

Instinct

What is identity?

Ultimately, all identity is a lie. This is because identity is a mask you choose to wear; or it is a mask you choose to see. As such, it appears as a fixed image within an otherwise moving world.

That is not to say that an identity should not attempt to be truthful. It is an acknowledgement that people and organisations are in a permanent state of change, and the image they wish to project may be at variance with the truth of where they are today. Indeed, their image may be the intention of what they want to be or how they wish to be seen. Truly effective identity manages this ‘reality gap’, promoting a set of deliberate messages and providing sufficient flexibility for the identity to grow with the individual or organisation’s growth.

Thought—there are identifiable laws regarding identity.

These laws have, within the limits of your audience, controllable aspects. You have a choice to deliberately determine the ‘reality gap’ of your identity, or leave it to chance.

The most obvious benefit of identity is being seen, and more, being seen to be different. Difference makes you visible and separates your personality from others. But difference is not enough. Your differential must attract, motivate and propel the instincts of those around you in accordance with your ambitions.

Many organisations are content to believe that their logo, and little else, is their identity. However, this is a shallow assumption, for a logo, albeit often the most visible graphic element, indicates only part of an overall identity. Successful identity is planned to succeed at all levels of communication. Only then does an organisation communicate an identity that ensures success and steers away from failure. Be aware that an unsuitable identity can only mislead and obstruct the wearer, and that a complete lack of any planned identity produces worse: the unknown and, inevitably, the undesirable.

A complete identity should cover all aspects of visual, written and spoken communication—no road or avenue you are about to proceed down should remain unaddressed. This is as challenging for you as it will be for your audience. If an identity represents opportunity, it also signals limitations: if we are to know who we are, we must equally know who we are not. Understanding your purpose and beliefs, then managing them with flair and accuracy, can be a private matter for an individual—a lone dancer controls his or her own movements. But the larger the organisation, the more difficult it is to maintain the choreography: stricter direction is required and, hence, it is important to enshrine all aspects of the identity into a written manual. This creates the focus, measuring stick and point of discussion—as all identity must have a review process in order to avoid the traps of time.

Thought—to avoid chance, application and commitment are required.

Achieving a successful identity is not for either the faint-hearted or fuzzy-minded. And clarity together with depth of vision is essential before you apply creativity.

Belief

If you believe in yourself you should believe in your identity. In addition, an appearance favourable to your aims and beliefs needs to represent more than merely a surface. The same principles should

permeate deeper, so that the identity that is seen always keeps its promise. We can all think of manufacturers who have used the past beliefs and reputation of a badge or marque on an inferior new product. When the truth is realised, the customer (and staff) feel cheated. Once cheated, the memory of dissatisfaction persists for a considerable time, if not forever.

Identifying your core beliefs is no easy matter—but identify you must, for if you don't know, how can you expect your market area to know? Insist on knowing who you are and where you are going. Failure to identify these beliefs produces an unpredictability which, in turn, will inevitably produce a shortfall in understanding and communication. This failure can easily spread throughout service, product design, manufacture and personnel, finally impacting upon the entire venture and its level of profit or loss.

To become successful, a team must share the same core beliefs. That team will feel energised in the knowledge that their contribution to the whole, whether major or minor, knowingly fits within the aims and beliefs of the overall venture. They will also project these shared beliefs as one. In this respect, a smaller organisation has an advantage over a larger one when it comes to punching beyond its weight. A vision is more easily shared and can therefore become so much more powerful within a smaller team.

Your beliefs need to communicate themselves to your audience without confusing them. All good interpretation requires an allowance for others' emotions. You need to communicate often with those who have no intention of communicating with you. Will you mislead, repel or attract them? If you attract them, will it be for the correct reasons? Likewise, if you repel them.

Thought—belief and ambition should be detailed, known and communicated throughout an organisation.

An identity should adhere to these beliefs and ambitions if it is to contribute towards its aims, rather than hinder them.

Emotion

How can we learn to understand the instincts and emotions of our audience?

We need to reflect upon our own instincts in order to understand others. We may prefer our personal self-image as that of someone unmoved by emotional reactions to such things as the appearance of people, products, advertisements or environments—for example buildings and their interiors. We may pride ourselves that we have the ability or experience to ‘see through’ and decide for ourselves the salient information and truth that we seek. However, the reality is that we are all, some more than others, susceptible to our emotions and passions. And it is in this morass of emotion versus reason that an identity must operate and succeed. That is why appearances are so critically important.

People tend to believe what they see. We all share a great tendency to judge the contents by the container. Moreover, we do this with a careless urgency. For example, when your audience meets you for the first time, or encounters your publicity material, they will attempt to evaluate you as speedily as they can, so they may proceed—with or without you. You had better assume that any audience is impatient and has a limited attention span. Their desire will be to label you, and identify and file this image with some urgency. Likewise, you will be evaluating them. These snap judgements will follow a mixture of conscious and unconscious reason and emotion. And they will be quick: a few seconds or a few minutes. While the clock is running, each increment of time will make your first impressions recede into history. In other words, unless you start from the correct position of identity, your failure will proceed, and compound, at the rate of one second per second. History will become track record, and track record, eventually, will become the reality of your relationship.

Any audience will judge what you say against how you appear. Upon this simple judgement they will be inclined to base their trust or distrust. Ask yourself whether they will believe what you say about

yourself when they compare it with what they can see. Realise that their reaction to what they see is likely to be the main influence over their first impressions.

What people see is both rapidly and largely automatically processed by their minds. They may not be exercising any concentrated or conscious reason whilst they gaze in your direction, but they are assessing you at the speed of light. They, you, cannot help this process.

Instincts are powerful forces, for they have a tendency to sweep away everything from their path. To succeed in building a relationship with your audience, their instincts must be either confirmed or overthrown.

This level of negotiation is greater than you may initially think; destiny is often decided from the first moment of contact.

To demonstrate the power of instincts, spend a few moments completing Tests 1 and 2. Test 1 is overleaf.

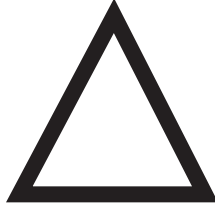
Test 1

[6] **THE ART OF IDENTITY**

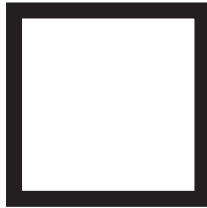
Imagine that the three shapes illustrated opposite are logos, each representing a major banking organisation.

- In your opinion, which bank is the most forward-looking?
- In your opinion, which bank will take the greatest risk with your investments?
- In your opinion, which bank has been established the greatest number of years?

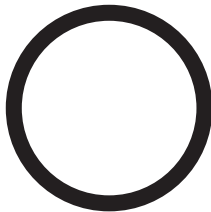
Bank A



Bank B



Bank C



Test 2

For this test, examine the colour illustration opposite.

The coloured shapes are the logos and colours of competing motor-racing teams.

- In your opinion, which motor-racing team enjoys the fastest lap times?

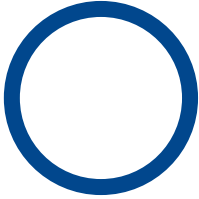
- In your opinion, which motor-racing team is the most technically advanced?

- In your opinion, which driver has the most reliable car?

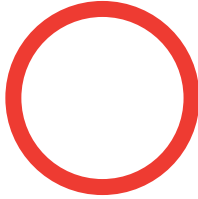
Test 2

See page 8.

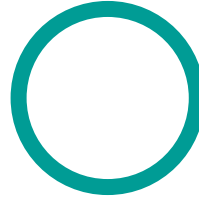
Team 1



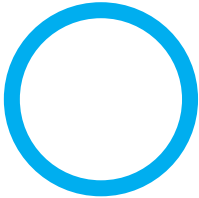
Team 2



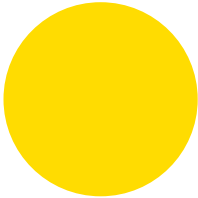
Team 3



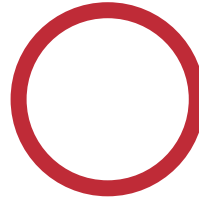
Team 4



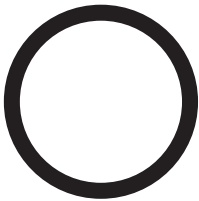
Team 5



Team 6



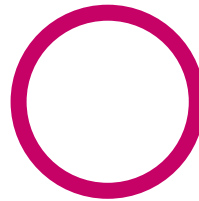
Team 7



Team 8



Team 9



You may be surprised at your reactions to these simple tests. Your initial responses will probably defy a wholly rational explanation. However, they will confirm or deny your preferences and prejudices regarding both shape and colour. You should therefore realise that the only correct answer to the questions in both tests is our tendency to make emotional judgements beyond any conscious reason. Yet there is a level of computation at work here, for your opinion has been influenced by the use of shape and colour.

An identity exists within a confusing and emotional market area. It is therefore vital to create and manage an identity's purpose, strength and effectiveness. The leap from instinctive and emotional first impressions to logical or consciously reasoned opinion is an unpredictable process. An excellent identity succeeds in managing this process effectively. A poor identity does not.