

## BRANDING TO SELL

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### *The Take Away*

Brands that are credibility-based sell products and services. They also have brand value, or ROI. The *key is a Credibility Based Logo Design<sup>sm</sup> as the cornerstone of an integrated brand promotion system.* The result is marketing communication that is planned to add credibility to the brand image. This is long term credibility-based integrated brand promotion. Credibility branding is a prudent investment for better selling and as an accrued financial return on marketing expenditure. *Remember this:* Credibility branding sells and has value. The customer should be convinced: "Why should I buy anywhere else?"

This article presents a new perspective for planning and designing company logo/branding systems. It is researched based, giving support to new theories about logo design and branding. New terms, ***Credibility Based Logo Design***, ***Credibility Based Branding*** and ***Brand Credibility*** are introduced by author to describe the new perspectives for logo design and branding in this article.

### *Branding is Part of the Communication Persuasion Process*

The roots of branding are in the social sciences: part psychology and part communication persuasion principles. Add creativity and design and the whole field of logo design/branding takes on an interesting new dimension the author has termed *Credibility Based Logo Design*, and in the broader sense, *Credibility Based Branding*. A third term *Brand Credibility* is the result of successful application of the first two.

Here is the background for understanding these terms and how they will change forever the present voodoo in logo design and branding management. Finally there is a rationale to the process of logo design and branding management.

### *The Right Brand Image Sells*

Because the brand image is a result of everything a company does, shouldn't there be a purpose for doing things? These are things that leave impressions.

These are impressions left by the way you advertise, the logo on your business card, even the way your people answer the phone. Wouldn't it be great to harness these activities so that a brand image could emerge which serves as an image backdrop which sells products or services? And has ROI?

This is not to be confused with leaving a ***just any brand image***. How many times have we heard that we must have a ***positive brand?*** Or a ***great brand***. What ***is*** a positive brand or a great brand anyway? What do these terms mean?

### **The Credibility-Based Brand**

Let me submit that we need a ***positive "credibility-based" brand***. Now that gives us a direction for branding. Further, if ***credibility-based branding increased company sales***, wouldn't that be a good reason to adopt a ***credibility strategy*** in everything your company does?

How does a credibility-based brand increase company sales?

### **How Credibility Works**

Credibility is strongly connected with messages being accepted. A credible source influences the message. The flip is also true that lack of credibility blocks a perfectly good message. We don't believe a person who isn't credible. We don't believe a company which isn't credible. The message is important, but the credibility of the company saying it determines if the audience will accept the message or not.

Research is conclusive about what we know about people influencing people. A person who is considered knowledgeable about a business, like computers, is more influential than someone who isn't as knowledgeable. We wouldn't go to a chef for computer advice. Nor would we go to a computer guru for recipe advice. Well in most cases. The point is that credibility is all about being trusted and being competent. And being credible gets messages accepted. That's selling.

Okay. But how does this apply to business. How does the company do this? First, the company must act and behave credibly. It must have substance. It must also ***look credible***. Let's look at the company logo for example.

### **Credibility Based Logo Design<sup>sm</sup>**

Credibility is best expressed by the company logo. But it is also company advertising, website, public relations, product and product packaging --- every thing a company does.

The company logo is the core of a credibility-based company brand. But, all marketing communication, including the logo, must work with credibility-based consistency to achieve the credibility-based company brand.

But let's break this down by just describing ***Credibility Based Logo Design<sup>sm</sup>***.

### **The Eight Essentials**

How credibility works in logo design is the subject of this article. This article describes the eight ***must*** criteria a ***Credibility Based Logo Design<sup>sm</sup>*** program must have to be successful.

These criteria are based on the teachings of logo design legend, Saul Bass (AT&T, Rockwell International, United Way, Alcoa, Minolta, United Airlines, Continental Airlines circa 1968 -1982 among many others). Saul's teachings were refined in university-supervised research I conducted as part of an advanced degree in Communication\* which later became the premise of my best-selling book, ***The Power of Logos: How to Create Effective Company Logos***. NY: Wiley, 1997 (fourth printing). It is now the subject of my PhD dissertation in credibility-based branding.

1. **Logos must be credibility-based.** This is the utmost essential. It is based on a simple principle: credibility persuasion. Just as credible people are more influential, so are company logos on the business card or letterhead. Many studies in people to people communication conclude that if a person as the ***source*** of the ***message*** is ***competent*** or ***knowledgeable*** as well as ***trustworthy***, then the ***message*** will be more readily accepted by the ***receiver***. The person is considered credible and more influential.

The research I conducted several years ago supports my premise that if a ***company logo*** as the ***source*** of the ***message*** is also designed as ***competent, knowledgeable, or expert in its field of business as well as trustworthy***, then the ***company's message*** will be more readily accepted by the ***receiver*** --- most often the customer. My study was the first ever to validate this premise.

Knowing "what" to put into the logo in the first place is 90 percent of the logo design job! Design is important. Content is ***more*** important.

2. **Logos must symbolize the company business to be credibility-based.** Okay, how does a logo become credibility-based? It is easy to understand that when a computer wiz talks about the best compact to buy, he will be more influential on this subject than, say, a chef. And, if a chef talks about a new restaurant in town, he will

be more influential on this subject than the computer wiz (well, in most cases).

The person most “expert” on the subject will be more persuasive. This is how credibility persuasion works between people assuming both are trustworthy.

How does this same principle apply to designing the company logo? The first thing a competent credibility-based logo designer does is **symbolize the company business, its core competency**, in the logo. Voila! This says that the company is an **expert** in that business. Like the shoe repair or key shops with their signs depicting their business. We know their business specialty, their expertise. Symbolizing the company business is key to a successful logo. But there is more.

3. **Logos must also be designed to communicate that the company is trustworthy.** This gets a bit trickier to understand, but here we go. Tom Housen wanted a credibility-based logo. This company is a quality house painter. The company’s **trustworthy traits are:** “highly professional”, “competent”, “efficient” and “provides quality” workmanship. These are traits which **contribute to our believing** that Housen Painting is **expert** in its area of business.

We started with symbolizing the basic business which is the company’s area of **expertise: house painting**. Then, we added design forms which would “non-verbally” express the desired **trustworthy traits so that we believe Housen Painting** can do what it says it can do. Here are the early progressions incorporating the desired trustworthy traits:





HOUSEN PAINTING



HOUSEN  
PAINTING



This is where the **expertise** symbol couples with **trustworthy** traits to become a great, **credibility-based** logo as shown here in the final Housen Painting logo design. It is strong and communicates with high impact as well.



HOUSEN  
painting

All companies have different **trustworthy** traits. An airline might want to communicate “highly technological” and “efficient service.” A public transportation system, “professional” and “friendly.” An

antique shop, “been around a long time” and “neighborly.” A website designer, “cutting-edge knowledge” and “highly creative.” And a bank, “stable.”

Other trustworthy attributes include: large, conservative, innovative, exciting, dynamic and traditional. They always support the company being **expert** in what it does. They are also a true statement about the company.

A third prong of company credibility is **forward thinking**. This is a company which is **innovative**. Recent research indicates that this is a high enough attribute to be included with **expert** and **trustworthy**. Being **innovative is accomplished** when a designer makes the whole logo come alive with a **contemporary motif**.

Besides Housen Painting, several examples of credibility-based logos are at the end of this paper.

4. **Logos must be planned.** A great logo doesn't come out of thin air. It has a basis for being. We know that logos have **content** and they have **design form**. But what content and what design form? Content and design must work together to communicate what the logo is to “say” in order to be credible. This requires a plan.

A competent designer first asks our clients to fill out a questionnaire. When the designer analyses the questionnaire, he looks for traits which make this client **credible**.

This becomes the logo design strategy which is included in a design brief, or Logo Planning Report. The report actually verbally describes the client's ideal logo, it's content and design form. The design team uses this plan as a guide the design of preliminary logos leading to the final design. The designer refers back to this plan when the final logo is presented for approval as a basis for judgment.

The Logo Planning Report based on credibility-based logo design strategy saves many hours of otherwise wasted time. It gives the design team a specific direction. The costs of logos have come down dramatically from the \$90,000 and up days. How about \$750?

5. **Logos must use the symbol over** (or beside on the left) **the company name**. There are three **trademarking systems** almost all logos fit into:

There is the name only:

**XEROX**

There is the monogram:



There is the symbol over the name:



The first two trademarking systems limit the company in expressing its area of **expertise** and **trustworthy** attributes. The name and monogram trademarking systems are intended only to be just what they are: a name and a monogram – with little or no credibility traits. The more a designer takes the name or monogram and tries to add credibility traits, the less recognizable the name or monogram become.

Only the symbol over the company name allows credibility communication to be effective. Further, the symbol over (or beside to the left of) the company name is the only trademarking system which communicates well on the Internet.

Besides being **credibility-based**, the logo must also be **bold, express authority, and be interesting --- in an instant! All this without losing the prime objective that the logo must be credibility-based.** This is quite an undertaking for a graphic designer.

**6. Logos must communicate, communicate, communicate.** Here are the most common mistakes:

- Adding too much to the symbology so that the whole logo is confused and cluttered. Less is more. Often designers have to explain each detail in the logo. There should not be an explanation that the “O” stands for the sun rising; the “wiggly lines” stand for “the lush landscape”; the “spaces between the wiggly lines” stand for the water flowing through the landscape; the “red” color stands for...etc. Everything in a logo must be simple and evident. A great logo needs no explanation.
- Making the name font compete with the symbol. This is the font that is a design statement in and of itself. It is always complex. The name font should always be simple, supporting the symbology. The symbol carries the burden of communicating credibility. Not the name font.
- Placing the company name within the symbol. The name and symbol must always be separated, with the symbol over or beside to the left of the name. Otherwise, the visual confusion is obvious. Many logos have the name curl around the symbol, causing the head and eye to follow each letter to read the whole name. We call this “visual gymnastics.”

**7. Logos must be very prominent in application. *Frequency* and *consistency* are the key points here.**

***Frequency*** means that all areas of public contact must be utilized: Business cards. Stationery. Forms. Trucks and vehicles. Shop or office signs. Site signs. Employee caps, shirts and uniforms. Giveaways. Brochures. Advertisements. Proposal covers.

Basic psychology tells us that the more frequent we experience something, the more likely we will remember it. And it should be the same, or consistent, each time.

***Consistency*** is the most common breakdown in logo application. Try this. Put up a “logo wall” somewhere in your office with all areas of current logo application. More often than not, this is normally a hodge-podge -- as either no one is responsible or

implementation just happened without consideration as to the logo working as a brand communication system.

The cure is to appoint a “**Keeper of the Logo**” with responsibility for applying the logo to all possible applications (frequency) and do it each time the same way (consistency). A Logo Design Implementation Guideline is often prepared to assist in this important requirement.

The result is **integrated brand promotion** which gives the logo, as a key member of the overall brand, important equity and awareness.

It also demonstrates the importance the company places on the management of resources. By managing the logo well, the company is often considered to be well managed in all areas.

**Feng Shui** followers rejoice. Having consistency means having order and alignment, reducing clutter. Energy flows from a living, meaningful logo that perks up the senses when used frequently in ready reach and in your control. This is positive workflow within and outside your workspace.

- 8. The logo symbol and name must work together.** Logo symbology and the company name must both express credibility traits. The symbology is a “visual” expression of company credibility. The name is a “verbal” expression of company credibility. Names like Mail Boxes Etc., The Closet Factory, and United Parcel Service are all good descriptive of the company’s expertise. They are therefore credible names.

On the other hand, names like Cebit, Retrosplex and Hebasco do not describe the company business, thus negating the opportunity to express their expertise in their respective fields. These names are also hard to remember.

Trustworthy attributes can also be incorporated into a company’s name. Names like Compaq for the personal computer is not only descriptive, but with the “q” at the end suggests “high technology.” Zippy’s Restaurants sound like a quick place to get a meal. Le Nouveau Riche Gourmand restaurant connotes something more formal. And better to check the wallet before going in.

Company names should also have longevity, as they are what we recall as the company **brand**. If the credibility-based logos which express the **brand image** are in the symbology, then the name

must support the symbology for the entire logo to be effective.  
(Already well-established names excepted.)

The following logos are credibility-based. A brief description tells **why** they are particularly **great logos**.

(Housen Painting, *Powerlogos Design sm*/Cygnus Advertising)



Comment: This is a perfect example of a credibility-based logo for small business. It was planned and created on this website. The "house and paint brush" symbolizes Housen's **expertise** in house painting. The logo projects Housen Painting as "highly professional company" doing only "quality" work --- great **trustworthy** traits. The **contemporary** design further signifies the company as being knowledgeable about the "latest paints" and "painting techniques." These traits were planned from the questionnaire section of this website.

(Access Referral Network. *Powerlogos Design sm*/Cygnus Advertising)



Comment: This company is a one-stop website to locate professionals and needed information about them. Providing information through a single website portal is this company's field of **expertise**. This is the main symbolism. The company is also highly professional, cutting-edge, competent, efficient and provides quality information. The **contemporary** yet stable design motif non-verbally expresses these **trustworthy** traits. The logo is very strong with high impact. This is a must for companies on the internet.

(Catalina, *Powerlogos Design sm*/Cygnus Advertising)



Comment: Catalina Island is just thirty miles off the coast of Los Angeles. The focal point of Catalina since the 20s has been the great Casino in Avalon. It is to Catalina what the Eiffel Tower is to Paris. It is only fitting that Catalina Island Vacation Rentals and its sister company, Catalina Island Real Estate, feature the Casino. It says "Catalina". It is say's "we know Catalina". This is the company's **expertise**. The design style is **contemporary** which communicates that the company has the latest technology to serve its customers. High personal service is also a key **trustworthy** trait.



(Earth Tec, *Powerlogos Design sm*/Cygnus Advertising)

Comment: This company provides offshore webhosting and services from Panama. This is its area of **expertise**. It employs leading edge technology to give reliability, secure, speedy and comprehensive services. The **contemporary** design tells us this and gives us **trust** in the company.



(Earth Keeper, *Powerlogos Design sm*/Cygnus Advertising)

Comment: Earthkeeper Foundation is a humanitarian money fund based in Panama. The symbolism communicates that the fund helps people which is its area of **expertise**. It also communicates that the company is highly competent, people-oriented and stable, which gives it **trust** in what it does. We can **believe** in the company. A **contemporary** shape tells us that the company is **forward thinking** in its use of funds.



(Marquee, *Powerlogos Design sm*/Cygnus Advertising)

Comment: Marquee Printing is a quality based printing company with very low prices for small business. Business printing is its area of **expertise**. The form is **contemporary** so we know that this company uses the latest printing technology to give us quality printing at low prices. We feel that the company is **trustworthy** and **forward thinking**. A great place for "value" in printing products.



(Prince&Phelps, *Powerlogos Design sm*/Cygnus Advertising)

Comment: This company consults with business in employee issues such as drug abuse and workplace violence. It "helps" people at work, hence the subtle communication of the word "helps". This is its area of **expertise**. The use of typography is perfect for this company, giving it the dignity of the organization. We get a feeling of **trust** and **forward thinking** from the **contemporary** character, communicating the true character of this consulting organization.



(Vacuum Lady & Co, *Powerlogos Design sm*/Cygnus Advertising)

Comment: Vacuum Lady & Co is a small shop, which sells high quality vacuums and cleaning products. This is its area of **expertise**. The company has grown on the basis of its high attention to personal service, care, clean/fresh store, honesty/trust and long relationships. These attributes are

included in the symbolism to round out a feeling of **trust**. The contemporary shape tells us the company has the latest products available, and is **forward thinking** in this regard.

The following logos are **not** credibility-based.



Comment: Unlike the AT&T logo which is credibility-based as it communicates "world-wide communication", Verizon does not express its area of **expertise**, which is also worldwide communication. The "V" swoosh doesn't communicate anything except "V" as in "Victory" as one company executive explained. It is slightly **trustworthy** expressing "technology" and "efficiency". It is also slightly a **contemporary** design form. The AT&T logo is blue --- a good "technology" or "electronic" color while Verizon is red.



Comment: Avaya's slogan is "communication without boundaries". It is also in the communication business which is its area of **expertise**. This is not expressed. The company name does not help to understand the company business. It is also not **trustworthy** or **contemporary** looking.



Comment: This company is worldwide, but neither the name nor other symbolologies express the company business, therefore lacking **expertise**. It is also a dated form looking "slow" and "sluggish" two **trustworthy** attributes which are probably not intended. It is also not **contemporary**.



Comment: This is a good company name with appropriate symbology expressing the company business and therefore giving the company **expertise**. It is also highly "likable" but lacks other dimensions of being **trustworthy** for a moving company such as "highly efficient", "latest packing techniques", or "on time".... These attributes could have been expressed just by

making the whole design **contemporary** --- which is also lacking.

### **Credibility-Based Branding**

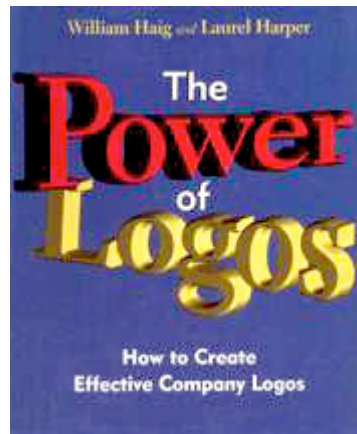
The same credibility principles apply to all marketing communication. Subsequent writings will explain how each touch point is empowered with credibility attributes. However, it is imperative that the company logo, advertising, website, public relations --- everything a company does ---- works as a consistent, integrated system with **credibility-based branding** as the objective. This is promoting **branding to sell**. It works.

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Bill Haig is a PhD in Management with a specialty in credibility-based branding expressed through visual communication. Please access his website, [www.powerlogos.com](http://www.powerlogos.com) and [www.haigbranding.com](http://www.haigbranding.com). He can also be reached at 808.922.4042 (Hawaii Standard Time.)

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\* University-supervised research as part of advanced degrees in Communication (with highest honors). including my PhD The credibility-based logo design premise is introduced in my best-selling book, *The Power of Logos: How to Create Effective Company Logos*. NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1997.



John Wiley & Sons Publishers, New York, 1997

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