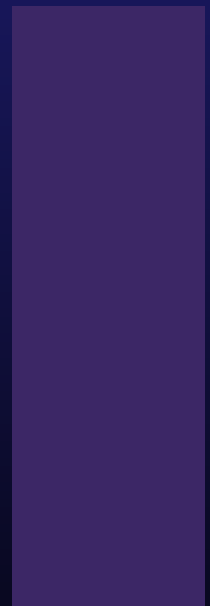
- You must understand your target market.
- Possess basic knowledge of color psychology.
- Apply that knowledge to create a color palette that matches your type of business and your target market.
- Ensure that your brand identity translates well in both print and digital media.

# 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.

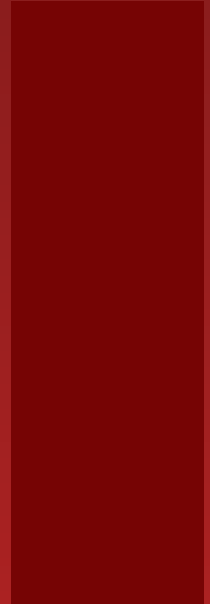


Purple is another hue with varied meanings. It's long been associated with royalty and wealth (since the purple dye was rare in many ancient civilizations, it was reserved for royalty). But it's also associated with mystery and spirituality. Purple can also evoke creativity.



# 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.

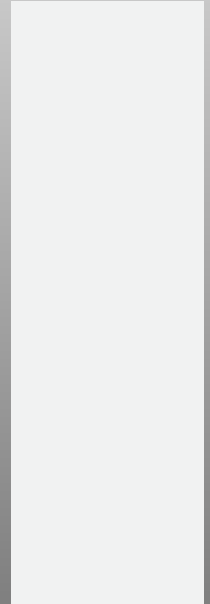
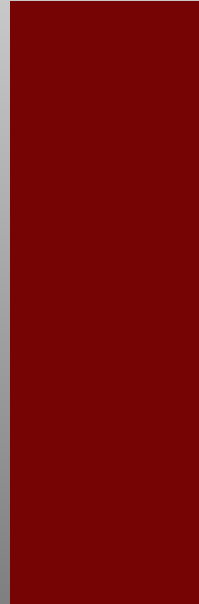


Green has varied associations. On the one hand, it provokes feelings of wealth and tradition (particularly darker hues), while on the other hand, it's strongly associated with environmentalism and nature. Lime greens are often associated with renewal and growth.

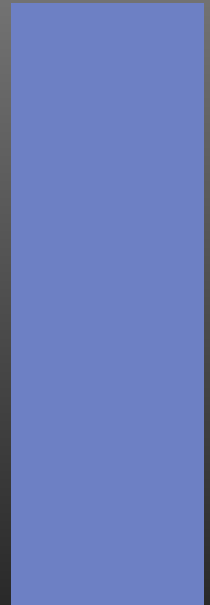
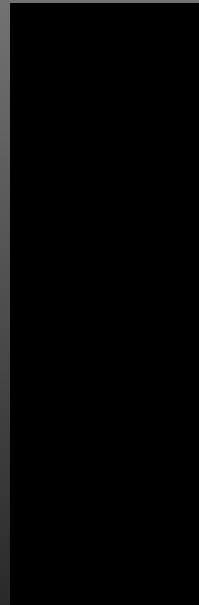


# Color Psychology & The Meaning of Colors

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?



**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 for you.

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 size, with different levels of spacing (condensing) 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 in the project is described as the font, Helvetica Regular at 12-point.

**cold,  
smooth  
& tasty.**

*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 our "cold, smooth & tasty"? Is it a bit sloppy like "Real Love, or is it geometric like "A Global Crisis"?

Do you think the graphic to complement the typeface "Curlz" shown here works for a cool hair salon?

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

What do you think of the logo/typeface for KIDZ 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?





# 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? If a viewer looks at your imagery, do they get what your brand is all about?

Here's where the heart-mind connection really comes into play.

We can imagine all sorts of things looking at this photo. It is clear that a thousand words are not needed. to see the emotions expressed here.

How would this graphic be used on a website or in an ad? What type of business is it? Perhaps it's a psychologist serving veterans or first responders, or a nonprofit serving veterans and/or military personnel.

Whatever the case may be, this photo does the job of capturing the hearts and minds of the viewers.

A photograph of a silver Apple laptop on a bed with a striped pillow. The laptop is open and positioned on the left side of the frame. The bed has a light-colored, striped pillow and a matching striped blanket. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# Voice

The term Voice as it relates to your brand is another word for your brand's personality. It's also referred to as "brand voice."

The stronger the voice of your brand, the more it stands out in the crowd. Consider the strength of the Apple voice for instance. It attracts raging fans; our design team among them. Or another use for a brand's voice may be to repel non-ideal customers.

Think about the voice of these competing brands and how they appeal to or repel their respective audiences.

- Nike vs Adidas
- Starbucks vs Dunkin Donuts
- Apple vs Dell
- Shopify vs Woo Commerce
- PetsMart vs Petco
- Dior vs Versace



# 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?





# Design

*"Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works."* –Steve Jobs

As an established branding and design agency we're familiar with the fact that the majority of our clients don't understand design and its relevance to branding, and therefore, marketing of services and products. That's why our brand architecture and design expertise play an important role in client success.

It's also why people from all walks of life seek the help of experts in design such as interior designers, architects, and fashion consultants.

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 as well as 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?







# Positioning

Brand positioning is the way a brand expresses how the organization is different from its competitors. Effective brand positioning influences how a viewer reacts to what they are seeing or experiencing each time they interact with the brand. Will it meet their needs? Does the product or service provide value? The viewer will choose what is offered and may be willing to pay more if they perceive the value.

*“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 used to identify a target audience and other key factors that establish what the business offers and why they are the best choice for the consumer.

Successful marketing requires you to reach the right people, at the right time, with the right message. Positioning yourself to do so requires rigorous internal research and 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?



## Continuing the Conversation

Whether you're starting a new business or looking to deepen your understanding of branding and brand identity, I hope this Guide has helped you think more clearly about your brand.

If you'd like to continue building that clarity, there are a few ways to do so. Throughout the year, I share deeper reflections, practical insights, and real-world examples through Brand Aid, my free bi-weekly newsletter. It's where ideas introduced in the Guide are explored further and applied in context.

### [Subscribe to Brand Aid](#)

For those seeking more personalized support, here are a few ways to continue the conversation:

### [Schedule a 30-minute Zoom meet and greet](#)

Free

### **An informal call to explore fit and next steps.**

Book a 90-minute strategy session with Maryle  
\$250. Includes notes and a Zoom recording.

A focused working session designed for clarity and direction.

**With appreciation,**



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**THE FORTUNE 500 WAY**



**wide**  
WEB ADVISOR

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